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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN:

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. How nice to see you. This series, called “The Rain of Wisdom,” is meant as an introduction to the lineage of the Kagyü tradition, the Kagyü lineage of Tibet, which is transplanted in the West, here, in Halifax, and various other places. I believe that Dr. Parent last week talked about the Buddha’s teaching and how it flourished in India, and what I would like to talk about tonight is some reference to this particular time, and how it is that we practice Buddhism in the way that we do, and how it came to us to practice in this way.

The Buddhism of India flourished because it was the teachings of truth, obviously, otherwise it wouldn’t flourish. And also it had a particular characteristic in India at the time, which was that it sort of went against the grain, so to speak. That period, the Vedic teaching had become corrupt, somewhat. And the notion of real spiritual accomplishment became more involved with simply playing with words than actual experience. At that particular time the Buddha was born, and in his life realized complete enlightenment and taught that enlightenment to the people of his time. And that way the teaching cut through the density of deception and conceptualization that happened, that was happening.

As Buddhism flourished in India, as everything is wont to do because of habitual patterns, the density of habitual pattern, habitual thinking and the possibility of corruption entered into the practice of Buddhism as well. Now this is not to say that the teachings were not true, therefore they were corrupted, but basically, habitual patterns are very strong, and unless we conquer them with direct experience they will eventually influence us. So the time of the Buddha, his being and his teaching were so strong that it actually opened many, many people. And through the centuries that followed, practice was maintained, up to a point, where people started to get more into the words rather than the sense of things. So the Buddhadharma, the teaching of the Buddha, became more and more intellectual and more and more based on just mental gymnastics rather than actual experience.

So round about the time of the second century there was a split into two schools. I don’t think we should get too technical about it now, but the basic split was that the old-timers, so to speak, and people that had become more into the letter than into the sense, began to solidify the teachings. In other words, the teaching became just memory instead of direct experience. At that

time there were a group of people who remembered that, "Well, wait a minute. Even though these teachings are absolutely true and direct and straightforward, if we don't experience them then they have no reality, no meaning." So that time two schools occurred. One is called Hinayana, one is called Mahayana. And Mahayana was somewhat a reaction to dryness, kind of intellectual approach to teachings that didn't have any experiential quality, any real heart. Now the Mahayana and the Hinayana were not different teachings. It was not as if a new teaching was discovered and the old teaching was displaced. It was simply more a matter of emphasis. That emphasis became, well, moved toward practical things rather than theoretical things.

Now the interesting thing about this is that any of us who have practiced a discipline realize that after a time that discipline becomes more like a memory than a living experience, and that it's necessary for us to wake us up constantly. In fact, that's what Mao Tsetung tried to do with the Cultural Revolution, because his idea of Communism became simply repetition, so he tried to shake it up. Unfortunately, the aggressive means that he used don't work. In order to make an experience fresh and live all the time it has to come from within, not from external circumstances. In any case, around the Second Century, the Mahayana came into being. And the Mahayana was fresh and had that sense of experience.

And both the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings are the same from this point of view: the Buddha taught egolessness. Egolessness being the continuation of being. You, me, everybody, whatever we call ourselves, there is no particular ego involved, so therefore there's one hundred percent enlightenment when there is no ego. Buddha taught that right from the beginning. In the Hinayana dharma what happened was that people just paid lip service to that. The Mahayanists came along as sort of revolutionary people. But, truth, they were not speaking any different dharma. Just practically speaking, they were adding teaching from the point of view of, let's say, activity in the world. Previous to that, activity in the world was looked at as a definite no-no. Very bad thing to do, because if you involved yourself with the world, you would eventually get involved with all the things of the world, become attached to them, and never achieve liberation from them, because those things in themselves were impermanent and without any substance. The Mahayana people came along and said, "That is true. However, we can use those things in such a way as to create an environment, to create a situation where people like ourselves can follow that path of renunciation and can attain enlightenment."

So, in the beginning with the Buddha, the path of practice was the way. As it became more solidified, people within that tradition woke up to it and said, "This is not the way, the original way is the best way, the path of practice is the way to cut through any kind of conceptualization or rigidity." So they taught the Mahayana path, the emphasis of which was attaining of enlightenment for the benefit of others. Previously, it was just attaining enlightenment because everything was a trap, everything in the phenomenal world was a trap, so to attain enlightenment meant to refrain from any sort of outward activity. When the Mahayanists came along, they said that what we're saying is well and good, but if we don't engage this enlightenment in the world, then we are simply recreating a higher ego, a spiritual ego. We are doing it for ourselves. We should do it for the benefit of others. This way our effort and our activity will not simply be like a trance, like a temporary state, but it will be more far reaching, because all beings, like ourselves, are by nature the same.

The sameness was what Hinayanists said was egotism. They said the Mahayanists are preaching egotism because they say there is a sameness of all beings. They said if you say that then you are saying there's something, and there's nothing. So you can't really help anybody because there's nobody to help. And the Mahayanists said that is true; however, if you take that to be real, then you are making a mistake, that there is no one to help.

Basically what the Mahayanists said was, in terms of the truth there are two aspects. There's what's called relativity and absolute, relative and absolute truth. Basically they are the same. However, it appears that they are different. In other words, if you want to attain enlightenment and by doing so you shut out all appearances and go within, and within you discover that enlightenment, then that is called absolute truth. However, if you extend yourself outside and get involved in things, that's called relative. Now the Mahayanists said that relativity is also true. The same as what's inward is what is outward, is the same, the same thing. So they're saying that therefore, activity in the world is not necessarily the root downfall. In other words, by acting in the world you will not get caught up in samsara if you do it with the right intention, and that intention being to benefit all sentient beings. Everybody. But how can we benefit everybody if we have that as a project? That would be egotism. And we can see in the popular religions that that is egotism. In other words, I'm going to help you. Which usually irritates the people you want to help. This is true. Look at every kind of missionary work that has ever been done. It usually has completely disturbed the culture to such an extent that it could never find its own sanity again. Great show, charity, all the rest of it. Not so great.

So how can we really help anybody? The Mahayanists said that the main understanding that should occur in one's life, one's mind is that of emptiness. All beings like myself are by nature empty. Empty means we have no real existence as such. There's no thing we can point to and say this is me. If we say that one thing or other is me we have to look at it, and as we look at it carefully through meditation and through discriminating awareness we see that there is no one element of existence that exists independently. Therefore all of it is bound to decay so we cannot say there is anything whatsoever that exists. Therefore we can help other people. Interesting logic. But perfectly true. If you try to help somebody from a point of view you will only lay that trip on them that is your point of view. No wonder that people get so irritated when you try to help them, because you are trying to put your version of reality on top of them.

So the Mahayanists say that in order to help somebody one must first understand shunyata, emptiness. There is no self, there is no appearance of a self, there is no activity of a self, there is no memory of a self. Everything is totally empty as it is. So in that way the Mahayanists developed compassion. If you help somebody from that point of view, then you have no memory of it. I think Mark Twain said that if you never tell a lie, you don't have to remember anything. Quite so. Same thing with helping people. If you help people, really help people, you don't have to remember that you did it. We're not talking about becoming deaf and dumb here, we're just talking about not having to congratulate oneself on performing an activity which is simply natural.

So the Mahayanists developed their practice of that, which was basically going out and teaching Buddhadharma. As they taught it, they themselves got involved in a particular intellectual discussion, that was, what was this emptiness really like? So this emptiness started

to get its own definition. And there were two major schools of thought. One was that emptiness could not in any way be described, and the other one said that emptiness had characteristics, such as luminosity or clarity. The one school said that if you posit any characteristic, then that is ego. The other school said that, on the contrary, the characteristic is non-ego itself. In other words, just shining like light shines doesn't necessarily mean that there's something behind that. So what happened was as the Mahayanists began to practice their dharma, they started to get into intellectual debates, and the practice started to wane and the intellectualism started to get very strong.

So what happens? Basically, along the way comes another group of people, and they are the Vajrayanists, the so-called divine madmen of India. That's what it says. Now their dharma and their practice is no different than the Hinayanists and the Mahayanists. Basically, they are understanding that there is no such thing as egotism or ego. Therefore no egotism, and therefore emptiness and luminosity are quite the same thing. Now the understanding here is that what we call relativity and absolute are the same. So basically what we're saying is that there is always, from the very beginning, a continuity of awareness which is not in any way moved, changed, shaken, transmuted, or anything by our own thoughts and emotions and whatever occurs in our memory. This basic singularity is what is real. However, when the practice has become so stiff that it becomes an intellectual argument, a new strain, so to speak, takes place, in this case in Buddhism, what's called the Vajrayana. And the Vajrayana is not different again from the Mahayana in saying that the outside and the inside are not different. The absolute and the relative are not different, however, in terms of the Vajrayana, again, the emphasis is on practicality, experiencing it, doing it, rather than just talking about it.

Now this occurred around the Eighth Century in India. And certain people in North India, around Bengal and also in the northwestern Kashmir and what is now Afghanistan, around that area and Bengal and what is now Assam and that area, there for some reason or other grew up these practitioners who called themselves "tantrikas." Now these people sort of got fed up with the endless intellectual pursuit of the dharma and said that well, the most important thing that the Buddha taught was to find out for oneself if there was anything as reality or not, and to find out for oneself means to actually test one's practice in the world. So they are what we call yogis, yogins. These people shunned any kind of distinction: monk, layman, householder, ascetic, anything like that. They just did exactly what they wanted to do in terms of practicing the dharma and practicing their different techniques. And it's those people we are talking about tonight, these divine madmen.

The phrase "divine madmen," in Sanskrit is what we call "siddha." Siddha, first of all the word "siddhi" in Sanskrit translation, that would mean "success" or "accomplishment." "Siddhi" means accomplishment in the practice. Now these crazy people, these divine madmen, were interested in one thing. To test their practice with the phenomenal world, in the phenomenal world, to see if it was actually so that there was emptiness, that there was luminous emptiness, or whatever, whatever the dharmas were, whatever the doctrine was. To test that in their body in this particular world at this particular time. And they were called siddhas, those people who were accomplished, who had success in their practice.

In terms of accomplishment, there are two types of siddhis. Siddhi on a relative level meant clairvoyance, what are the other things, what do you call those things? Telepathy, what else? Flying through the air, leaving footprints [in rocks or stone], changing the elements, changing the weather, those are called relative siddhis. The people who practiced this kind of yoga could do those things. That is not particular to Buddhism, by the way. If you look at any sort of shamanistic or, what do you call it, that kind of magical religion, people are known to do that. That's why they are called relative siddhis, relative accomplishments. However, it is also said that it is a mark of practice when one can do those things. But in Buddhism, the aim was the ultimate siddhi, or absolute siddhi. In this case, that siddhi is called mahamudra. And that is the complete and total realization of a Buddha.

Now these siddhis were accomplished through great and intense practice of meditation. Now what kind of practice are we talking about here? Now the very basic practice is sitting with oneself and being, just like the Buddha taught. Further practice is extending one's mind so that one begins to see clearly the interdependence, that's called the Mahayana teaching. In the Vajrayana teaching or the tantric teaching, the practice is transmuting everything that is visible, which means all sense objects and sense perceptions, into divinity. In other words, what is normally considered to be neurosis is actually experienced as enlightenment. What do we mean by neurosis? Hatred, jealousy, pride, anger, all of those things. All of those things are changed into divinity, or changed into enlightened aspects. What are they? All accomplishing action, discriminating awareness wisdom, [TAPE 1: END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B; some words missing] wisdom.

In the Vajrayana, it is said that everything that is apparent is a mandala, a divine palace. Everything that is seen is a Buddha, everything that is heard is the dharma, everything that is experienced is the totality of all those things. In the Vajrayana we say that everything that you experience is the totality of enlightenment. Everything. How did the Vajrayanists accomplish that? Well, they took the actual thing itself, this body, number one, this world that we live in, number two, and this relationship, number three, and worked on those things in a particular way so as to wear down the fixation to such a point where you actually saw the bone. What's the actual bone? And then wear down the bone and you saw the marrow. And then wear down the marrow and you saw the emptiness.

They did it through particular techniques which were taught. Those techniques are what are called "mantra" and "mudra" and "sadhana." "Sadhana" means "a yogi's practice." A yogi was called a "sadhu," you know, someone who traveled around naked with just a few things around him, maybe around their head, or around their ankles, and traveled around and practiced these disciplines, mostly in cemeteries. It's true, because that's where everybody is afraid to go. So basically they are confronting their own mind in a very organic situation, shall we say. People say, "Don't go in there!" So that's where they went. And they took their bodies in there, because the body was said to be the total representation of reality, this body, total representation of reality. Within this body there's representation, there's the essence of reality in terms of the organs and veins and breath, those things. In terms of this body, those things are all marked by particular aspects of reality. So a yogi, a yogin, would visualize, inside his body, the veins and arteries and organs as particular deities, such as these [gestures toward thangkas]

could be human ones, but could be not human ones. But they all represented some aspect of reality, in this case, as I said, passion, aggression, jealousy, pride became deities inside the body. And also that particular body inside was also seen to be totally empty at the same time. So that yogin would do that in charnel ground, in a cemetery. Visualize the body as a mandala of deities, and visualize everything around him as a palace. By doing so, what they did was eventually, through practice, transform ordinary sight, hearing, taste, touch, whatever, all the senses and sense perceptions into enlightened activity.

What does that mean? Into emptiness and luminosity at the same time. And they experienced what is called great bliss, mahasukha. So by experiencing that, they acted in a very unconventional manner, because there is no conventional great bliss. It doesn't exist. The conventional great bliss is called ego, something you can actually feel. And when you have that orgasm, you say, "Ahhh!," but that's not great bliss, that's simply temporary. The great bliss of the yogins was, is, continuous. And it's continuous with the body, it's continuous with the thoughts, and it's continuous with the life stream.

Now these yogins, the practitioners, began talking about dharma. And when they talked about it, the other people started to get very frightened. They said, "Oh, now wait a minute. This is not what the Buddha taught." But if we look at it, the previous people said this is not what the Buddha taught, and the previous people said this is not what the Buddha taught, but basically the whole process of realizing enlightenment is unfolding. Continually unfolding. And the process of the Buddha's teaching unfolding is the same process of our own unfolding. We start in a very measured way, in a very tight way, so to speak. We have to hold ourselves very still in order to stop running so fast. That's called Hinayana. When we feel relaxed with that, we start to open our eyes and see colors and shapes and whatnot, and when we begin to see colors and shapes not separate from our awareness, that's called Mahayana. And when we actually transform those colors and shapes with our emotions, this is called Vajrayana. In other words, our emotions become these pillars and these colors and these people and this hair and shoes and everything. That's called total sacred world. That's called Vajrayana.

Now these divine people, mad people, crazy people, were the progenitors of this particular lineage of which I am holder. That's why I wore these clothes tonight. And that's why we are in Halifax. What that means is that we teach particular kinds of techniques and meditation which has to do with working directly with emotions. Because emotions, I think, are the closest thing we can get to understanding what these people were talking about. Mahamudra is said to be the ultimate enlightenment of the tantrika, and that mahamudra means "great seal," or "great symbol." "Seal" in this case is not the flapping kind, but seal meaning seal, symbol. And I think Dr. Parent talked about a gesture the Buddha made of holding up a flower, and that in itself is the mahamudra. Now mahamudra means self-existing symbol, in a way. Something that points to itself by itself. In other words, you can't say, "Ah, that's it," because that is saying it to itself. That's the way we talk to ourselves all the time. We say, "Ah, yes, that's it," or we say other things. But we say that all the time. When we flush the toilet we say that. And that's true, that is it.

But those great yogins, the mahamudra people, they were different kinds of people. Sometimes they were lawyers, sometimes bankers, sometimes carpenters, sometimes musicians,

sometimes poets, sometimes professors, sometimes bricklayers, sometimes gossipers, sometimes gamblers. Everything. Every kind of example of being in the world, these siddhas were. Because the only way to actually demonstrate to people like ourselves that it is possible to attain such enlightenment is to *be* such enlightenment. In our lineage, the Kagyü, we go back to the earthly person, Tilopa, who, in expressing his enlightenment became a procurer, a pimp for a prostitute. That's what he did. He also pounded sesame seeds. And from pounding those sesame seeds, he realized the essence mahamudra, the bliss and emptiness inseparable. His great student, Naropa, ate a razor blade. Someone asked him, "Since you're such a great yogi, eat this!" And as he ate it, it melted on his tongue. He looked at an elephant, and the elephant dropped dead. When everybody was so unhappy, he said, "Get up," and the elephant got up.

The point of telling these stories is that the mastery of the phenomenal world is associated with the siddha. They can change their bodily structure in such a way that they become easily visible or not visible at all. They become understandable or not understandable on the spot. They speak in ordinary language, but you can't understand what they say. They look like ordinary people, but you are fascinated by their looks. They look at one point very old, another point very young. They teach the dharma without teaching it. These people are very rare in our lifetime. In my lifetime I have met a few. One of them is here in Halifax, not looking like anything I've ever seen before. I think the point is that the demonstration of enlightenment has to be, for the complete revolution of the wheel of dharma, visible to the naked eye, so to speak. One has to see it, because seeing is believing, after all.

So this tradition happened between the Eighth and Twelfth Centuries in India and was transmitted in Tibet by great teachers like Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra and Marpa, the father of the Tibetan Kagyü, our own lineage. They had no care for their own lives, no care for what was conventionally real. But they taught the dharma so well that this lineage has persisted in a stubborn way right to this moment. Interesting, and yet at the same time not all that interesting. We have opportunity to pursue that path. Very fortunate. By the way, this particular talk is just a smattering of that kind of dharma which sometimes falls like the snowflakes on the ground and sometimes seems very bleak, like grey, cloudless sky. But tonight it's pleasant to do it.

So that's it. If you have any questions, we could discuss them.

QUESTION: After that talk, this may seem beside the point, but I thought that when the Buddha became enlightened he realized the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana path. And the way you described it, these things came about in the Second Century, and I just –

VAJRA REGENT: The Buddha realized all of that at once. The disciples took a little time with it. So the same thing with ourselves. It's like people say, each different yana as it evolved in history, the previous one said that's not the truth. The next one said that's okay, this is the way it's going now. And the next one said that's not the truth, and the next one, that's okay. Basically one has to look at it as unfolding. In your own experience, in this case my own experience, what I'm talking about tonight has happened over a period of time. And I can talk about it in a straightforward way tonight because it's my experience. But fifteen years ago, I can see I wouldn't be saying this. In the same way with all the disciples of the Buddha over that

period of time, that happened. That's why it's not a different transmission. The Buddha taught the Hinayana first, and somebody later on figured out he wasn't just talking about that, he was talking about something else as well, and then somebody later on figured it out. It was all like, in a sense, you could say whatever is contained in the seed matures as the tree, with fruit, in the same way your initial understanding of the dharma becomes the same as the siddhas, who understand inside and outside to be the same.

Q: But he taught the Vajrayana teachings.

VR: Not in words. According to the Hinayanists, and according to what's called the sutras, or the polytexts sutras, there's no Vajrayana teaching there as such. However, if you read it, it's no different than the tantras. The language is different. In the language of the tantras they say, the Buddha, as so-and-so, Vajradhara, was teaching in this particular realm, and some people said to him, "Buddha, oh Buddha, what is this?? And he said this, and na-na-na-na, it's no different than the actual sutras of the Hinayana text, and it's mainly that the language has to do with one's own understanding. In other words, when you understand it, the language becomes different, becomes much more free. It's actually a complicated story. That's why the scholars picked the corpse apart with their teeth and their fingertips about who taught what, when, and where. But basically it really has to do with one's experience. Your Hinayana understanding of just simply being expands into simply being with this and that, and that expands into simply being with this and that as it is. Basically, it's just one circle, you have to start somewhere, though.

QUESTION: Sir, yesterday evening I watched a program on television about Mother Theresa, it was a documentary.

VR: Oh, I heard about that. I heard it was a really marvelous thing.

Q: Yes, it really was extremely impressive.

VR: I think Rinpoche's student worked on that.

Q: It struck me that in some way she followed what you were talking about – the combination of Mahayana and siddha behavior, the siddha lineage –

VR: Outrageous behavior to live there with all the cholera and leprosy and everything. It's not conventional behavior, obviously.

Q: So from that point of view you would consider it to be very similar.

VR: I would. I would consider it to be a relative accomplishment.

Q: Thank you, sir.

VR: But that's just what I said, so, who cares? I don't remember the last person who cared. Did you say Who dat? Who dat who said who dat? So if everything is understood, we can just fold the tent and get out of here.

QUESTION: Sir, what were you indicating when you were saying that's it, that's what we do all the time?

VR: What we do all the time is what the crazy people would say dharma. They would say that's the dharma. What we do all the time is what is. It is totally unadulterated, has no conditions, has no qualifications, has no memory, has no past, has no present, has no future, just

as arising, and that is that. It's very monumental in a way, but very simple, it's almost like stubbing your toe. It's very simple, monumental, and that is it, that's that.

Q: That does not at all, I'm just saying, preclude that you still have to do it again and again.

VR: Ah. Now we come to the point. That is, that is the emptiness, doing it again and again is the clarity of it. That's where these two schools got mixed up about the continuity of awareness. That is, that said that is that, so why do it again. Do it again is simply luminous, clarity, happening, again. Again doesn't even matter. You say we do it again, right, I think that's just a very charming thing to do. I think we all appreciate that.

QUESTION: Sir, you talked about relative and absolute reality last time. My question has to do with where do these meet. You know, it's sort of like you're standing by the side of the cliff. You could jump off, but then there's sort of this relative reality problem with that, you could throw the pie in the person's face, but then the cleaning bills, all this kind of thing, and there's sort of –

VR: You know, it's basically very simple. If you jump off, then your body gets crushed at the bottom. If you throw the pie, then you have to clean it in one way or another. That's where they meet. That's where what in the Vajrayana they would say rock meets bone. In other words, it's not really a speculation. You know, when you have that pie in your hand, and you're looking and saying, ohhhhh. And you know that if you throw it, it's going to cost you. If you know that, then throw it. Because you're going to have to clean it up.

Now it depends on your realization of what you mean by cleaning it up. Some people on an exalted level in their minds think they can wage war and clean that up. They cannot. Because they think beyond their means. Maybe a pie is okay, but I'm not so sure that's okay if you don't know what the consequences are of throwing it. That's what it means to have wisdom, to have a mahamudra mentality. Throwing the pie actually changes the situation so people become enlightened, rather than, if I throw this I won't have to clean it up. Different situation, but in reality, rock meets bone at that point. You throw the pie, you clean it. You have to clean it from the very beginning, otherwise why even throw it. See what I mean? You have to know that right from the beginning, otherwise it's just simply, blah, blah, blah, some fantasy that you can be a crazy person or whatever, but you can't because you're stuck with the bill. See the thing about the siddhas, they're never stuck with any bill. They sent it down to us. You pay. They're having a great old time. We're paying. I'm working off my credit, myself. It's a good point, but do you understand my meaning? It's very precise. It's so very precise it's almost like you took a needle and you pierced space. That point where you pierced space is where enlightenment is. That's what they had, they had that kind of awareness in everything they did, and that's their legacy. And that's why you asked the question. In the Hinayana they would call that "soso tharpa," in Mahayana they would call that "bodhichitta," and in the Vajrayana, "sugatagarbha." Technical terms, who cares. You have to do it yourself in any case.

Q: Thank you.

So this particular series, called The Rain of Wisdom, means to instruct us in the lineage teaching of the Kagyü fathers, and it has been designed so those of us who attend these talks

can practice the dharma and get a flavor of those practitioners in the past who transmitted to us this precious teaching, which is like a jewel, found in a garbage heap. So thank you very much, good to see you.