

VAJRA REGENT OSEL TENDZIN

Public Talk: "The Open Way"

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Checked by

VAJRA REGENT OSEL TENDZIN: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this discussion of the Buddhist path. This particular teaching of the Buddha has been transmitted from teacher to student for over 2,500 years, and it remains to this very day without distortion and uncorrupted. And the practices that began at that time are still practiced today. This particular topic, called "The Open Way," has to do with the teaching of the mahayana. And the mahayana, the Sanskrit word meaning "great vehicle," is that teaching which bases its path on the understanding of Buddha nature and its manifestation in activity and life.

Buddha nature, or tathagatagarba, is the essence of one's heart or mind. And in this teaching, we say that all beings possess such a nature. And that nature, when uncovered completely, manifests as complete awakening, manifests as an individual who comprehends the nature of reality and acts accordingly. Now historically, the Buddha Sakyamuni attained enlightenment and therefore was called the Buddha, or the awakened one. Since that time, great teachers have practiced this particular way and in doing so have awakened this Buddha nature and become fully enlightened.

So, what is the nature itself? The nature has two aspects. One is wisdom, and the other is compassion or skillful means. Wisdom is seeing reality just as it is, without preconception and without the notion of an ego. Wisdom is the direct perception of things as they are. Seeing things as they are leads to enlightened activity, which is by nature compassionate. We talk about the open way, because it is a way which includes all of experience and it is a way which, from the very beginning, talks about awakening, and that awakening being part of one's nature, one's experiential nature.

So therefore, the path is very vast and very profound. At the same time, it is very down-to-earth and simple. In order to awaken Buddha nature, one has to, first of all, tame

one's mind, because the mind is the generator of activity. Now, without getting into philosophical discussions about what this mind is, let's simply say that the mind as we experience it is, first of all, a progression of a thought process and that thought process from time to time becoming heightened into emotional experience. It includes memory. It includes sensation. It includes perception. All of that we call mind. Now generally, the mind is very jumpy. We find it difficult to put our mind on anything for very long. Even when we do put our mind on something for very long, we don't actually understand what it is that we are doing. We may, for instance, have a great desire, because of our conceptual mind, to be famous or to be successful, and so we direct our mind as much we can to those goals. Or we may have a desire for some kind of acknowledgment, some kind of notoriety. Whatever it is, we have to put our mind on it in order for it to happen. However, if anything goes wrong, we lose our mind. And that losing of one's mind is because we have not tamed that very mind that we use to direct our energy and our thoughts.

The taming process in a Buddhist tradition is the simple experience of allowing the mind to be simply as it is. That allowing the mind to be as it is at once simplistic and at the same time extremely difficult. The simplistic part is that, if we let the mind be as it is, then there's really nothing to do. There's no such thing as enlightenment and there's no such as path and there's no such thing as practice. Things are just what they are. However, the difficulty comes in because we have developed patterns over lifetimes, and in particular this lifetime, patterns which create chaos in our minds and therefore to simply let things be as they are becomes the most difficult thing we can possibly attempt. And so, in order to work with that kind of situation, the Buddha in his experience sat down and began to let his mind settle itself. And that has come down to us in the present day as what we call the practice of meditation.

The practice of meditation in the Buddhist tradition is simply letting things be. The outward form of that is to sit in a relaxed posture, preferably cross-legged on a comfortable seat, with the spine, shoulders, and head in a straight line, looking straight ahead without looking at anything, and just being there. There are different techniques for being there, in order to help get over the jumpiness. In some traditions, they follow the rise and fall of the muscles in the chest. In some traditions, they count breaths. In some traditions, they visualize the breath leaving the tip of the nose. In this tradition, we just sit there and allow the breath to go out and dissolve into space. And that kind of technique simply a help for us to just be. Now what happens to us when we try such a thing is that we begin to notice how active our minds are, all the time. And that translates also into restlessness in the body--pain in the back, pain in the neck, pain everywhere. Restlessness in the mind, endless discursive thoughts, story after story, after awhile beginning to understand that one is not related to

another, it's just production. That's what happens in the mind, production. Occasionally we get really excited when we think of passionate thoughts, or depressed when we think of negative thoughts. And occasionally we get hooked into memories. In any case, it becomes obvious that to do nothing whatsoever, to let things just be, is an extremely difficult proposition for a restless mind. However, the best way to tame that mind is to put oneself in that position and just be there for a certain amount of time. And that is called discipline of meditation.

What we begin to discover when we practice is that this mind, restlessness, and this body, uncomfortableness and all the rest of it, are purely temporary phenomena. There's no basis for any of it, in terms of continuity. We cannot recognize a mind as such. We cannot even recognize a body as such. We begin to think or see that this that we call our body is mostly made up of our notion of a body, our thoughts about a body. And this mind, which we call "my mind," is basically a series of flickering thoughts that have no particular solidity. When that experience begins to occur, there is a kind of openness that happens that is very unusual. In terms of our everyday life, we rarely experience such openness. But this kind of openness needs no particular history, needs no particular reference, didn't come from anywhere, and isn't going anywhere. So we begin to feel that there is more room in our life than we thought. There's more space than we thought. And that is the very beginning of taming the mind and the beginning of experiencing what we call the open way.

And later on we begin to see, if we continue to practice in this way, that we usually pick and choose arbitrarily what seems to be pleasurable for us one minute the next minute is painful. What we appreciate at one time in our life we don't appreciate at another time in our life. We begin to see that all of our opinions are arbitrary, made up due to habit. This of course means that we have really taken a good look at ourselves. And when we see that, we start to see that we actually impose upon ourselves a kind of torture which is a humorless existence, humorless in the sense that we are constantly measuring ourselves to a standard about who we think we should be which is totally made up. It has no reality, no essence at all. Ordinarily in our life this only occurs when we have some shock, some sort of a break in the pattern of our existence, for instance, if a relative dies, someone we love very dearly, or if we have a very severe accident or illness, or if we lose all our money in the stock market. Some break, some little break in a pattern makes us aware that we are actually self-creating an image all the time about who we want to be or think we should be.

When we practice meditation, what occurs is that autobiography becomes redundant, which autobiography already is. So we start playing back our life history until we realize that it's purely the production of our thoughts. The freedom, openness that occurs there is understood in this way. We realize we no longer have to be prisoner to ideas, notions,

especially concepts. We no longer have to train ourselves to jump through a hoop, that we can actually settle into who we are, just who we are. You know, who is that? Nobody. Nobody in particular. Could be somebody. If we like to create a somebody, we could do that. But basically it's really simple to be, just be. It doesn't need a lot of description, doesn't need a lot of history. Now we might think, "Well, that sounds very fine and good, but how can you actually function like that? Don't you need to function?" And it seems that in order to function, one has to have some sort of story going along with the function, some sort of history, some sort of name, form, credential of some kind. Well, according to the teachings, the truth of the matter is that the name, form, and credentials, all they do is complicate life. And in fact, rather than having life happen or function naturally, the opposite occurs. Everything becomes effort; everything becomes struggle; everything becomes some sort of difficult time, just to be, just to be somebody, livelihood, having a job, having a family, having relationships, working with the government, neighbors, friends. I don't know how many times a human being would sigh think, "Ah--I've got to do that today?" What's the problem? The problem is artificial projection about who and what we are and what life is. So if you sit and you practice and allow the space to open up, you begin not to be so hard on yourself, this so-called self. You begin not to constantly create further images of yourself in order that you can live up to something. I remember watching a tape of Jack Nicklaus as a golfer, since I like to play golf occasionally. And he was standing up to the ball and he said, "The problem with most golfers is they want to get the swing over as fast as they can." And I thought, isn't that interesting? That's precisely what happens in a life. We're all sort of rushing to death. Get it over with.

Now when you open up and let your mind open up, you begin to see very precisely all the details of your experience. Not saying they're good or bad particularly, but just to see them, see the details, see the precision of what actually happens, colors, shapes, sounds, smell, what you eat, how you interact with people, how your thoughts go up and down, how sometimes your thoughts create color, shape, how sometimes you feel exalted, sometimes you feel empty. You begin to see every little detail. Now for most people that would, I think, be very frightening, claustrophobic in a way. Why would we want to do that? However, I think we do. Because fundamentally, nobody wants to suffer. Fundamentally, everybody wants to be happy. But we cannot have that so-called happiness when we are ignoring what is actually going on. So the struggle to exist and to exist in a full way, and at the same the fear of not being able to do so creates a constant tension. Opening up your mind, your body, speech, mind, heart, everything, and seeing every detail creates a tremendous amount of freedom. When you don't miss anything, when you see how life actually goes, then you don't become trapped by your own confusion. Because when thoughts arise, you see them arise. And if that thought arises as anger or as jealousy or as pride or hatred, or that thought arises as pleasure,

as love, or as affection, you see every detail of it. You begin to understand that there is nobody pulling the strings here. There's nobody upstairs or anywhere pulling the strings. That isn't to say that you suddenly become master of the universe and realize that you are pulling the strings. I think more likely you realize there aren't any strings. There are no strings attached to this life. You are born, you get older, you get sick, and you die. That's what happens to everybody. There's a tremendous amount of freedom in that.

So, if you keep practicing in this way and realize that you do not have to create an image of a self or an ego constantly, then things are very immediate and precise and vivid. And at the same time, you begin to see that it's not all that complicated to be alive. And that begins to awaken what we call Buddha nature. There's a possibility, a hint that you actually can master the whole process of living and dying. Master from the point of view of not losing track, not falling asleep, not indulging in your dreams, but actually seeing things as a person who is awake all the time, even when you dream. That kind of feeling is like a spring breeze. It makes you sniff, like the scent of a spring blossom makes you sniff and wake up. That kind of feeling makes you sit up straight and take a look at everything. In fact, if you've seen a statue of the Buddha or a picture of the Buddha, that kind of feeling makes you feel that you are like that. Completely composed and totally there, and also very open.

So the beginning of this experience of Buddha nature is a very definite part of the path of mahayana teaching. And when you experience that, you also experience at the same time a certain kind of claustrophobia, because you begin to see how easy it is to fall into the trap of doubt, trap of being caught by a thought or an emotion or even a view of a poodle with a hat on. Yes, you look at it and say, "Isn't that cute, isn't that cute." And for a short time, you've lost your mind. [Laughter.] It's true. So there's a certain kind of claustrophobia involved as well, because you realize that you can't get out of it once you're in it. You can't get out of your mind. I know that we try all kinds of things to get out of our mind. There are lots of variations on the theme of "get me out of here quickly."

Some of it has to do with entertainment. In fact, most of it has to do with entertainment. I'm not sure why all of you came here tonight, but I have a feeling that you are interested in your mind. And there must be some connection because even if you know nothing about Buddhism, just the thought of Buddha must mean something about that. However, we are not in the business of entertaining each other. But you can find endless kinds of entertainment in the world. All of that just to short-circuit simply being awake. And you know that simply being awake is not a fight between good and evil, particularly. It's just a natural state. And all that we have to do is just simply be who we are, not do anything, at least for awhile. How about a minute? [Laughs.]

The path expands as one's mind expands. In fact, the path of Buddhism is not a path that was prescribed particularly, but it is an experiential path, in that once you begin to smell that particular scent of awakened mind, you sort of follow it in a very simply fashion. But that has nothing to do with entertainment. Because as I said, you begin to realize how claustrophobic it might be to really take charge in a certain sense, to be awake.

And then you have to train your mind, the second step on the path. First is to be still; the second to train. To train your mind simply means this: to allow those insights into the nature of things to happen unobstructedly. If you sit with yourself and empty your preconceptions by just being, eventually you will get flashes of insight into the nature of your own life and existence and to the nature of everybody else. To train your mind is to allow those insights to come and go without fixating on them. The second stage of training: not to fixate. How do you do that? Because, you might say, "Ah. That's it! I got it." And then it will go away. Well, to train your mind means not to try and recapture experience and make it into something permanent. You might get an insight into the nature of thoughts. Well, what is a thought? Thought has no color, it has no form, no shape. It has no solid quality whatsoever. You say, "Ah! Now I can understand how to work with my thoughts. They're empty. They don't exist. So I don't have to pay any attention to them." And then suddenly something happens and you're madly thinking, and at the same time saying to yourself, "This doesn't exist, this doesn't exist." So you think on top of thinking. It's not that easy. At the same time, it's completely natural. To train your mind means to remind your mind of what's actually happening, and that isn't really done in words although there are words which help. Teachings which we call dharma, they help. They don't do it, but they help. When you're learning to walk, it's always good to have mama holding your arms so that you can do this. In the same way, it's always good to have teachings to remind you that you are actually working with yourself on yourself, all the time. Some people even put slogans up on a wall, just to remind themselves of what they are doing. Why, we see signs everywhere, don't we? Eat here. Good eats. These particular teachings are a little bit more useful, although good eats is probably useful as well if you're hungry, but in this case useful in the long run in that reminding you to wake up [snaps fingers], wake up [snaps finger]. I know it's boring, but it's what we have.

The main point is that we begin to realize altogether that there's nothing to be thrown out. There's nothing to be rejected out of hand. There's nothing to be embraced and held onto as more precious than anything else. But rather the whole of experience is one large field, a very fertile field where everything can be included. And that's why it's called the open way. So we don't think or talk about in terms of this teaching that such and such is a bad

emotion and this is a good emotion, therefore we should cultivate the good emotions and throw out the bad emotions. Not particularly that. We don't talk about, you know, reliving experience so that we can get rid of our--the ghost of our dead somebody or other. We don't talk about those kinds of extremes, which are simply entertainment. We talk about the real open way, where everything is included exactly as it is. So if you experience the pain of loss or if you experience the happiness of gain, you experience them just as they arise in their entirety. So that when you experience your old age, sickness, and death, and whatever comes along in your life, you experience it completely as you are. Nobody really has to tell you what you already know. In fact, this talk that I'm making here is from my own experience. Fortunately, I had some very good teachers who allowed me to grow in an unobstructed way. They also were very ruthless, if I tried to make this path into entertainment.

However, the result is that everybody knows precisely already what it is to be awakened. Nobody needs to--nobody can give it to you. It can't be brought through some technique. You can't buy it, sell it, you can't conceptualize it. You already know. Everybody here knows exactly who they are. But all the stuff around it is just purely stuff. To be compassionate, first of all, means to stop stuffing oneself, to make one's life simple and to realize that there is no such thing as an ego. It's a pure illusion. That's called the wisdom of the Buddha. The second thing is that, knowing that, one speaks, walks, acts, one benefits beings because of that. When any one of us realizes that there is really no purpose to life, then we can actually be of benefit to other people. When any one of us realizes the innate freedom that is simplicity itself, then we become beneficial just by our life and just by our example. We do not have to become great scholars or great meditators, you know, who can sit in the same posture for months at a time without eating. We don't have to fly unless we have to get from one place to another. We don't have to pump ourselves up to be something other than what we are. We don't. We begin to live compassionately when we realize that all of life is sacred and has as its basis this quality of awakened, of awakens, all of life. So, we begin to feel related to everything. Big, big, relationship. Big family. And we begin to see that every action, every thought and every action, every word, everything that originates with ourselves affects the rest of the world. Every little thing. Again, this might seem very claustrophobic. On the other hand, it really makes sense, if you think about it, that your life--small, little life compared to the great big people--has as much effect on the nature of the world as the great big people, because it's all so inter-related, every one of us, every thought, every action. We create these buildings. We create the best sewage system and all the rest of it because of our relationship. If for one instant you feel the thought of enlightenment, that breeze of delight which is the feeling of being awakened, then at the same time compassion is born in your mind. Not born from causes particularly, but just born spontaneously. And there is no way you cannot feel sad when you see people suffer. There is no way you cannot

feel tender and almost wounded when you realize that there is no permanent experience to hang onto. There's a great feeling of sadness and loss. At the same time, there is a feeling of encompassing more in one's life than we ever thought we could do, including more in one's life than we ever imagined we could. You actually can become like a highway for other people, like a precious treasury, like a cloud that brings rain, like a sun that illuminates the darkness. You can become like that for other people, not because you have some self-serving idea or you think that by doing so you will eventually reach some sort of exalted state. Simply because you see things as they are and it is a natural expression to be kind.

So that in essence, in a short form, so to speak, is the quality of the open way and the nature of the path. There are many, many ways in which to discuss this. Tonight, being invited here by Dharmadhatu of Milwaukee--I have not been here since 1980 and it's very good to be back--but tonight, having been invited, I decided to say these things. I hope they have some benefit to your mind. [tape turned to side 2; apparently a few words not recorded when tape turned] ... questions or anything you would like to discuss about what we've said, please feel free to do so. We have some microphones here, and if you would raise your hand if you have a question, we'll pass them to you. Please feel free. [Pause.] This gentleman in the front.

QUESTION: I don't even know how to formulate this question, but what did you mean by claustrophobic?

VAJRA REGENT OSEL TENDZIN: Well, I think that, once you sort of start to wake up, you realize that you can't really indulge yourself in falling asleep. And that becomes claustrophobic, experientially, at least for a time. You sort of feel like your eyes have just been pinned up, you know, your eyelashes, and you just look around, you see ... It's a little claustrophobic from that point of view. You think to yourself, "I don't want to be awake any more. Yeah, I want to close them, I want to go dream a little bit. It was nice there. At least it was familiar there."

Q: [inaudible]

VROT: Easier to hear.

Q: So in that respect, do you meditate far into the night, in the early morning?

VROT: You could. It's not necessarily--I don't mean sleep and dream as a staying awake physically, particularly. I mean staying awake with experience. You know, like when you

dream, you know. It's possible to be awake in a dream. This is a dream. Are you awake? Yes. But the nature of this experience is dream-like. Here we are sitting in this room listening to somebody you never heard of or saw before. Just like in a dream. [Laughter.] But you're awake.

Q: You referred to the oneness, in a sense, of all things.

VROT: Interdependence.

Q: Yeah, interdependence.

VROT: It's a better word, it's a better word than oneness.

Q: Okay, interrelatedness, if that's okay.

VROT: Yeah.

Q: And you speak of doing nothing, if that's correct. There's-- can you talk about how there is what's called good and there is what's called bad in this interrelatedness, and one can do nothing but one has a choice.

VROT: Yes.

Q: One has a choice. And how does one know how to make that choice?

VROT: That's precisely the point, really, that usually one does not know how to make that choice at all, because the choice is based on habit, based on continual production in the mind. And what, like I said, what you like one minute you don't like the next minute, or "This is good, I like this food, I don't like this food." But really making a decision or a choice should be complete spontaneity based on no reference. So, that means tremendous faith in one's own intelligence. But in order to contact that, one has to stop the previous activity at least for awhile. And that's why we do this nothing, just to let the dust settle. You can't really see properly when all this stuff is going on, you know. If two things come up, three things come, you say, "Well, what should I do next? That looks good, go." There's not enough space to actually distinguish one thing from another. So, the whole notion of just being without any project is really presenting the ground like a blank piece of paper. You say, "Well, what color shall we put here? Red." Pow! There's red. It's very distinct. So that's the point. In that way, you can't fall back on your--again, this is back to the

claustrophobia--in that way, you can't say, "It wasn't my fault; things were just going so fast I didn't know what to do." That's what everybody says. That's why we continually go around and around in this world creating further and further aggression. All you have to do is pick up a newspaper. However, if you create that very, very simple ground, it's possible to actually decide to go this way and not that way. What might be called good or bad or whatever, but basically it's more than good or bad. It's what's really appropriate. Because good or bad is arbitrary too, depending on situations and, you know, some people say, "That was terrible." "But I don't think it was terrible, I think it was right." You know. People say that sort of thing, you know. Look at the politics. That's always happening in politics. Every time you read, some people say, "Well, I thought he did the right thing." They say, "Well, that's terrible." For oneself, one should know that one's activity, the real difference between having made the choice is what happens when you make that choice. General thing should be that it shouldn't create further struggle. In fact, it should do the opposite. What your actions should result it is more space for other people, including yourself.

Q: Doesn't that become a point of reference? Earlier you said choose in the moment without a point of reference.

VROT: That's right.

Q: And—

VROT: Does that become a point of reference?

Q: Right—

VROT: Only momentarily.

Q: The red becomes a point of reference.

VROT: Only momentarily. It doesn't have a memory. In other words, you don't have to say, "I did the right thing. I put the red in the right place." Not necessary, because immediately following that smack of red [snaps fingers] is more space.

Q: But what's appropriate? You did use the word appropriate and you said--

VROT: Appropriate.

Q: And you said based on intelligence.

VROT: Yes.

Q: Acting without point of reference with intelligence from that moment?

VROT: Well, we're not talking about mindlessness, particularly. When I talk about spontaneity and no reference, I am talking about what we call Buddha nature, which is wisdom. That is intelligence, wisdom.

Q: And that's a point of reference, then.

VROT: No, it's not point of reference. It's just spontaneous accomplishment.

Q: Isn't a basis for choice, as opposed to emotion, say?

VROT: No. It's not a basis for choice. The only basis for choice is openness.

Q: Openness to what is? And to what's happening?

VROT: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And to what's here now?

VROT: Yeah. There's no other basis for choice. Otherwise we get into the pro and con of everything, which is endless. But space is just space. Doesn't demand anything. In fact, that's what a little claustrophobic about it.

Q: Thank you.

VROT: Pretty good. That's really good. [Laughs; laughter.] We hope so. This gentleman over there.

Q: Sir, can I ask you how you determine that interdependence is a better word than oneness?

VROT: Oneness, I think, would tend to make one numb, not see the edges of things, whereas interdependence has more to do with the fact that there are angles and lines and circles but they're connected, making a connection. Oneness in some ways has a feeling of one doesn't have to do very much, you know, because it's all one, so why bother, you know. But interdependence, it has something to do with really precision.

Q: Thank you.

VROT: It's also the truth. You can't say everything is one, because that doesn't make sense. We can't find any one thing that everything is. So [pause], you have every thing is one. Well, why do you have an "every," if you have a one? You should just say "thing." But if you have thing, if there are more than one thing, you have things and you have every again, and it just goes on and on and on. Which it does, it goes on and on and on. Usually we get exhausted just thinking about it. In this case we might become more open to the possibilities. One thing that is important though. One has to have some effort at the beginning. Otherwise, you know, this is simply just a bunch of talk.

Q: I'd like to ask how we can distinguish between entertainment and teachings. In other words, we're trying to reach our own intelligence, but there are so many offerings of how to do that.

VROT: I think, I think, I think, you know, there's a sharpness involved with teaching that is somewhat irritating.

Q: But, for example, there's psychotherapy in the western tradition.

VROT: Yes, there is.

Q: Where that helps you, and there are spirit guides in other traditions.

VROT: Oh, so many things.

Q: And there are extra-terrestrials are here with higher wisdom.

VROT: They are all over the place. [Laughter.] We're chock full of ideas, aren't we? When it comes right down to it, when you are by yourself, right, and it may be perhaps in the early morning when the first ray of sunlight hits your eyelid and you open your eyes, that's it. [Pause.]

Q: [different person] Whenever I hear these talks, I tend to feel fairly inspired and happy for the moment, and then weeks or days later when things don't work out and I realize that I have not in fact created more space for people around me, I don't really know what to do with that disappointment.

VROT: Well, certainly you can't go back for another talk, even though it might be a little bit helpful to hear the teachings now and then. That is helpful, because you do remind yourself, but I think basically what happens is that when we get disappointed we start to

revert back to habitual pattern, when we get disappointed that our, you know, goal hasn't been reached or we really didn't live up to what to what we thought we could do, we get really disappointed. Now, again, turn the light of your mind on that disappointment and see what it is actually is. Does it have a shape? Does it have a color? Where did it come from? Can you smell it? Can you handle it? Does it exist at all? Or is this something that you create in your mind? Or, not even you, it just happened in your mind. How did it happen? You have to look at it, you know, whatever it is, whatever the experience. In fact, it's better in some ways to be disappointed than not. Well, it gives you a chance to look at the raw quality of life. Life is very raw. There's nothing really sweet about being alive. Occasionally now and then we have little, you know, we have a good meal somewhere. We say that was wonderful. Or we see, you know, a movie or something, or a child is born, or a little baby, and we say, "Oh, look at that!" You know, then suddenly everything goes wrong. There's nothing in this particular life that has any solidity, so you can't grab onto it. If you're disappointed in your, you know, desire to be helpful, then perhaps you're still clinging to an idea. Just let it go. Let it just open up. But you have to look at it, you know, so, so you don't just simply gloss it over with some kind of another thought. I mean, even your disappointment is another thought. You're saying, "Oh, I'm so disappointed. I couldn't do what I wanted to do." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. [Laughter.] Just keep entertaining oneself all the time with another thing. Everybody's afraid to be totally bored. [Pause.] But I think it's necessary. If we're going to be of any use to each other, we should be so thoroughly bored that we don't even care at all to raise another eyebrow--about ourselves or anybody else, for that matter. Kind of basic real sense of awareness. Awareness is like a cool mountain stream. Doesn't think of itself. Oop, okay.

Q: Well, I try to create an open field, what happens if my neighbor poaches my livestock or kills my hired hand?

VROT: Well, what are you doing with livestock and a hired hand with such an open field? [Laughter.] Seems to me you have a particular field. Now, I'm not saying that--that might be cute and all that. What you're talking about, what happens if aggression comes at you when you're trying to be open? Is that what you're saying?

Q: I'm thinking of my history in the last fifty years or so, which includes an awful lot of aggression and—

VROT: Fifty years, that's all? [Laughs.]

Q: That's all I am.

VROT: [Laughs.] Oh, you mean your own history. I see. Well, you know, the wisdom that we talk about has something to do with understanding aggression altogether, how aggression is generated, you know, that kind of thing. That has a lot to do with sort of deflating the aggressive action in the world. Without the wisdom, there's no way that we can counter aggression with some sort of strategy. It doesn't work. All you can do is build bigger fences, bigger walls, so it doesn't get into your territory, so that dirtiness doesn't happen. But that doesn't work. There's got to be some notion of really what is it that makes people angry. What is it that makes us angry with ourselves or our neighbor, you know? And then, maybe work on it. But unless we know, that hired hand, that field, is your property, your territory, it's your confine, it's your mind, your boundary of your mind, what you own and what you call yours. We have a little bit of problem there. And I don't want to sound like some utopian view. Not interested in that, particularly. The gentleman in the blue sweater. I still see it's blue, isn't it?

Q: I'm a student here, and I've having this thought that I've been tumbling over and it seems like the more I learn and stuff, the more muddled and confused my observations get. And my question is, is whether I should try and stop learning and start forgetting, or if I should try to continue and learn, and if these conflicts will work out?

VROT: You should go to Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. Because the notion of learning is not the accumulation of knowledge. Learning is a constant state of mind. What a delightful thing to learn about something or other! Should be, but when gets to be the point where it's just the heaping one thing on top of another for the purpose of what? One doesn't know. "Well, I'm going to college. I'm going to get educated." That should be what I was talking about earlier about training the mind. That's what education should be, training the mind. And I think, classically speaking, that's what it is. In the west, in the east, anywhere. Training the mind in order to, you know, be able to create more awakened society. However, if you're just sort of piling things up, doesn't make any sense. You should go to Naropa Institute in Boulder. They have a good way of teaching there, seriously. They have a good way of teaching. It's not based on accumulation, based on, you know, actual experience. Now, if you try to sort of wake yourself in your situation here, that's good. Try it. Just sort of wake yourself up, any class that you have. Just say, what is the essence of what they are teaching? What are they trying to say? What's going on here? Well, we want to talk about history. For what? For what reason do we want to talk about what happened in 1865 that made anything understandable to me right now? So it's that kind of light of awareness that you should put on anything that you study. Anything, you know. And nobody--you know, if you're lucky, you get a good teacher. If you're fortunate, you get a

teacher who's awake as well. And I think without a good teacher it's really hard to learn anything. Actually really what learning is learning how to learn. It's not learning something. It's how to learn, you know. We become ever increasingly bigger people, in a certain way. Not just in size but in our minds. The more we can encompass, the more compassion there is. So you should learn how to learn. [Laughs.] Ahh, I understand. It's really painful. [Laughs.] It's frustrating--really. If you just, you know, you talk about packaging things and all that stuff. It's not good enough. We need something more than that. Well, tell you what. Try and go to Dharmadhatu and learn a little bit of this meditation technique. It's very helpful just for the space, you know. Because the process of learning is innate. And if you have the time, go to Naropa Institute in Boulder. [Laughter.] It's good. We've been working on that for a long time. Trungpa Rinpoche started that in 1974, and it has produced great benefit for people like yourself who would like to do that very thing. I just did, you know, an unsolicited advertisement for Naropa Institute.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it has been really indeed a pleasure to be able to say these few things about the Buddhist teaching. I appreciate your patience and the fact that you stayed awake for such a boring thing. It is also important to recognize that this particular life that we have should not be taken for granted. We have no idea when it is that we will die. We have no idea how long or what kind of life will occur to us. Therefore it is supremely important to take advantage of what we have, in this time, in this place, in this life to awaken oneself to the possibilities of a great compassion and great wisdom. So please take it as your own, and by means of encouragement, we have Dharmadhatu here in Milwaukee. It works very hard to present these teachings and present also a place for people to practice meditation. So, please try. And it has been delightful to see you. And I hope we meet again. Thank you.

[Applause.]

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