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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

Intensive Training Session: Generosity: Transcending the Boundaries of Self
Karme-Choling
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Talk Two of Three
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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. We are continuing our discussion of generosity as the means to transcending any boundary which is caused by belief in a self or ego. I think it's, would be interesting at this point to talk about transcending. And "transcending," that's an interesting word. Transcending, does anybody know the exact meaning of that word, anybody into language? Just say it. Yes?

[Inaudible response from audience]

VR: Is that a Webster type idea or is it your own idea? It's your own idea, no. I just meant a regular English dictionary definition of transcend.

[Audience Member: Etymologically, it has to do with going across.]

VR: Right, transcend, ascend, is that it? Or cross over, cross over—maybe that's it, cross over?

[Audience Member: Going beyond usually means to go above or go beyond.]

VR: That's it. Right, to go above or to go beyond, that's right.

[Audience: Rise above.]

VR: Rise above, that's right. That's good, that's very good. We should talk about that, I think. And rise above or transcend, go above. Well, our discussion as we talked about last night, there's fixation, which we call self. We're fixated on this idea of ourselves because of ignorance. And our notion of practice, our notion of being involved with the buddhadharma is to transcend or to go beyond or above that. And to go above that completely is what's called enlightenment. That's the word that is commonly used for having completely transcended and gone above and beyond the ordinary fixation about who and what we are.

So we should talk a little bit about what we mean by enlightenment. Well, to begin with, we should say that enlightenment is not any kind of a categorical experience. Nor is it substantial thing in terms of the way we ordinarily describe phenomena. Phenomena. To say that enlightenment is not a thing is very powerful statement. Because if it is not a thing, nor is it a particular experience involved with a thing, then it is difficult to reference enlightenment at all. When we talk about enlightenment, we talk about the absence of reference, that means the absence of self, which is the primary reference, the same reference that we have to our clothes, our relatives, our automobile, our insurance policy, whatever. Those references. Say that enlightenment is the absence of reference. Since it's the absence of reference, then what could exist? Which is a question, I suppose. But even that question is referential, because we're thinking about enlightenment still as something other. That's the same way we think about ourselves: we're other to ourselves. So to talk about enlightenment means that we have to pretty much give up all sense of possessing anything, including our own experience and our own ideas, just have to pretty much give it up.

Now that takes tremendous faith. And faith in the Buddhist world is the same as confidence. Faith is not simply believing in something, obviously, or else we wouldn't be talking about enlightenment, because it is not a something—there is no thing involved, no substance, no essence, no this or no that. So the faith we're talking about is not based on something to be faithful about.

So faith actually means confidence, and confidence is pretty much an unconditional sense of being. When we say, "This person has confidence," what do we mean? Well, we mean they're strong, they're forceful, they can project, they can influence the world, and things like that. That's an ordinary definition of confidence. But confidence in the Buddhist sense is confidence based on, first of all, understanding that our notions about enlightenment are based on cause and effect.

Needless to say, they're generated, our notions about enlightenment are generated due to our own ignorance, and they're continued, or the result of that generation is our mistaken action. Because of our ignorant notions to begin with, we act according to those notions and we create this stupefied world of ours. Sort of like this bumper car world, everybody is sort of bumping into each other, bumping. That kind of thing. That's the first kind of confidence you should have is realize that that's what happens. And that's due to ignorance as what we talked about last night.

And beyond that, there's a second kind of faith one should have, and that is that that whole process is, it's possible to transcend that whole process. Enlightenment is possible for us as human beings. Not as a thing that we achieve, some kind of badge or medal or something like that that we get, or some kind of immortal status, Zeus or something, and we reach the realm of the gods—no. But that it's possible to actually take the wind out or the air out of this balloon just like the, you know, little things you see in swimming pools in the shape of a dragon or something like that, have to be blown up. But if you take the plug out, the shape of it is gone

and so is the concept of it as well at the same time. So enlightenment is possible, that's the second kind of confidence one should have.

And third is that there's a particular vehicle to achieve that confidence and that is what's called the three jewels: the buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. The Buddha is notion of a human being who practiced generosity on himself. You know the story of the Buddha. He did all kinds of things in order to try and achieve this something that he thought was there— austerities of all kinds, studied with all kinds of teachers, but finally, he decided to practice generosity. That is, he arranged a comfortable seat for himself, just like the one you're sitting on: eight, three squares, whatever, and sat under a tree, so he wasn't too hot, and just sat there, practiced meditation. That's a very generous point of view—he wasn't being stingy with himself. Previously, he was being very stingy with himself: trying to, you know, stand in the middle of a fire, and not eat anything, wear no clothes, and whatever thing happened to the body would be kind of austerity in order to cleanse any notion of self, to try and purge it, get rid of it, destroy it. But that didn't work, so he decided to be generous with himself and just to sit in a simple way, eat simple food, and just be reasonably comfortable for a human being in order to practice meditation. So he did that. And because he was generous with himself, then that movement of generosity created a big wind and storm of practice, which resulted in enlightenment. And from that came what we call the dharma. That's what we are talking about, the dharma.

Dharma, as we know, means “things as they are.” But there are two types of things as they are. There's the type of things as they are, such as the sensory world, such as hot, fire is hot, that's ordinary dharma, that kind of thing. And then there's dharma which investigates the notion of reality itself or investigates itself so to speak, which is a higher dharma. When the Buddha taught these dharmas, higher dharmas, and we have confidence in that, because as we said last night, by contemplating, studying the dharma, we lose reference point, we shed reference point—not lose it, that's a funny word. Lose reference point makes one feel like you're getting sort of drowsy or passing out. But shed reference point is just like losing some thick skin. So we have confidence in that dharma, because we see that this thick skin begins to shed when we contemplate the dharma or have confidence in it.

And thirdly, we have confidence in the sangha. That is to say, we realize that by practicing the Buddhist teaching and by being in association with others who practice the Buddhist teaching, we develop a certain kind of strength, because the sangha is the sort of, you might say collective—collected, collected rather than collective—collected power of people like ourselves trying to practice and achieve enlightenment. So we have confidence in that because we see when we practice together with a group of people like ourselves, there's tremendous power and tremendous strength that is created by that kind of situation.

So those are three kinds of confidence we should develop. And they're all based in some ways on generosity. And generosity, I suppose, has to do with one primary experience, and that is what's called the arising of bodhichitta. *Bodhi* means “awake,” and *chitta* means—well, could be either mind or heart, depending on the translation—but “awakened mind” or “awakened heart.” Bodhichitta is something that occurs when we put ourselves in a situation, when we find

ourselves in a situation of buddha, dharma, and sangha. We find ourselves in that situation, bodhichitta ignites like that spontaneous combustion we talked about last night, it just happens. In other words, it doesn't need, you don't have to strike the match, but the match suddenly explodes, by itself.

That is recognized by two things. One is a kind of longing or aspiration to attain enlightenment, which, I suppose, we all have, otherwise we wouldn't be here, unless we're doing an article for *The New York Post* or something like that, or for our own *Washington Post*, rather, and for *Washington Post*, or for our own post, we can even write it in the post, "I was, Kilroy was here." Or what other reason, I suppose we are curious, our curiosity about the awakened state of mind is what brought us here. There is already some confidence in the buddha, dharma and sangha, that's why we're here. And we are further, we are curious about what that is. And we'd like to achieve that enlightenment, which is our aspiration. But also at the same time we realize that we cannot grasp at that, as they try to grasp at enlightenment, because we realize that there's no such thing. If we grasp at it, it's like a wet bar of soap. As soon as you say "Well, I've got it," it's gone. And we can't fixate on our idea of it, because our idea of it changes, minute by minute.

So grasping and fixation are the two things that bind us to the notion of self. Grasping is primarily what we talked about last night, is that sense of freeze, panic and freezing this self. Fixation is continuing it by elaborating the description of ourselves on and on and on and to everybody. Grasping and fixation are the same, are the qualities we should say, we could say, the basic descriptions of what we call ego or self consciousness.

In order to free ourselves from grasping and fixation, we have to realize that we cannot possess enlightenment for ourselves. That would make it anti-enlightenment. It's simple, mathematical thing. If you have a self and you have enlightenment as no self, and self tries to possess no self, impossible. Basically, what you need is equation that cancels out, right, so you have to have no self, no self, no self here, no self there. No this one, no that one. And that way you have enlightenment.

Well, bodhichitta is like this match that lights by itself. And it has two aspects: first is the desire to achieve enlightenment, to be free from grasping and fixation. The second is to realize that to be totally free from grasping and fixation, it is necessary to dedicate one's enlightenment to others. In other words, if you do achieve enlightenment, it won't be for yourself, but actually be for someone else. Because at the moment you achieve enlightenment, it's already for somebody else, because there's no one here to possess the enlightenment, therefore it has to be for somebody else. It's very simple and direct logic, and yet there must be experience that goes along with it. The point of this discussion, I think, is to emphasize that generosity is the realization that enlightenment cannot be a possession. Therefore, to do what we are doing has to be dedicated to others.

Bodhichitta is of two types: relative and absolute. The relative is the aspiration to achieve enlightenment through developing this kind of feeling of dedicating one's activity to others, spiritual practice that we do, meditation, whatnot. Dedicating that to others, not possessing for

oneself whatever occurs, whether they're high, middle, or low experiences. And therefore, developing a certain kind of kindness or warmth, called maitri, "loving kindness." Developing this kind of kindness and warmth in oneself so that we can dedicate what we do. That's relative point of view.

And the absolute point of view is that through developing such a discipline, through being kind and generous to ourselves and to others and not possessing or hoarding our experience or our notion of enlightenment, you begin to realize that this one, the practitioner who is dedicating practice, does not exist. And the sentient beings or people that you are dedicating practice to also do not exist, and at the same time your practice does not exist as well. This is called absolute bodhichitta, is called threefold purity, or what we talked about last night of the being in the bathtub without the water, is the experience of shunyata or emptiness. Self is empty of self, other is empty of other, the action is empty of itself. In this way we can develop real compassion because there's no reference point whatsoever. Therefore, everything that occurs is spontaneous combustion.

It is important to realize that the relative part is what we're working on right now. We're trying to talk about generosity as a practice, rather than as a perfection. We'll talk about both tomorrow, but there are two aspects: generosity as a practice, generosity as a perfect enlightenment. As a practice, it is the generation of warmth and sympathy to oneself and to others by not holding on to whatever you experience in your meditation practice, not trying to possess it, but rather letting go and giving in this sense is not holding on to one's own experience. That's the first notion of giving that we could have. That's a very generous thing to do. And secondly, if one has a good sense of meditation practice, not holding onto that, but sharing that with others. In other words, being able to pass on or pass along what one knows to other practitioners. Dedicating the merit begins with not holding onto one's own experience and further than that, sharing that with other people.

So, that's the beginning of what we call compassion. We're not talking about anything that happens out of a vacuum, so to speak. That's a silly idea altogether. We begin very simply by processing ourselves. Developing generosity means to process yourself through the practice of meditation and through the postmeditation experience, that is, not being stingy with others. In a very definite way you have to do that. And through that, the experience of shunyata or emptiness dawns by itself, just like that match exploding by itself. It doesn't have to be sought after, it doesn't have to be possessed, because it cannot, there's nothing to possess about it. Basically, when you realize that there's no giver, there's no receiver, and there's nothing given, then you have generosity. Then you can be really generous, because then there's nothing to refer to and one's body, speech, and mind are the proclamation of generosity, demonstration or manifestation of generosity. What you think, how you speak, how you act, are all generous.

So that is the talk for tonight. Do we have any questions? Gentleman back here.

QUESTION: Sir, I guess, I don't know the proper title.

VAJRA REGENT: Good enough.

Q: Listening to the talk actually in a sort of atmosphere of being angry or something like that. Say, well various obstacles came up and one of them or at least the way I experienced it was that I didn't believe you. Not what you're saying, but you saying it, you know what I mean?

VR: I know exactly what you mean.

Q: Well, I thought the best thing to do was to at least bring it up.

VR: Well, you see the point there is, is that me saying it and you believing it is not all that important. It's what's being said.

Q: Well, that's much easier.

VR: Well, let's do it that way. We don't have to continue the myth of self.

Q: Oh, all right then, thank you.

VR: Very simple.

QUESTION: Yes, I want to talk about anger a little bit more. I've been bargaining with this practice for years, and now I find that I'm angry with it. My back hurts, my knees hurt, if I bow one more time I'm going to need a chiropractor. I don't like your suit.

VR: Now we're in trouble. [Laughter]

Q: According to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, I've been through bargaining, and I've been through anger, and I've got two more stages to go, and I'll be dead. That's depressing.

VR: Who, who is that?

Q: Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.

VR: I'm missing it.

Q: On death and dying.

VR: Is she dead?

Q: No. She's on the way, but she's not there yet.

VR: Oh, so are we all. Anyway, you know, we have this, yes, I understand, it hurts everywhere.

Q: Yes, and my question is, it may seem like a frivolous or flip question, but actually it's quite serious: do you have to be dead to be a good Buddhist?

VR: Yes. In a very particular way, yes. You have to be dead to your own, your own biography.

Q: Well, I'm looking at that four hours of meditation tomorrow, and it looks like the Sahara desert to me.

VR: Well, don't start writing it yet. You didn't even get there. You see, that's what I mean by generosity, we get so stingy, we didn't even get there, and we're all writing, the tombstone is being carved, "Here lies who almost went to meditation practice tomorrow." Listen, the pain

that experienced in the back and the bowing and the whole self consciousness that you feel could be included in the practice as an act of generosity to yourself. It's possible to do that. Does that make any sense?

Q: Well, it all makes sense, actually. Thank you.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. I was wondering—

VR: I was thinking that it didn't make any sense at all. [Laughter]

Q: Good evening, sir.

VR: Good evening.

Q: At what stage do we transcend the relative...

VR: You know, you know, relative bodhichitta and absolute bodhichitta, one is not transcended for the other, they blend together just like body, speech and mind, you know, that kind of thing, it's continuous. First thing is you have to, since we are sitting here working on the practice of meditation, and the back hurts and things happen, be generous with yourself. Don't fight yourself about it because you realize somewhere that ultimately this is good, good. So, the resistance comes from karma, which I talked about earlier, cause and effect of constantly rehashing the same story, right, rehashing it over and over again. So realize that is the first kind of confidence that that's what you're doing, you're rehashing your story, and it's not particularity interesting. So that's relative bodhichitta is to realize that, work on that. And absolute bodhichitta is when you experience the nonduality, nonexistence of this, that, and the other.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You can't actually separate the two, it's like thinking that you want to go somewhere and going. That's what's actually said in the text, in the text of the bodhisattva path. The aspiration to go and actually going, they work together.

QUESTION: I have a personal question to ask you. Do you terrify me totally because of my own projections?

VR: I think so, because other than that...

Q: You're not even there...

VR: What else is there?

Q: Thank you.

VR: I was thinking about that today, by the way. I was talking to my Kasung while driving down here—right, where are you—yes. I said, "I wonder why people get so shaky." It's because of their own idea of who that is in there that they're going to see, who—they're going to see yourself in some ways, you know [laughs], yes, it's true. It is because of your own projection, but on the other hand, don't take it as throw away. You know what I mean, take a little piece of paper and

just flick it. In this case, it's good practice, good to learn something about what actually is. Because of the interaction, something happens, and you'll wake up.

QUESTION: Sir, would you say confidence and fearlessness are the same?

VR: Not exactly. Confidence is sort of like the, your state of mind. Fearlessness is your action.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Yesterday you mentioned bhumi, shortly after you talked about—

VR: Did I? I did? Bhumi, yes. Bhumi means what? Stage, path, level. Does it have anything to do with earth? Earth, yes, right, yes.

Q: Okay. That answers my question.

VR: Yes.

QUESTION: Could you say something about equanimity in terms of relative bodhichitta?

VR: Yes. The equanimity of relative bodhichitta is settling into your practice. When you settle into your practice that means you're not put off by the fact that you have to be generous to yourself and to others. Before you actually have equanimity in your practice, it's abrasive to you to even think about, let alone have to do it. Once you're generous or you discover some sort of opening let's say, some sort of space, some sort of equanimity, then it's not particularly important, nor is it a big deal to be generous to yourself, to others. So that's the equanimity of the relative bodhichitta, that is to say, the effort that goes into doing it is not a problem.

Q: That automatically just goes out to others?

VR: Yes, it's not like you're used to it therefore it works, that would be a misinterpretation there. It's more like you see the logic in it, you see the reason in it, like Shakespeare would say, you see the truth in it, therefore there's equanimity.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: How does that differ with no giver and no receiver?

VR: Well, you see there's some effort involved. You have to have effort in the beginning. To practice this, it needs effort.

Q: And that's the equanimity part of it?

VR: No. The equanimity, he's talking about the equanimity of the relative point of view, and my answer to that was that the equanimity of the relative point of view is you see the truth in it, therefore, you're not afraid to exert yourself to do it. The absolute point of view, there's no effort necessary, and there's no equanimity necessary.

Q: Thank you.

VR: [Laughs] Every time you talk about absolute point of view, everybody says thank you. [Laughter] [Inaudible words] thank you. We shouldn't make this notion of absolute into a theistic notion. You can't possess it, so don't overload your thought process with trying to figure

it out. Basically, work on yourself, practice generosity by shamatha, vipashyana, study, contemplation, working for the benefit of others, that's how absolute point of view comes about, absolute reality comes about, not by trying to squeeze the lemon until they, it becomes sweet. It doesn't work. Yes, isn't that something... [Laughter] That's the surprise of absolute mind.

Going to have another go at it?

Q: I was going to say something about lojong practice.

VR: What are you going to say?

Q: Something about how—oh, we, I think Shantideva talks about self-cherishing attitude, that we cherish ourselves more than anyone else. Well, he doesn't really bring up lojong, but I guess in another commentary that does.

VR: Well, the point is that we think that this is the greatest, and it's only because we are afraid that there might be something else. And even then, both of those are sort of ignorant points of view. This is great, something else might be greater. It's silly. There's no difference here in terms of mind, in terms of reality, there's no difference. There's difference in terms of the appearance of bodies—different shapes and hair color and skin and what not. But in terms of bodhichitta, it's completely the same, ultimately the same, relatively the same.

Q: Could you say something about exchanging self for other?

VR: Why?

Q: It would be nice, interesting.

VR: Exchange can happen, you know, it's not like barter, right, you know, it's not like saying, you know, "I'd like to exchange myself for you, especially if you're slightly better than I am, then I'd like to make that exchange." Or you might do it from the martyrdom point of view, "Since you're worse and I'm better, then I can be so generous as to exchange myself for you, because you're worse, and therefore, you'll be better, and I will dissolve." Yes, so exchanging oneself for other is a practice of generosity, which begins by understanding that the notion of self is a phantom, and that since self is a phantom, then phenomena also has a phantom-like quality. If phenomena has a phantom-like quality, then perception of phenomena, which seems to be the bridge between self and phenomena, is also phantom-like. Therefore, reality is just as it is, then exchange is no problem. You asked for it!

Q: Thank you.

VR: It's very long topic, we could go on and on about that. I think the basic thing is try to generate the heart of giving up territory, you know, individually, by not sitting there complaining about yourself moment by moment by moment, and in a group situation by not attacking others for their lack of generosity. So that kind of exchange can happen on a very basic, practical level. When you practice meditation, stop complaining. When you relate with others, stop blaming.

Oh... that caused a lot of hands to go up somehow. All right, in the front here.

QUESTION: Well, on a relative level I guess, what do we do when we feel pleased with ourselves?

VR: Think this way: I'm pleased with myself now but previously I wasn't. Now because of some particular action, which seems beneficial, I'm pleased with myself. Why is it so? It always will be so because somebody else appreciated it. That's why you're pleased with yourself. If somebody else appreciated it then you think to yourself, it's their doing that I feel pleased, therefore it belongs to them.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, when we fall in love, is it generous or confirming self?

VR: Neither.

Q: Can you say something?

VR: Well, it's unconditional. Later on and very quickly, it becomes self confirming, and then we have to work backwards. Basically, that's what we are doing. Falling in love is what we're doing all the time, but we're working backwards to remember that particular moment, which is unconditional. We call it falling in love, that's our human language. We call it enlightenment. Falling in love is just human language.

Q: For enlightenment?

VR: Yes. What it means is: no conditions.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Where shall we go? Okay, how about here. Do you understand? Well, work on it.

QUESTION: How can phantom world appreciate transcendental generosity or real generosity?

VR: No need.

Q: Well, why....

VR: That's how, how can you appreciate anything if you need something, you know, you want to have it, you've got to have it, "I want to have it." How can you appreciate it, you can't, you want to devour it. No need, means that you're a rich person let's say, you're totally rich, you're the Scrooge McDuck. You have piles of gold pieces everywhere, and you can just throw out gold everywhere. So there's no need to appreciate it yourself, right, because you're already wealthy. The phantom is yourself to begin with. The phenomena is also yourself as a phantom to begin with. So that you can appreciate it that way.

Q: But there's this low level feeling of..

VR: That's what I mean, yes, right. It is, it's a low level feeling that's not necessary. It's due to habit, go ahead, shoot it out.

Q: Why bother, you know...it's so...

VR: That's the low level feeling, why bother?

Q: Yes.

VR: Low level feeling is why bother because it's too much trouble and it causes complications and then you have to start figuring out with the, you know, little calculator, whose got what and where things go, and all this stuff. Why bother? It's like in Karne-Chöling we talk about, well, Karne-Chöling, all of our places everywhere, who did this and who did that, who sent in their pledge and who, you know. I mean, why bother, here we're talking about spirituality, why do we have to mess with money or mess with even keeping the place up? Well, we could say, well, there's a relative reason for doing that, you know, because it's, we should have a spiritually lighted room. But there's always this question of why bother. Well, that's because you realize that grasping and fixation, right, are due to ignorance. And why bother is kind of like the code of the ignorant world is why bother. It's the code, it's how we talk to each other when we don't want to talk to each other. See what I mean? It's like you know, why bother. Why bother is like a snooze, you know, if we're talking to each other and just for a few seconds we take a little time out to [snores], then we come back. [Laughs] I'm sorry, I'm getting carried away about this.

Q: No, no you're not.

VR: It's not that I'm talking personally, you know. I'm just talking about the whole why bother question, which is so powerful. Why be generous, you know, if it doesn't really matter, if there's no giver and there's no receiver and there's no gift, why do anything?

Q: But doesn't it matter? Say it matters, say it matters.

VR: No it doesn't matter, it does not matter, it absolutely does not matter.

Q: That is really hard.

VR: But why bother is not the same thing as saying it does not matter. It's completely different. Why bother is saying that it does.

Q: There's a problem as soon as you say why bother.

VR: Yes, why bother means that you exist, therefore why bother with the other, if you can stay with this one [laughs].

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome. [Addressing next questioner] Harold.

QUESTION: I didn't understand your reference to confidence being unconditional.

VR: Well, I meant that faith or confidence in something is usually based on what's going to come back to me as a reward. In this case we're saying that faith or confidence has nothing to do with what comes back, just goes this way, forward, goes out. In other words, you see a rose that's red, you don't have to say to yourself "that's a red rose, I recognize that that's a red rose." It's not necessary to do the, you know. This is what's called a waste of energy, yes. You don't even have to think that's a red rose, just is and we don't even have to get into red or even rose for that matter, just is.

Q: Well because it's immediately confirmed; it's there.

VR: That's right, immediately confirmed because it is. Well...

Q: Yes, I mean, this is in the context of confidence and enlightenment, faith and enlightenment.

VR: Yes, well, it's a generous point of view, what I'm saying is a generous point of view, because once you have a notion of the rose, lot of things might occur for that poor little flower. You might try to smell it, that might not be too much of a problem. Might try to pick a few petals off and tear them apart just to see what they look like. You might try to bend it, or you might try to cut it, or you might try to dig it up and bring it home and try to keep it growing, or you might try to breed it with other roses. And it just sort of goes on, you know. Sort of pick up on your own echo and do things with it. But generosity might be just let it be the rose as it is.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Behind you, Harold.

QUESTION: You say it's unconditional in the sense that it doesn't come back to you, but it seems like it's a great relief that it just is. That's, seems like, that sense of relief...

VR: That's fine, but you see sense of relief is what we call relative bodhichitta, that ha, I can do something, yes. You don't even have to possess the sense of relief. You can do something, all right. The relief is actually good that this ego number that is sort of like a, you know, what are those wrench thingies that go like this, you know, you all have that's you know, you put a piece of wood in between and you turn it. Audience: a screw driver.] Yes, whatever. It's you know, you don't have to put this notion of self in between the crushing environment of reality, the phenomena, and work against that. It's not necessary. That's a relief and that's okay, there's no problem with that. Then turn it over and dedicate it to others.

Gentleman all the way back. Keeping you up late, huh. Tomorrow we have a nyinthun. Sit, sit, sit. How many people sat today, raise your hand. Oh, come on, don't be stingy. Okay, how many people sat more than three hours, raise your hand. How many people sat two hours? How many people sat one hour? Less? The numbers don't add up.

QUESTION: Sir, recently someone came to me—

VR: Oh, I'm sorry, how many people sat more than three hours? Oh, makes better numbers, all right, all right, slightly better. I'm sorry.

Q: It's all right. Recently someone came to me who was very depressed and he's coming seemed to be asking something of me and the quality of depression seems to be that the person is in a kind of neurotic loop, and it's really hard to communicate with a person like that sometimes, or I found myself very having great difficulty to communicate with this person. And later, contemplating the three gifts of generosity in *Jewel Ornament*, I was wondering perhaps which gift might be appropriate, and how to go about working with this person?

VR: Did they need food?

Q: No.

VR: Money, need shelter?

Q: It wasn't the first, it seemed. I was confused between the last two which is gift of fearlessness...

VR: They afraid that they're being attacked?

Q: Well, I think depression has a lot to do with fearlessness, doesn't it? Oh, excuse me, fear.

VR: No, no, I'm talking—well, we'll talk about that tomorrow. Yes, we'll talk about that tomorrow. No, the actual second one has to do with real threat. You're talking about psychological one.

Q: Right. So tomorrow?

VR: Yes, why not?

Q: Okay, good.

VR: Okay. So.

QUESTION: Good evening. In Buddhism, you speak a lot about this notion of a loss of self, I'm a little confused about that. Don't you first have to have a self to lose a self? If we live—

VR: Well, yes, yes, you do.

Q: —if we live in a state of ignorance, which could be—

VR: We don't, we don't, we don't live in any state.

Q: We don't live in any state?

VR: No.

Q: Well, if we could describe the human condition as a condition of ignorance—

VR: Sometimes—

Q: —existing—

VR: Sometimes, sometimes.

Q: —and describe it as a form of existence in which we attach ourselves to external things.

VR: That's right, yes.

Q: And we equate that with ignorance.

VR: That's right, yes.

Q: And we're always fleeing into external things.

VR: Right.

Q: And in that sort of condition, that I would describe that condition as a state of fragmentariness.

VR: That's right.

Q: And the absence of any real self, any real selfhood.

VR: No, I would say that's the recreation of selfhood every moment, rather than the absence of selfhood. It's the recreation of a self every moment, because a self, you have to have a self if you have a fragmentation. If something's fragmented, it's a piece of something, right? It has to relate to something, which indicates more than that, right? If you have a fragment, it's a fragment of something else, right? So if you have a fragmented approach or piece of it, it has to relate to the bigger piece. The bigger piece in terms of ourselves is what we call ourselves. We think we're the bigger piece, and we're only seeing part of it. That's why we want to attain enlightenment, because we think we'll see all of it. [Laughter]

Q: But, see, my experience as a human being and through other people that I know is that—

VR: Congratulations.

Q: Thank you. Is that most of us don't have such a big notion of who we are, we don't think we're such hot stuff.

VR: Are you kidding?

Q: No, I'm no kidding at all. I mean, our mental institutions attest of it.

VR: Yes, but let's not talk about our mental institutions, take a look around you. Everybody here has a big notion of who they are, or else they wouldn't be here. We're not in a mental institution, but maybe we are. [Laughter] I just don't want you to get social conscious on me. We're sitting here in Karne-Choling with everybody who's here because of some notion of bigger vision, bigger world. So if you want to talk about mental institutions and people in society who are suffering, okay, let's talk about that. But the reality is everybody here has some notion of enlightenment, otherwise they wouldn't be here.

Q: Okay, thank you.

QUESTION: I'm having a hard time understanding the cosmic design if you like, or the reason why we create this sense of selfhood to begin with, only to spend a lifetime going through all kinds of practices and disciplines and austerities to unlearn it.

VR: There's only one lifetime, there's only one lifetime.

Q: All right, let's talk ten thousand lifetimes....

VR: Why would you talk that? Why did it happen? Who is asking whom? You're asking me?

Q: You seem to be in the know. [Laughter]

VR: I am. And I'll tell you exactly what it is: N-O. That's the whole point, N-O, no self. No matter how long it seems to have taken, the moment that the match ignites there is no particular belief anymore, and there's no particular clinging, it is exactly no.

Q: But why is it that we also naturally seem to slide into that?

VR: Who cares?

Q: To the extent that we say that life is suffering, it's a consequence of this

VR: No, when we say that life is suffering it's a reality, it's not a consequence, it's a reality. It's called first noble truth. It's noble, it's not the first disgusting truth. [Laughter] It's the Aryan truth, the noble truth.

Q: Why is that the essential truth of life?

VR: Because it is. That's exactly what is. It's not why is it, it is that! Your bones are going to crumble just like everybody else's, that is. That's called enlightenment, is good. Why is drowsiness, at least from this point of view, you know, you could refine that actually, that why, but it's still going to wind up the same in any case. It's still going to wind up to first noble truth in any case, suffering is the reality of existence. If there is existence, there is suffering, and that is it. That's what happens, there's no why. If why, you have to ask the big guy in the sky with the gray beard and who sent down the books and all that stuff. But you don't want to do that, so take it as it is. Take it as it is. Don't look anywhere, don't look around, just take it as it is. That's what we're trying to do here.

Q: I'll try it, thank you.

VR: Please do. Thank you.

Well, ladies and gentleman, talk and talk and talk, who knows. Well, we have an interesting situation here, it's really late, it's very late, and we want to talk about something to you tonight.

[END OF TAPE?]