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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

Intensive Training Session: Generosity: Transcending the Boundaries of Self

Karme-Choling

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Talk Three of Three

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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN:

Good afternoon. Having generated the bodhichitta in one's heart, the next step is to embrace the path of the bodhisattva. And that specifically means dedicating one's life, practice and enlightenment to others for the benefit of others. And the practice of generosity is the key to that fulfillment.

In terms of the practice of generosity, the most important thing to remember—and this is the same throughout any of the bodhisattva practices in the mahayana path—is that the practice is not done so that we can receive something back, some kind of ratification or some kind of congratulations or some kind of reward. Main point is that we are talking about breaking down this territory of self and also the boundary, the artificial boundary which we call self and other, and realizing that I am not separate from you or from any other being, that we are interdependent and, therefore, whatever we do is for each other's benefit, or should be. And that's the main, key thought in terms of this practice, especially in terms of generosity, which is where we begin.

So far we've been talking more or less about theory and certain practical applications, such as the practice of meditation and the postmeditation experience. Now, we should talk a little bit about the actual teaching in regard to generosity. Generosity. By generosity we mean to give without thought of oneself.

So giving is involved with three different types, the first being a gift of material goods. So how should we give the gift of material goods? The giving of material goods should not be with improper intention. Improper intention is intention to cause harm to others by giving something, or to gain fame for oneself in this life, or to rival others. Those three things are called improper intention. If we give a gift of material goods with those intentions, we are simply creating further misery. So that's the first kind of gift. So giving should be spontaneous and

without holding back whatever wealth we possess. Not simply money, but we could give food or shelter to people or whatever people need. Basically, to give that kind of gift we should have the right intention.

The second kind of gift is called the gift of fearlessness. And that is to simply protect people from harm. That is to say, if people feel threatened by either the environment—enemies, wild animals—whatever kind of physical situation produces fear, if we have the intention, right intention to be generous, then we should at that point try to protect people from fear. That's the second kind of gift.

And the third kind of gift is the gift of dharma, which leads people to the ultimate good, that is, complete enlightenment. To give the gift of dharma, there are things we must consider. First of all, we shouldn't give that gift to people who are not interested in it. That's the first notion. If people are interested, then we could give a gift of dharma.

The second thing is, in giving the gift of dharma, we should not have material considerations for ourselves. That is, by giving such a gift of dharma, teaching the dharma, that we will gain wealth or fame or any other kind of material consideration in this life.

Thirdly, when we give the gift of dharma, it should make sense. That is to say, it shouldn't contradict what has been taught previously by the Buddha and by the great teachers of the past, or contradict what is said in the sutras and texts.

And lastly, when we give the gift of dharma, there is a particular manner in which to do it. That is, it should be in the right setting, free from anxiety and aggression. And the person who does such a thing should, as it says, traditionally, should bathe themselves and dress nicely and sit in a proper seat and things like that. But that goes along with it.

So those are the three categories of generosity, according to the texts. And, basically, we can practice all of those to the degree that we are able to. It is necessary to say that in the beginning, when we begin such practice as generosity or any other bodhisattva practice or mahayana practice, there is a tendency to go whole hog, and sometimes we miss the point. And we don't, we sort of overload people, rather than giving what's really useful. But there is a certain kind of enthusiasm when one actually discovers it's possible to help others, a certain kind of enthusiasm is generated where we feel very delighted and joyful. Life makes sense in a way at that point. So there's a general tendency to overdo it in the beginning. So that's just some sort of caution.

Well, again, the main point is this: If we're not generous, then we're not, we're unable to help others. If we're unable to help others, then we cannot attain enlightenment, and neither can they. Because there is no real separation between self and other. And when we are generous, we can work for the benefit of others, and therefore we can attract people to the dharma so that they, too, can liberate themselves from confusion. And, again, finally, last thing I'd like to say that the essence of generosity is to give with an unattached and spontaneous mind. That's the, you could say, the inner notion.

So that's it. Do you have any questions? Microphone. Gentleman in the back. If you have any questions at all about anything we've said over the weekend, please look over your notes, because this is it.

QUESTION: Sir, considering not teaching dharma to those that aren't interested, isn't it possible to interest them

VR: By your behavior, yes. That's why the first two are taught. By being generous with whatever you have, not hoarding and not being stingy with others, that's a sign of a dharmic person already. And by protecting people from harm, that's also another sign. So that would interest people if you act, behave that way.

Q: Well, once with me, the third one was having dharma make sense. For example, let's take a hometown friend that finds out you're a Buddhist. They have all these preconceived ideas of you as someone who worships a big statue of a fat person, and so on and so forth. And you know they're making fun of you. So, to help clarify the situation, basically, what you do, you make it, you make sense. You say, "Well, we look at ourselves without bias. You're looking at your mind. You're making friends with yourself." You make it make sense, and before you know it, you're teaching dharma, even though they aren't interested. Then you interest them, you know. You made them interested. And you may not have converted them into a Dharmadhatu member, particularly, but at least you've dispelled their myths and notions and so forth

VR: I doubt it. It's temporary. Basically, if you're in a position to teach the dharma, you should really check it out to see if someone's interested or not. If they're not, according to the texts, it says first thing you should say is, "Well, I don't know much about it myself." [Laughter; laughs]

Q: Thank you.

VR: I mean, if it happens that someone's antagonistic toward you or—what do you call it?—resentful or skeptical because you practice the dharma, the most generous thing to do would be not to feed that skepticism or antagonism by trying to explain what it is. Best thing is to be it, and pretty much say, "Well, that's just what I do." [Inaudible words]

QUESTION: Hi! When someone you care for very much refuses to see what is, and does things that really make no sense—well, they may make sense somehow, but they're very confused, and basically they don't want to see a lot of things—what can you do?

VR: Well, depending on the karma, sometimes you can't do anything except wait and allow a person to actually experience what they have to in order to come to some reality for themselves. I think that's essentially the best way. Trying to, you know, override somebody's karma and do it for them never, never really works. So it takes a lot of generosity or your part to stick in with them, even though it's painful and sometimes irritating and senseless. But you have to understand that other people have their own life and their own memories and their own expectations of whatnot that they have to work through. Again, if you can create an atmosphere just by your being—which means you can't really think a lot, you know—in a situation like that, if your mind is racing around trying to figure what's best for this person or how they should, how

you could help by saying this at a certain time, that at a certain time, it just clouds the atmosphere.

Q: One more question. In your estimation, when will America have its first Buddhist president? [Laughter]

VR: I don't know very much about things like that. [Much laughter]

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, I had a question about the middle talk. You said, when you were talking about bodhichitta, that it arises by itself in an atmosphere of buddha, dharma and sangha. And I was wondering, it seems very clear when we're here that that's the atmosphere we're in. And then we go back to wherever we came from, and often it's not so clear.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: So, in terms of rousing bodhichitta, when you're on the job, and there are no Buddhists in sight, I was just wondering if you had some advice

VR: There might be, there might be bodhisattvas hovering around [laughs, laughter]. Well, the first thing is to keep up a steady practice of your own according to your time, your means, so that that continually brings you back to the point. And the second thing is to recognize that since there's nobody around to confirm your practice, then those people who are around are actually the object of your practice, and to remind yourself of that all the time. That whether they're Buddhists or not, they happen to be sentient beings. And that because of that, you remind yourself.

And I suppose that one of the most powerful things is when you feel cheap, stingy. Because, and there's a tendency immediately to blame that or the others, because the world is so abrasive and non-dharmic, we'd like to keep inside to protect that, you know, sense of peacefulness and nonaggression. That's when we actually should reverse it and go outside and work with the situation. So that's a kind of little reminder that's based on your own practice. When you feel like you're holding back, pulling back, then you reverse it and look to the other and try to work with the state of mind that exists. So that's a kind of constant situation. It's like when, you know, any time you feel pain. That's a time to wake up, because whether it's psychological pain or physical pain—whatever—that's the time when you can actually click into the practice. I'm talking about postmeditation practice, you know, when you're working with others, especially in terms of generosity. It's kind of like a huge relief at that point, when you realize "Ah, that's the idea!" It's not, we're not just meant to just stick around here and guard this little thing. **It's to go.** Then you begin to see that sentient beings are, actually, all do possess buddha nature. Even though it's doubtful sometimes, you can't believe that people could really have something there, you know, because they seem so solid about what they believe and all of that. But once you change your attitude, you begin to see the spark of intelligence in the other people as well.

Q: Thank you very much.

VR: You're welcome. [Addressing next questioner:] Gentleman here?

QUESTION: Suppose you have contributed to a situation for thirteen years, where you and another person have created for each other a life of mutual stinginess of adversity, adversaries. And you become a practitioner, and you begin to see this. I guess the question is you could stay in that situation and try to work with it, knowing that overcoming the habitual patterns that you helped create for thirteen years means very, very, slow kind of path. Or you could remove yourself from that situation and practice. And then, when you have some control over the whirl of thoughts that come up, when you are back into that habitual situation—we're talking about thirteen years—my friend has a poem about that. It's called "The Wall." "Once there was a wall between us, but now we have nothing in common." [Laughter] If you stay, you think, "I'm staying because I'm selfish. I'm going to make this work." And if you go, you say, "I'm being selfish because look! I can practice and I can study, and I don't fall into those habitual patterns of thirteen years when I'm not with that person." And if I stay with that person and I break those habitual patterns—and I don't always do it, I do it sometimes and inconsistently—look at the pain I'm causing that person. At least I know what I'm trying to do. So, if I cause myself pain, I understand that. But they don't understand that. Do you stay and work with it? Do you go and work with it?

VR: Well, that really depends on the situation. You can't—there's no general, you know, rule about that. If the situation is actually destroying your practice, then you should remove yourself from it. But if the situation is not hindering your practice, and on the other hand causing you to think about all these different things, it might be beneficial to stay with it. It depends on the amount of aggression that's involved, see. If there's too much aggression, then nobody benefits, and it might be best to separate. But if it's just a matter of ignorance, that may seem more difficult to work with, because it's so foggy. Like you say, "Thirteen years of fog." More difficult to work with. But at least it's not hurting, you know, outwardly, anyway, in the aggressive sense. So then you have to say, "Well, I've got to do both. I've got to do the practice and get on with it. And I also have to relate to the situation, which is my situation, anyway. You know, my responsibility." The main thing is not to think solely of oneself.

Q: Now, I'm a little suspicious as to whether or not when I look at the situation I'm genuinely not thinking so much of myself. It's hard to know. There's a lot of aggression

VR: Well, there's the same barometer as before—the pain. If you feel, you know, we have a sense of psychological comfort, you know, when we—and I think all of us—know when we slip into that little psychological cradle of comfort.

Q: It's a very frozen situation.

VR: Yes. That's the whole notion of bodhisattva path or mahayana path is to...

Q: Thaw that.

VR: Thaw that, yes. Unfreeze it. Go out and actually take a chance relating with others. People think, "Well, it's going to be more painful still than what I have now. At least this is

manageable. You know. It's a familiar pain in any case." But that's not really true. That's just the way we delude ourselves into continuing to run around in that little circle of samsara.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, about the idea of seeing that all sentient beings have buddha nature, I was hoping that you could say something more about how we can actually learn to see that, rather than just accepting it on faith.

VR: Well, you learn to see it by practicing generosity. So you don't actually learn to see it. It's by practicing generosity you take away the veil that prevents you from seeing it in any case. That veil is ignorance and self consciousness, self indulgence. It's not like you have to train your eyes to see in a particular way. You just have to take the foggy lenses off and they see. That's what they see. Because that's what is. Do you understand?

Q: I think so. I think—

VR: Yes.

Q: —that what you said is that practicing generosity makes it clearer.

VR: Right. That's right.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Almost as if you had, you wore glasses, and they got fogged up.

QUESTION: Could you elaborate a little more or how the knowledge, the realization of the absence of self, helps you to understand the absence of other?

VR: Mm-hmm. Well, basically, the notion of self—right?—arises because of something seemingly outside. It doesn't arise because of some self inside. In other words, let's say there's a timeless moment when energy becomes aware of itself. That's the creation of "other." But it seems like that's coming from outside. In other words, the other makes *this* a reference point. So by working on *this* reference point and seeing its insubstantiality, that removes the cause of creating "other." If there's nothing here to refer to, then things are as they are. The so-called "other" is simply the reality, what is. There's nothing to check back to, you see. *That* is confirmed by *this*, right? *This* perceives *that*, and *that* confirms *this*, right?

Q: So, are you thinking, is it in terms of something that's a phenomenon in your mind that you begin to see through?

VR: That's right.

Q: Well, okay.

VR: There's still all this! [Laughs; laughter] But there's nothing solid about it, you know. It's seemingly solid.

QUESTION: Sir, when you were talking about the second gift of fearlessness, you mentioned something about protecting people.

VR: Yes.

Q: I don't understand. Protecting them from what?

VR: Somebody might be afraid of lightning or thunderstorms.

Q: Physical things?

VR: Yes! You know, just ordinary things that people get frightened of. Such as thief, murderers, you know, that kind of thing.

Q: And how do you protect them?

VR: Well, whichever way you can, you know. You might provide shelter for someone who's caught in a storm, for example. You know, that kind of protection. Or call the police if someone's being attacked. Things like that.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Yes. Stop on the highway, and—I mean, traditionally speaking, that the gift of fearlessness is meant to inspire peoples' confidence so that they can live their life securely. So, you know, providing the environment in which they could do that. That is to say, environment free from harm of enemies or this, that, the other, you know. The traditional analogies are that of wild animals, robbers, thieves, evil kings, that kind of thing. Do you get the idea? Yes. Because if people are feeling insecure about just their physical existence, they can't practice the dharma, which comes next.

[Addressing next questioner] Yes.

QUESTION: Sir, I'd like to sort of follow up on that. I think this is the old political social involvement question: That when I think of eighty percent of the world starving, and I think of so many people living under the tremendous fear of nuclear holocaust, those seem to be the two primary concerns of the world. And I know that—

VR: I don't think that many people live under the fear of nuclear holocaust.

Q: Well, I've talked to, my impre—maybe it's just the people I know.

VR: I think so. I mean, when we were in New Delhi last, there were millions of people there, and I didn't notice them, you know, in fear of nuclear holocaust. Didn't really seem to matter much. They were building their buildings in the same way they had done for a long, long time, and cooking the same kind of food, and things like that.

Q: But doesn't that eat away in the back of their minds and possibly prevent them from really practicing dharma?

VR: I think it's much simpler than that, you know. There are all different levels of that, you know. If someone is in great fear of nuclear holocaust, then you have to do something to help them about that fear. But I wouldn't say that the majority of the world is having that problem.

Q: What about the eighty percent of the people who go to bed hungry every night in the world?

VR: That's a real one. Yes.

Q: I guess when I became a Buddhist, I felt that there was some frowning on real social involvement in certain ways, I mean, in large groups, in joining any kind of really big political movement. And I was, I don't know, I mean, I thought about the monks marching on July 12th into the United Nations, and the kind of... I'm wondering about the possibility of sane, united bodhisattva action, if that really happens or can happen.

VR: I think bodhisattva action has to be individual action. If it happens to coincide with others in a group, then it's united action. But first of all, one has to be clear in one's own mind where if you're actually creating benefit for others. You have to know what that means. I think that in the beginning, it's best to train one's mind so that you recognize what is good and wholesome. And after that, one definitely should engage in the world in whichever way is beneficial.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: I was wondering how patience ties into generosity. I've been in situations where I thought I was being generous to someone, then I realized that they felt I was their enemy. And I had to wait quite a while for any clarity to come to the situation. And I was wondering how that ties in.

VR: That's how it ties in! [Laughter]

Q: By waiting? [Inaudible]

VR: Well, first, well, for generosity, if it's perfected, that is to say, it's on the level of what we call paramita. Then, it automatically leads to patience. Because, since you have nothing to hold back, therefore you can wait forever, you know. That's the part of generosity—being patient, you know, in that sense. But, on a practical level, a day-to-day level, before that's perfected, if we're talking about just path level, just working with the practice, that, again, you have to study your motives clearly, your intention. Make sure that it corresponds with your own inner feeling. And also make sure that it coincides with what's been taught, you know, that those things go together. And from that kind of approach, you slowly begin to generate the discipline aspect, which comes before patience, in terms of the actions—discipline aspect, that is. Sometimes our generosity is not received because our presentation is somewhat crude, and people react to that, see. But once we practice generosity again and again and again, we develop what's called shila. That is a sense of how we present ourselves in the world.

Q: Right conduct?

VR: Yes, how we present ourselves. Which also, the conduct includes how we talk, how we dress, how we walk.

Q: I have a Brooklyn accent. I always have trouble with that.

VR: Well, even that! Brooklyn accent is fine, you know. It doesn't matter about the accent. Sometimes it matters about how we say things, you know, the tone and, you know.

Q: Thank you.

VR: More people from Brooklyn? [Laughter]

QUESTION: I find it relatively easy to at least apparently be generous to others. But I'm very hard on myself. And, obviously, from what you said, that might reinforce a separation of self and other.

VR: Quite definitely, I think so. Yes.

Q: I was wondering if you could say something that might help along those lines.

VR: Well, the question is that. Yes. The question is, "Why would you be hard on yourself?" Generally speaking, we are hard on ourselves because if we have any kind of gentleness at all, it's because we don't think we're good enough and we haven't done as well as we should. Basically, that's what we think. And because of that, we get tight and sort of downgrade ourselves, denigrate ourselves. Yes. It's that kind of thing. It's usually because we're sort of overdoing it.

Q: So what might be an antidote to being too hard on oneself?

VR: Well, I think shamatha practice is the best antidote to that, because it involves simplicity, the absence of complication, that especially in terms of your sense perceptions and your thought process. Basically, we're working off just what we have all the time, right? And we form our interpretive mind, you know. Conceptual mind forms in relation to our sense faculties and thought process and whatnot. So, if we can see things as they are, that is to say, red is red, blue is blue—that kind of thing—thoughts are thoughts, and that simplifies the situation. And by simplifying the situation, we begin to see when we overdo it. We work too hard at perfection, whatever it is. Then we can just come back and relax.

Q: And that would work the same in terms of when we're actually doing things?

VR: Well, if you build up a solid foundation, and you begin to, you know—what's the term, "work on oneself," right? which we use a lot—you can actually isolate certain things that are happening in your behavior and work on those. Especially if you have good shamatha practice, that is to say, practice that's not based on working on anything at all. Good shamatha practice just is. Right? Then, in postmeditation experience, the vipashyana practice is you are working with your intellect, and you are contrasting things. And there's dharma. There are dharmas, all different kinds of dharmas and behavior and whatnot. You can do that.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, we were talking today in discussion group about the idea of movement of generosity resulting in this storm of practice out of which enlightenment arose. And I just wondered if you would say more about that idea of movement of generosity.

VR: Well, it is like the Buddha turning the wheel of the dharma is the first movement of generosity in this particular age—created a lot of practice over this twenty five hundred years or so. And a lot of people attained enlightenment because of that. So I guess you could say that movement is the gesture of the Buddha. Like Shantideva says in the Bodhicharyavatara, goes something like—I don't know how the translation goes, but something like, “Just like lightning in the dark sky suddenly illuminates everything, the same way with a simple gesture of the Buddha, the world is turned from confusion to things which are good.”

Q: Was there also a sense of his generosity towards himself and how that affected his practice at that point?

VR: Well, generosity towards himself was accumulated over lifetimes of practice on the bodhisattva path. And when he attained perfect enlightenment, then just a simple gesture of turning the wheel created benefit, created the action so that people like ourselves are still practicing.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, is the root of fear the fear of one's own impermanence?

VR: Well, yes.

Q: Because there are a lot of cases where someone is afraid, but the lion isn't really there.

VR: That's right, yes. Well, you could say the root of fear is ignorance. But ignorance as to what?

Q: Yes.

VR: Yes. In this case, it's the notion of self that generates the illusion of you, me, and our problem about each other, you know. The whole world. Separation. Me and the rest of you and our, my problem with that, you know, which could result in the either passion, aggression, or ignorance, stupidity, pride, jealousy, hatred, anger, lust—on and on. But you could say it's fear of one's own impermanence, which is the same thing as saying egolessness.

Q: Mm-hmm.

VR: Yes. Same thing as saying that, basically, there is egolessness—that there is no such thing as ego.

Q: So if someone has that basic anxiety, it's kind of covered up.

VR: Yes.

Q: But there at the same time.

VR: Yes.

Q: The best way to work with that—perhaps this is the question—is just to be. In other words, when someone else is afraid in that way, the best way is to be dharmic yourself.

VR: Yes.

Q: Just be that.

VR: Definitely. Yes. Well, I mean, by your behavior, people can see that it might be just little petty concerns that make people completely frightened, you know. And because you have seen through those things as not having any solid reality, you yourself are not concerned about them. And also at the same time you are cheerful and not an idiot, you know. If you were sort of idiotic and stupid, people would say, "Well, that's only because he's an idiot that he thinks that way," you know. But, if you're intelligent, at the same time can live your life in sort of effortless fashion, unconcerned about the ego game, you know, the impermanence and all the rest, suffering, that could, you know, inspire other people.

Q: That's kind of living the gift of dharma, as opposed to teaching it.

VR: Well, eventually, you would have to say something.

Q: Yes.

VR: Yes. Because people would ask. [Laughter]

Q: "What's wrong with you?" [Laughs]

VR: No, usually they say, "How come that doesn't bother you?"

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, in that same regard, is there a quality of difference between becoming something, or thinking that you ought to be becoming something, versus acknowledging what you are?

VR: Yes. I think we talked about that last time. It's the notion of, if you aspire to become a buddha to benefit all beings, that means you've already noticed something about yourself, which is an acknowledgment in itself. But practically, to become buddha might, it is necessary to unwind any—what is it?—superfluous material. So, that's the becoming part. But there has to be an acknowledgment to begin with. It's not like you have to think to yourself, "I am Buddha." But it's sort of just like that spontaneous lightning fire that we talked about, that certain feeling of wholesomeness and effortless being comes over you, that so it is.

Q: Thank you.

VR: So that's the confirmation. And then in terms of action, in order for that to be continuous, we realize that what we have to do is remove the obstacles. So, basically, the path is actually working with the obstacles, not generating the enlightened mind. Enlightened mind is already there.

QUESTION: Sir, in our I.T.S. this weekend, we've certainly covered a lot of very pith instruction.

VR: We certainly have.

Q: And if I've followed you correctly, through the practice of generosity we discover and dissolve the boundary of self and other. And, feeling that first decent notion for the first

[inaudible: time?], bodhichitta. And you also spoke of not grasping or fixating on that notion, but just to feel the movement of bodhichitta in one's experience. And also I think, if I remember the comment correctly, you said something about "falling in love" is worldly language for the experience of bodhichitta. Is that correct?

VR: [Inaudible]

Q: Well, in the last year and a half or so as a student of the mahayana, I certainly feel myself go through a lot of changes. And it feels very much like falling in love with the entire world, with all the splendor and radiance and heartbreak that goes with falling in love with anyone or the world in general. But sometimes I get confused by that as being is that genuine, or mere emotionality, or a mixture? And I was wondering, taking the long way around the barn to ask you this, if you might perhaps remark on any of the qualities or marks or distinguishing characteristics of bodhichitta.

VR: Absence of being lazy. Physical appearance being sort of shining, right? Being interested in whatever comes into your sense field. Having genuine warmth for other people. Not particularly pampering yourself. And being sensible about your practice and your path. And, oh—one more thing—being completely grateful to people that have passed before you and done the same thing.

Q: Would you say that that ties in a lot with the notion of surrender?

VR: Certainly. Yes.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Yes.

QUESTION: Sir, I am frequently asked that question, "Why doesn't that bother you?" or "Why are you so calm amidst all of this?" and sometimes I'm really at a loss as to how to answer people if they don't have an understanding of the dharma. Could you give me some suggestions on what a good way to answer people would be?

VR: Well, I think many times it's best to bring it back to them, rather than talk about oneself. If somebody says, "Well, why doesn't that affect you?" you might ask them what "it" is. "What is it about it that bothers you?" And by them beginning to explain to themselves what it is, if you keep a good, calm, steady mind, it's possible that they can catch a little glimpse of their own tail [laughter]. Or you could be very straightforward and say, "Well, basically, I don't see the point in..." It depends on the situation. There are so many different kinds of things, situations like that. People might get really upset about their children, or the prices in the supermarket, or car breaking down, their football team losing. Little kinds of things, you know.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, you mentioned that there sometimes is a tendency to go overboard. You used the expression "whole hog."

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: And I'm thinking of that. I'm not sure if you were talking about it, but the way it came across to me was in terms of trying to be aware of generosity, and I can just see myself already moving into the form of, "Oh, I really got to do this, and I'm really going to try hard," and—

VR: [laughs]

Q: —and then finding myself in a very familiar kind of corner which is like being very hard on myself. And so, I guess I think about it in terms of an old thing to do with some notion of morality. And it's hard to leave that aside and move on to some other way of doing things. I mean, where there's no gift, there's no person giving and no person receiving... But you know, it's a new path for me. And I wonder if you could say anything about how to deal with this tendency of making it a moral trip and being a knight on a white horse with the whole situation

VR: Well, one has to have a sense of humor. I mean otherwise it's really deadly! I mean, you can imagine yourself as a knight on a white horse, which is pretty funny. [Laughs; laughter] You know what I mean. You know, you see yourself in the act of being whatever kind of righteous person you think you are where you're giving this gift. You know, if you have the ideal in mind, the ideas, rather, and the ideal of the bodhisattva in mind, it acts as a mirror for you. So, when you give a gift with improper intention, it shows up and you feel the—you know—squirminess of the person giving. The person receiving gift feels slightly—you know—funny.

And they take it. But, you know, they feel—if they are sensitive—there's some kind of string attached. Right?

Q: Mm—hmm.

VR: Well, I mean, I really can't tell you how to get rid of that, aside from having good, solid meditation practice, so that you see things aren't so real as they appear, you know. "Real" meaning the sense of conceptually real. That would help a lot. Because then, you know, the main thing you're talking about is something in reference to yourself.

Q: Yes.

VR: So it's... Again, people look outside and say, "Well, I can do with this," "I can do with that," "I can do with that." And then you have one of these little problems about yourself, which has been going on for as long as you can remember. And that is really a problem. That one is really a problem. The other ones are not problems because they don't have to do with the precious sense of "me," "my life," "who I am" and all of that. But the other ones we can work with. We can be generous here, there and, you know... But when we have this problem about "me," we get stingy. It's the same illusion here as there. It's just that we have become so used to thinking of ourselves as a somebody or other, it's hard to break that habit.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome. [Laughs] Sounds so simplistic, doesn't it? But it's actually simple.

QUESTION: How do you get over the fear of losing the illusion or losing your sense of self? It seems like, I mean, I just started practicing very recently, but I just have confidence in horrible

fear of losing it all. I don't recognize myself at all, sometimes. I don't know what I'm doing. When I'm bowing to the shrine or hearing myself doing the chants or something, it just doesn't feel like ..

VR: It's you?

Q: Yes. It's...I feel like I've sort of... I can see myself doing it, and sometimes I feel like I've really gone off the deep end or something. I mean, like, you know...

VR: I think that's actually quite good. In terms of beginning stages of practice, one should experience that. As long as it's, you know, within the environment of practice, that's fine. I mean, if you suddenly find yourself walking in the middle of a street and not knowing where you are, then I think that's a problem. Yes. That kind of losing it. But I doubt that that happens. Basically, what you're experiencing is moment without preconceptions. I mean, you experience a moment without preconceptions, it's immediately followed by your memory of who...who you think you are. So you refer back to what just happened. And there's nothing there. Which creates a big question mark about "Who am I?" [Laughter]

Q: How do you get over the fear of that?

VR: You don't! [Laughter]

Q: Why? [Laughs]

VR: It just dissolves. You don't get over it. If you had to get over it, all you would do is create another "I," a bigger one, the one who got over that fear.

Q: The fear never goes away?

VR: Sure it does. But you don't get over it. It's not...That's not the process, that's not the way things happen. In reality, it just leaves. As you practice, suddenly, almost unexpectedly, you find it's not there anymore. And that's when you have a big smile on your face. [Laughs] You start to think, "What was that again?" [Laughter] But that goes along with all the different stages of the path. The same thing happens and we're doing it constantly. But we're getting deeper and deeper into understanding the nature of reality altogether. So, in the beginning we get afraid over little things. And later on we get afraid over big things. [laughs]

QUESTION: Sir, the other day you talked about the First Noble Truth as being good, otherwise it would be called the First Detestable Truth, I think you said. [Laughs]

VR: Right.

Q: And, I was thinking about-

VR: That was pretty good. I forgot about that. [Much laughter]

Q: Well, just trying to think some about what that actually means, I suppose I've always thought of suffering as somewhat a subjective attitude towards experience

VR: Right. Right. Most people do, yes.

Q: I mean, is that not so?

VR: Well, it's not entirely so. I mean, it's the illusion of suffering as a subjective experience. But suffering as true has nothing to do with a subject as such. It's just it's true.

Q: Then, well, for example: If you feel pain from—you know—physical pain—

VR: Yes.

Q: —you have on the one hand the pain, but there's also the interpretation that that is suffering. Right?

VR: Well, it probably goes something like this. You have physical pain which refers to a body, which refers to a mental body which refers to a notion of "I", which is completely confused because of the experience.

Q: But what I'm wondering is, isn't the experience of pain...couldn't that actually be distinguished from suffering that isn't the suffering the relating it to an "I."

VR: Oh, any way you want to say it.

Q: Excuse me?

VR: Suffering, pain, discomfort, anxiety—they're different ways of saying the same thing.

Q: But, then, if there's egolessness, can there, is there, there would still be suffering?

VR: Sure.

Q: Anxiety?

VR: Sure, yes.

Q: About what?

VR: About itself, I suppose. Could be. Why not? Why does it have to be in reference to something?

Q: Well, I guess I'll have to find out.

VR: Well, that's your question, you see.

Q: Yes, because I just can't see if, you row, if there's physical pain, it's physical pain. You row [inaudible].

VR: Well, you're just isolating on a particular thing, see—

Q: Yes. Okay.

VR: —which is definitely in reference to a body, which again is in reference to a self.

Q: Right.

VR: Yes.

Q: So, in other words, talking about generosity, well, it's not describing a reference point ..

VR: Well, we don't want to get too bound up in, you know, in trying to verbally disregard reference points. It's really hard to do.

Q: Yes. Well, the thing is that that I guess I tend to assume that a bodhisattva, seeing the pain of the world—

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: —would possibly somewhat feel that pain.

VR: Yes, but not personally.

Q: But, yes, that's the question.

VR: Not *oy vey* type pain. Definitely does feel the pain. But it doesn't stick to something, like this notion of “I.” You don't find a bodhisattva saying, “I feel the pain of the world.” Just doesn't happen that way! “I feel the pain of others. Therefore I'm going to practice generosity,” you know.

Q: Well, then, one more thing. The second Noble Truth is the origin of pain, right? Which, as I understand it, comes from clinging.

VR: Yes.

Q: So again, so if there's not clinging, then there is no origin of suffering?

VR: No.

Q: [Inaudible: Well, that's?]

VR: [Laughs] Oh, you mean the—that comes next.

Q: Yes.

VR: That comes next. See, you have to take each one of them as they are, you see. That's why they're called “Truth.” One is existence. Conditioned existence is marked by suffering. That's true. They have sickness, old age and death. Things like that. 'Cause of that, suffering is clinging to this life and to the notion of a self, right? The cessation of suffering is possible when we attain enlightenment. And the way to attain enlightenment is to follow the path.

Q: And the cessation of suffering is possible. Then, I guess, that's what I'm really asking.

VR: Yes. But that's also the truth that doesn't cancel out the other ones, you see?

Q: Yes.

VR: So it's very difficult, because we always think in terms of ourselves to try and figure out these things, you know. That's why the mahayana and bodhisattva path is so powerful and good. Because by actually working for the benefit of others, you erode any kind of basis for regenerating this self all the time.

Q: Yes. Thank you very much

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: First, thank you. Then, there were two questions that came up.

VR: Yes.

Q: First, when you were talking about timeless moment of energy becoming aware of itself, creation of other–

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: –is that the point on the wheel of nidanas in between the grandmother and birth?

VR: No. This is previous to that.

Q: Yes?

VR: Yes.

Q: Okay.

VR: Previous to the whole chain.

Q: Glad I asked. The second is just much simpler and more practical. In terms of egolessness as just basic mark of existence–

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: –can you just give an example of that? Are you talking about stubbing your toe or something like that, or something else?

VR: The stubbing your toe, that's part of the first one. Well, actually, you could say that could be egolessness, impermanence, and suffering at the same time.

Q: So that all [inaudible words]

VR: See, they all go together, you know. Because things are impermanent, therefore we look for a self. We can't find any such thing, and we suffer. We suffer because we begin grasping, and what do we grasp onto? Illusion of permanence. When things are impermanent, therefore we suffer. And it keeps going like that.

Q: Yes. That's how it feels.

VR: Yes. [Laughs] As long as we don't have any kind of nihilistic notion of what that means, it doesn't mean that therefore we might as well give up the whole thing and, you know. Because when you start thinking that way, you begin to see that chain and that, you know, samsaric quality. It has a feeling of the bottom dropping out. There's a sense of "Ah!" [inhales sharply]. You know, no substance, no particular hope. Which is quite true.

Q: Yes, but interdependent.

VR: Right. Right. I mean, first, people, at first, I think people flash on no hope. But they also, if they stick with it, realize also no fear.

Well, ladies and gentlemen [laughs], one more.

QUESTION: Upon discovering generosity, ego is still in town, is it not?

VR: In the beginning.

Q: In the beginning.

VR: Yes, because you see, we talk...we talk about generosity as path and generosity as perfection, right? Paramita.

VR: Well, I mean strictly speaking, ego has never been in town.

Q: ... in the absolute realm...

VR: But, if you mean there's a still a reference point to ego, yes, at the beginning.

Q: Yes. It seems sometimes that ego can very subtly make any...to the extent that any generosity evolves, ego can make it territory. Is that where you and the Vajracharya come in or

VR: Yes, that's true. One has to have a friend around. That's true. But, basically, the friend will just tell you this: "Ego can't do anything. That's a fake. If there was such a thing as ego, you better explain to me what that is, show me this ego." And if you just say, "Well, this is it," how do you know? You can't even see it.

Q: As soon as you look for it, it's gone!

VR: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: And when you're not looking for it, it seems like it can show up pretty quick

VR: Well, that's just because you're not...That's just because you're not looking. You fall asleep.

Q: Fall asleep.

VR: Yes. Fall asleep. And when you fall asleep, the illusion of a self arises just like a dream. So, the main thing is we don't have to actually buy into the fantasy. It's not necessary.

Q: A thought is a thought.

VR: Yes. Precisely. [Laughs]

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I think that's as much as we can do for this time. I'd like to thank you very much for your patience and your generosity and your exertion and all the rest. It's certainly delightful to be able to be here again and do this and to see so many familiar faces and new faces as well. As with any of the programs that we do, we hear teaching, we try to—you know—feel it, assimilate it, and practice it. With a weekend such as this, it's important that we take something with us, or keep something with us, rather. And that is the sense of continuity in terms of what we have said and how we feel about it and how we're going to apply that to our lives. I realize it's very difficult to remember all the different details, things we have discussed. But it's not important that you should remember everything. A few things would do. First of all, don't be too hard on yourself in trying to practice generosity, or that would be counter-productive. Secondly, think of others first. And above all, realize that this notion of self

and other is purely an illusion. But it's a good one in terms of practice. So try and remember that. And I trust we'll have a chance to do this again. Thank you very much.

[END OF RECORDING]