

Speaker: The Vajra Regent Osel Tendzin

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Everyone, again welcome to the second day of our symposium We're very fortunate to introduce this morning's speaker, the Vajra Regent Osel Tendzin. He is the foremost student of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. In 1976 was appointed dharma heir to the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. He is executive Vice President of Naropa Institute and is a teacher in the Buddhist Studies program. Osel Tendzin has inspired thousands of students to begin to wake up to their own sanity. And again we're very fortunate to have him speaking today.

VROT: Good morning, everyone. I believe our topic has been centered around working with others. Working with others we are naturally talking about motivation. And motivation seems to come out of some kind of a recognition of suffering. Whether it be in oneself or others or in the society environment. Also seems to come out of some sense of interests or inquisitive mind. Those two aspects recognition of suffering and inquisitive mind, are the basis for what we call compassion.

Compassion in the Buddhist sense is working for the benefit of others without ego. Without self-interest. Working for the benefit of others without self-interest automatically means we have some notion of self. Obviously in your profession, or your work, you're dealing with the notion of self all the time. Or we could say the existence of self. And in some ways we could say that you are rare birds. Constantly thinking about existence of self, and other. Which is saying the same thing. In a way we could say that we're preoccupied, which might be a problem in working with others. Being preoccupied, that is. I think the difference between professionalism and, compassion has a lot to do with this preoccupation with self.

It seems to me that if one is a hard-core professional, then very little doubt arises. Unless of course, there's some big gap or trauma or accident that happens in one's life. But if one is not such a hard core professional, there is a lot of doubt and a lot of preoccupation. So the notion of compassion arises from a restless mind. In our world, perhaps we stumble upon this inquiry, this type of life, by accident. It presented itself to us. But not entirely. Probably we were always looking for some answer or some kind of clue to the nature of this existence of self. But fortunately along the way, we were interested enough not to become hardcore and to keep up our interest. Probably that's why you're here at this particular symposium. What I would like to talk about this morning is how compassion arises from the Buddhist point of view, or from the Buddhist experience, I should say.

The existence of a self from the very beginning, is in question. So much so that we must examine our whole notion of who we are and what we do. We must examine ourselves without bias. Without self-interest. To do that one must have an extremely clear mind. A sharpened intellect. And also one must have had experience of suffering to the point where we become disgusted, fed up, to the point where we find conventional pleasure and entertainment unsatisfactory.

This kind of motivation was the same motivation which prompted the great teachers of the past to look into this notion of self existence of self. Because of that intensity of search they discovered the practice of meditation. In order to look into this notion of self without bias, with sharpened intellect, one's mind must be tuned properly. It must be an instrument which is in good working order. Healthy. The practice of meditation is designed to do such a thing. To sharpen one's intellect. Why so? How much mind is there? Can anybody tell me? What is mind, anyway? Is it the same thing as experience? Is it the same thing as body? Is it the result of impulses? Is it located anywhere? Is it different when we sleep? Is it changed by the food we eat? Or the weather? Is it an anything, after all? The practice of meditation is, in that the clear perception of our experience from moment to moment without distortion.

Without that kind of practice, it is unlikely that we can discover the nature of this existence of self. Simply because it's, convenient and habitual to miss the moment to moment detail of our existence. How fast, how much time, does it take to think? What's the duration between one thought and another? The reason I am talking about this practice of meditation is to link up the notion of helping others with that of the realization of non-ego, or the realization of the existence of self. Practicing in this way the teachers of the past and the practitioners of the past developed what is called prajna or discriminating awareness. That discriminating awareness means the awareness which is not dependent on any particular allegiance to pleasure or pain, or duality of any kind. It's what we call self existing. And it has been said that this is our natural state of awareness. That natural state of awareness needs however, to be recognized as such. And that takes discipline and some kind of sharp tool, in this case, the practice of meditation because it is, non-aligned, has no particular motivation other than itself.

So coming back to original state of motivation. That's the beginning of truly working with others. Linking one's mind to the practice which has no particular motivation other than itself. Are you following me? Thank you. The same with our practice of helping others, should have no particular motivation other than itself. So to go further with this logic when one's intellect is tuned and one's sense of pain, the existent pain is acute, one develops prajna which sees moment to moment the nature of experience, the nature of perceiver and perceived. The discovery of the Buddha and the teachers of the past is just this. When one practices in such a way, one realizes that there is no such thing as an independent entity, "self." And practicing further, one also sees that there is no such thing as an independent entity, "other." That kind of discovery is very shocking and it could take the wind out of the sails of, professionalism completely. If that is truly the case then why should I do anything? Might as well just lie down here and die. Why do anything, let alone such lofty ideals as helping others. Who don't exist. [laughter] Very interesting.

But if we look at it a little further what we talk about is discovery, realization, of this truth. We are not talking about philosophy. We are not talking about any kind of formula to help you do things better, such as your therapeutic work. What we're talking about is each individual, sentient being, must come to this particular realization himself or herself. Why so? By achieving or realizing this essential truth then the pathway to helping others is opened up completely. But again if others don't exist, why should there be a pathway to helping them? In one's own experience, and one's own realization, one could say, self does not exist other doesn't exist.

But maybe other sentient beings don't think that way. So there is plenty of pathway, because it turns out from the Buddhist point of view that sentient beings are limitless. Which means that if you think that by having some realization yourself and maybe helping the people in this room to have that realization you are finished with your work. Well, you're mistaken. There don't seem to be any retirement age, particularly, in helping others. Nor is there a specific vacation period.

So continuing our logic, the discovery of nonexistence of self and other, how does that lead to compassion? Because there is, no notion of, a separation to get in the way of helping others, there is no notion of, ax to grind personally. In other words, your own specific survival as who you think you are doesn't exist. On the other hand, the experience of pain does. In others, in people who have not realized any notion of nonexistence. That is a very simple and maybe sketchy explanation of the Buddhist approach to the fundamental compassionate life. Further than that, there is the notion of what's called skillful means. And that is having some realization, some wisdom, the necessity to act is obvious. Because of ignorance and pain in sentient beings, the necessity to act is obvious. How to act is another story. In this particular world of therapy, I wonder how many kinds of therapy there are. I wonder if anybody's made a count of methods. Any idea, Ed? Hundreds.

And figure you're a very learned person in this world and maybe you know 275 methods to help others. Particular kinds of therapy. And a person comes in to see you. Immediately you're thinking, is it number 276 or number 17? Which one is this person? Which is the right therapy for this person? It's going to be very difficult to help anybody that way, extremely difficult. We can accumulate lots of knowledge so-called knowledge, and in fact we can experiment, which is a little suspect. But on the other hands we are in the scientific world, so we can experiment and do our case studies and say, well, number 23 did not work on, women who were 27 to 35 and had one child. And collect a lot of information like that. But still we have basic doubt about what we're doing altogether what, if our action is true. It goes back to the very beginning when we said because our motivation is still, if we think of a notion of self, then our motivation has to be dualistic. Even if you put it in the abstract sense of science when we're doing it just for science that's some-what pathetic and weak. That's not nonexistence at all. That's making the abstract notion the self or existence of some thing or other. So what do we do how do we act, to help anybody?

Right action or compassionate action, from the Buddhist point of view, evolves naturally and spontaneously from one realization of non-ego or nonexistence. And it manifests in whatever way is, useful or helpful to the environment. So in other words there is no particular formula. There is spontaneous action based on wisdom. Which means there is no second thought. I'm not talking about some kind of, monumental stiffness or perfection in the conventional sense. I'm talking about mind which is fluid and does not stick anywhere. The only time we get stuck is when there is a flashback to me, and then a flash to other.

The variety, of ways that the compassionate person acts are categorized as the paramitas, or six transcendent actions of a bodhisattva. Those are general descriptions. And they are, generosity is the first. The second is called discipline or behavior, correct behavior or proper behavior. The third one is called patience. The fourth one is called energy, or exertion. The fifth meditative awareness, and the sixth prajna, which we talked about, discriminating awareness. Those are the general, that's the general picture of compassionate action from the Buddhist point of view. But those actions again do not arise out of any kind of strategy or manipulation. They arise out of one's personal experience and realization. Well, I think that's all I can say at this point. It's a very encapsulated sketch of, the ground of working with others, the path and fruition. If you have any questions we could have a discussion. Is microphones today? In the front.

Q: You talked at some description and at some length about the idea of nonexistence, we don't exist, the other doesn't exist. But I keep thinking that, for most of us, it's still a duality, that even with a lot of sitting, there is still, we still think we exist. It is an ongoing path, right? It's not just suddenly at some point you know you don't exist?

VROT: Could you say that again?

Q: The whole thing?

VROT: No. just the last part the last sentence.

Q: Okay. I'm confused with this idea of we know we don't exist.

VROT: UM.

Q: I can take it intellectually and understand it. I can see myself at moments existing, I mean not existing.

VROT: Oh, I see your point yeah.

Q: But I'm, I'm still asking, isn't this sort of an ongoing thing we're working towards more and more moments where was quote, don't exist. I mean it still is a duality, yes?

VROT: Is there duality?

Q: But as you speak of that concept of not existing. Most of us are still caught up in existing. So we're working back and forth between the two.

VROT: Yes, that's right.

Q: And, and that somewhere gives us more of a sense where the others are maybe who exist more. [laughter]

VROT: Well, if you if you recognize that that duality is, painful then I would agree with you.

Q: But the end result seems to me quite static. I mean you kept saying yourself, if we don't exist, why bother to do anything. If you're totally in that space of, quote nonexisting why don't you just sit on your cloud or, you know, your mountains and be spaced out?

VROT: That sounds like existence to me. Of some kind of notion, clouds mountains.

Q: So nonexistence is being here in the world, too?

VROT: Too?

Q: I guess I'm easier with the concept of non-attachment. Are they close?

VROT: Nonexistence and non-attachment? Well, nonexistence, you could say, isn't close to any kind of concept. Anything that arises in your mind.

Q: But non-existence still means you're here eating, moving around, working with people right? I mean you do have that in your concept?

VROT: You have that in your concept? [he laughs]

Q: No do you?

VROT: Concept?

Q: Your, your description--

VROT: Description? Well, you see, that's why I talked about actually being able to, perceive the function of mind. And part of the function of mind is description, working with concepts. Sure. But those particular concepts don't exist as such, have any permanent existence, one concept or another.

Q: So it's, it's sort of like with sitting practice where they come and go and come and go.

VROT: They certainly do.

Q: Thank you.

VROT: All the way in the back.

Q: I'm wondering what kind of sense it makes, if any, to study, more traditional western psychology, given what you've been saying this morning.

VROT: Well, I think it makes sense from the point of view of inquisitive mind. But if it has no realization behind it, it's just kind of mental gymnastics, gathering more information, in the hope that it might pay off either for oneself or others. See that notion of maybe, maybe if I try one thing or another, eventually it's going to work out. Which is starting from being defeated, to begin with.

Q: Thank you.

VROT: Gentleman here in the red shirt.

Q: You said that there's no self and no other. This brings up the question, why do we, what inspires us to help others, in that case? And I have the thought, well, this is crucial. This is important to me to inspire my own motivation and then for some reason I blanked out to what you said afterwards. [laughter] That's the last thought I remember.

VROT: That's very good.

Q: So then I came back a little while later and thought, well I really need some elaboration on that because it, this is an important question. And I need my motivation to be inspired.

VROT: Certainly, if one's motivation is without, self in this case, then the inspiration is constant. That's what we're talking about. But the main point is the blank out. That's the main point for all of us. And that's where the notion of ego begins to arise, in the blank out point. Before that it's simply mind working. Existence, nonexistence, duality, self, other. It's just mind working.

There's no particular ax to grind, until the blank out. Then we arise again as question. That's how we arise as individuals, the question. Anyway that's experiential, you see. That moment of blank out could be explored a lot further. By all of us. Because something's going on. In a very simple sense. I'm not talking about anything complicated. That something's actually going on, something's going on at that point. So to do that one must have a very keen mind. You must be very awake, because we fall asleep. That's the whole point. Then wake up again and say what happened? That's why they, they have taught the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation is simply staying awake. Which is going against the habitual pattern of blanking out.

Q: And what about the notion of why help others, if they don't exist and we don't exist?

VROT: Well, we have to find out. You see, it's no good just to listen to a speaker like myself or somebody else and say well, the theory here is, you know. We have to find out for ourselves, if there is any such thing as a motivation and helping others at all.

Q: Yesterday we were talking about basic goodness as a desirable, experience. And today about the experiencing duality as painful. I feel some confusion about why, there is such resistance to stay in that painful state, if there is the experience of freshness and health, why does that blank-out happen and why is there such resistance to letting go of the painful state?

VROT: I don't know about this letting go business.

Q: Just getting out somehow. It seems like there's some, fascination or attraction to staying in a state of pain even when we've had the experience of, of the possibility of not being in that entangled state.

VROT: Well, I could give you the Buddhist point of view, I don't know if that would be helpful. But from the Buddhist point of view, it's because off, clinging to a notion of self. But I'm afraid you have to find out for yourself, so to speak. [laughter]

Q: Thank you.

Q: I was thinking about what you said to the answer in the back about western therapies. And, yet you have examples of, I was thinking of that book or program about Sybil, the girl that had sixteen personalities and she had a very dedicated therapist who worked with her and finally helped her to integrate.

VROT: All sixteen?

Q: All sixteen into one [laughter] and she had had a very--

VROT: At least that's a beginning. [laughter]

Q: Well, I was wondering in the case--

VROT: That's a healthy ego. [he laughs] At least there's one there, anyway.

Q: Well, that's what I was wondering, that in the case, uh, where we've said that some people aren't ready to meditate, that it's more people on the level of neurosis, who can actually sit and relate to non-existence, that in those cases like that where you're dealing with psychosis, it seems that there are skills that are, that need to be learned to use too you know, to relate to

those situations something other than, I mean you could be aware that the person doesn't actually exist and you didn't exist, but still they're, they're not integrated, I mean they can't function.

VROT: Fine, fine, there is no limit to means, particularly. That's why I said there's no particular formula about which therapy to use, or how to do this, how to help anybody. What we're talking about today is the notion of getting stuck in trying to help somebody.

Q: Well I was wondering whether there are particular western therapies that, tend to lead more into getting stuck in psychologizing rather than actually-

VROT: I don't think there is any, any such thing as a particular therapy which goes against or goes for. It's just, endless concepts, all over the place. It has all to do with us, rather than the method, to begin with. You see, we're not, I'm not trying to talk about blanking out one's memory of anything you ever read or did or practiced. Not at all. If you really want to help somebody it is because you have the realization of non-ego. Not because you feel satisfied, you have your thing printed up that you integrated

sixteen into one with this person and then you have some credential about that, and so what? As I said earlier, it's endless. There's lots of sentient beings, and everybody has some sort of pain. So variety of means doesn't matter. It's motivation and action that matter. The quality of it. So, by all means you know-[he laughs]

Microphone in the back here, gentleman with the blond hair.

Q: Yesterday we talked about the technique of exchanging self for other and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

VROT: Well, it's the same thing as, it's the extension of realization of non-ego. The actual technique of doing it. Did anybody talk about that?

Q: Yes, Lila Rich talked about four steps.

VROT: The actual technique of taking in what's negative and sending out what's healthy. Right? You can't do that if you're stuck on yourself. Impossible. It'd be just like some kind of mechanics. You know [he blows breath out] out goes all the good stuff, in comes all the bad stuff, and then you, you know. Basically what happens is you'd get exhausted very quickly. [laughter]

Q: How do you take in somebody else's bad stuff?

VROT: Well, because somebody else's bad stuff is not exactly his or hers. It's ours. Because of a sense of interdependent quality of our existence. Because of the fact there's no solid self or other that's why you can take it in and send it out. [he laughs] Because it doesn't locate anywhere, particularly. It's environmental at some point. If there's one confused person in a room, how much havoc that causes. If you've ever worked with somebody you know. One confused person in a room of maybe fifteen therapists [laughter] causes tremendous havoc [laughter] How about if there is a hundred or million confused people and one therapist? [laughter]

Q: When you [laughter] when you let out the good stuff [he laughs] is that sort of like trying to clarify the issue or talk about it, or be very open to it?

VROT: I beg your pardon--is that what? I guess I'm thinking of like if I'm in a room with a client all right, and the client tells me you know, their problems, and I, you know, identify very much with them, see their neurosis and so on--

VROT: Yes.

Q: And then I usually try to do something about it, by either talking about it, usually--

VROT: Uh um.

Q: Is that sort of like letting out the good stuff?

VROT: No.

Q: No? Okay--

VROT: Well, first of all I wouldn't recommend you trying to do this particular thing when you're working with somebody across from you. That's not the idea. The whole notion of this tonglen or sending and taking practice is from one's own individual point of view. It's a practice as such. It's not, action. Do you see what I mean?

Q: Uh huh.

VROT: See, if we go back. You see the problem is don't jump ahead. Let's go back to our original topic, which is one self existence of oneself. That's where everything starts. You see? So my main point is there's no way you can possibly help others until you sort out this notion of existence of oneself. And this tonglen practice is part of it. Well, I think it's a later part of it. We're talking about if you're going to do that the, the simplest way is the basic sitting practice, working with the breath. And, for instance, knowing what to say. How does one know what to say in response to someone saying, how are you today? You know on a very mundane level. If we know how that works, that's a very big step toward when someone says I feel like I want to kill myself every day. Knowing what to say at that very moment. It's not a matter of accumulation of knowledge. It's a matter of mind being spontaneous and free from self.

Q: Right. Thank you.

VROT: The front here.

Q: In your talk you mentioned sort of a basic atmosphere of questioning and doubt, inquisitive mind? And you also mentioned, the possibility of experimentation that one can experiment but you said that is suspect. But it seems to me that action arising out of a questioning and inquisitive kind of atmosphere, spontaneous action is indeed experimental action.

VROT: Depends on the motivation

Q: How so?

VROT: Got to go back another step. We started off talking about motivation. Then later we talked about a variety of means. You see, if you take various attitudes towards this experimentation, like this other over there, that you gonna--. If you're experimenting on somebody, then I think you're in deep trouble.

Q: Okay I see what you mean in terms of strategizing and manipulative kind of action. But if I act spontaneously, I still have no idea what the result or the response to that action will be. In that case, it's--

VROT: What do you mean? You see it right in front of your face.

Q: But I have to act first.

VROT: Of course, of course. No, I'm not talking about not. One must act, it seems. [laughter]

Q: Then does one look back on the acts one has done?

VROT: If it's useful, why not?

In front here--

Q: It seems clear to me that you are not saying that meditation practice or the recognition of nonexistence of self and other would replace all of those 275 psychotherapies. But what I'm not clear about, is means and ends. If all of the skills, and the craft, the techniques and so forth, that are available from those as means are based on an end or on an underlying idea that the self does exist that there is a self made up of ego, super ego, and id, or there's a self, whose behavior can be conditioned, or whatever therapy it is--then how does, how might one reconcile the practice of those means?

VROT: How is it possible to use them at all?

Q: Right.

VROT: Well, it's like, sifting. If you have discriminating awareness, which is not based on any kind of personal gain, or any kind of notion of a solid existence, then as I said action becomes spontaneous. There might be some word you might say, at a particular moment which actually wakes somebody up, or helps to wake them up. It might have a reference point in your

memory to something you studied with so and so, or so and so. But it doesn't necessarily mean it belongs to that particular camp or to this particular camp. You see, one, one should be free to use whatever is at one's disposal at the moment, if it's based on proper motivation, it won't hurt anybody. And it won't further the whole notion of ego. These things don't belong to anybody, that's the whole point. You know, people have good discoveries, in the psychological world, or medical world, or scientific world, whatever world. Any kind of discovery comes out of being awake. What's done with it is another matter altogether.

Q: Thank you.

VROT: The gentleman in the back there with the beard.

Q: Sometimes when with a person who is really extremely confused, psychotic, and they have a sense of their, a real sense of the illusoriness of the world around them and their own nonexistence, it seems to bring up, real panic and fear. But there also seems to be at that point a unique opportunity to flip that--I guess what I'm saying is--

VROT: That's right.

Q: When that opportunity is there--

VROT: That's right.

Q: How you work with that so that the panic becomes some sense of actually being in the world?

VROT: Well, I think it has all to do with your own understanding of panic. You see, to help someone you have to have the same mind as that person, basically. You have to have a complete connection with their experience. And if some one is panicking, you have to partake in that panic yourself. Now everybody's afraid to do that because we might wind up psychotic like the other person and destroy the office, say well forget it! Good bye [laughter] walk out.

Who knows? That might work as well, who knows? But the main point is that try not to shield one's self. If you have a doubt about your own sanity, then, you know we try to protect it from the panic of other. By experiencing your own panic, you have some communication with others, their panic as well. And that could happen right at the very moment, if your mind is trained properly, that can happen right at the very moment when the person begins to panic right in front of you. That you actually go with the panic yourself.

Q: Is that sense of your own panic communicated to the other person?

VROT: Not necessarily, not on a conceptual basis, maybe on an environmental basis, yes. Because human beings are intelligent. Maybe because of confusion they can't pick up the exact, the totality of that experience, but something gets across

Q: Thank you.

VROT: Well, ladies and gentlemen, I think we should stop at this point. There's a lot to work on, but basically I would suggest that we work on ourselves constantly. And that's the main point. I hope you can benefit from this symposium. We are very honored to have you all here, glad that you're here, and that we can provide the situation to discuss these things openly. And, please go further. Thank you very much.

