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The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

Talk seven of eight: The Attitude and Practice of the Bodhisattva Path

Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado

July 1, 1977

Audio filename (on vajraregent.org Timeline): VROT\_1977\_07\_01\_JOL7sm.mp3

Transcript filename: VROT\_1977\_07\_01\_JOL7\_ez.pdf

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Checked by Ed Zaron January 18, 2025

Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin: We have seen that training in the bodhisattva's discipline involves two sections, intention and action. In terms of intuition, we should be quite clear at this point that we are not involving ourselves in theistic idea of helping others, theistic notions of charity and humility, et cetera, and that we can actually secure a better state for ourselves by performing these actions of the bodhisattva. This is a very important distinction, that clinging to a primitive state of mind is not the bodhisattva's way. Believing that some outside agency can somehow deliver us to salvation, either be it through practices of bodhisattva path or through deity, whatever. That this attitude is actually sticking ourselves deeper into primitive state of mind, in other words, spiritual materialism, calling ignorance spirituality.

So this discussion of right intention is extremely vital. Intention begins with, as we said, taking the bodhisattva's vow. And that vow is simply that we intend to unravel the entire complication of the ego. And taking a vow is very important in the sense that you actually make a statement that you are going to work for sentient beings, make a statement in the presence of the teacher and the sangha, the lineage, that you are actually going to do that. In other words, you come out up front. This taking of the vow is understood by personal experience in the practice of meditation and its results, which means that when you take the vow you have already some understanding of egolessness of oneself and others. But you also understand at the same time that, without proper instruction and tremendous effort, that you cannot achieve perfect real enlightenment. This is a somewhat frightening, somewhat shocking experience in the sense that you have awakened the bodhichitta or awakened mind has occurred. And somehow being driven by that sense of buddha nature in us, we have come across this bodhisattva's way and have decided to pursue the path of the bodhisattva and the mahayana way. It's an inspiring and frightening prospect, inspiring because we hear that the actual mahayana way is described as compassion without end and wisdom devoid of habit-forming thoughts. And we are inspired because there is some click in our own mind that this actually is present, actually exists already. And on the other hand, it is frightening because we realize that we will actually confront the density of ego-clinging entirely, one hundred percent, that we'll have to do that, that there's no way out for us but to actually confront that, actually deal with that sense of solidity of ego.

So the bodhichitta driving us is not in the sense of compulsion, but rather from the fact, the realization of the fact that we have seen ego's sticky quality, that everything we do is converted into ego's world, ego's domain, everything, including the spiritual practice, the so-called spiritual practice.

And we discover that perhaps we got into a situation which was much more difficult than we had intended. We discover that the vision of the mahayana is extremely vast, deep, profound, much more so than we had thought. Inspiring and frightening that we cannot avoid dealing with the basic ignorance of who and what we are, if we walk on the bodhisattva's path. It is important to have the right attitude, training in the proper attitude. The attitude of the bodhisattva is that practice and enlightenment are not different, in other words, goal and path are the same.

This is the core of the bodhisattva's attitude. This does not mean that there is no journey, nothing to be done. On the contrary, what it means is that the experience of separateness between practice and enlightenment must be understood. Embarking on such practices as has been described in the text—not excluding sentient beings from one's thoughts, not lying, not causing others to feel guilty, prostrating to the teacher, asking the teacher to turn the wheel of the dharma, confessing evil deeds—we begin to realize that this is not something we can actually practice without experiencing some fundamental embarrassment. It's unavoidable. That we can't practice the bodhisattva path by falling into dualistic thinking, such as, "Perhaps what I can do is just transplant all these righteous and virtuous deeds on top of the existing junk and therefore that will carry me to enlightenment." Or the opposite being that, "Since goal and enlightenment are the same, there's no need for me to practice all these little trivialities and details. But actually we're enlightened already, no problem." This is the stink of dualistic mind, the goeey, sticky quality of ego.

So, having been so warned, we set out on the bodhisattva's path with the right attitude, which is a sense of open heart and nonclinging mind, realizing that from intention comes action. We continue on the path, realizing that small spark of bodhichitta, which is just flame, must be fanned by action to produce the great fire of enlightenment. And that action or those actions of the bodhisattva are called the six paramitas, transcendent actions of the bodhisattva, called the six perfections in the text, or the translation of the text. And these actions should be understood as nondualistic from the beginning, in other words, arising from an attitude directed toward enlightenment rather than being imposed.

In talking about the six paramitas, transcendent action, we have three categories. The first being ethics, which means behavior or living with others in the world without ego. The second and third called higher thoughts and deeper understanding, higher thoughts meaning meditation without ego. And the third, awareness, resulting awareness, which is intelligence without habit-forming thoughts. Those three categories of paramitas. And these paramitas, actions, involve not simply sitting meditation as we can see, but working in the world with others, in other words, meditation in action—realizing that by sitting practice alone we cannot achieve the goal of enlightenment.

In the first category, ethics, we have generosity, discipline, and patience, which are translated in the text as liberality, ethics and manners, and patience; the second category of meditation; third category, discriminating awareness. And the one paramita which relates to the whole three is energy or effort, virya paramita.

I think it would be more practical for us to talk in terms of what these paramitas are not, instead of what they are, so that we do not fall into particular traps of trying to implant ourselves with these noble actions. But rather, to begin with, not being generous involves the sense of clinging to one's own territory, creating a sense of protection for oneself always and sense of mine, me and mine, my own territory, ego, not being generous. And that clinging to territory involves fluctuations of mood. In other words, how you relate with others in terms of your mannerisms, your being in

the world, depends on how secure you feel, how secure you don't feel, which creates all sorts of allegiances and crude mannerisms and meanness and harshness of speech, which is producing further tension of being impatient because of a basic self-consciousness about situations and other people and not having things turn out the way we would like them to turn out, again involving so much clinging, so much holding onto our own ground that it produces this tension, constant tension that makes us fatigued, tired, not being able to keep up always. Where's the energy to do all these things? And that sense of fatigue and tiredness is a resulting in not being able to be at home with our own thought processes and disturbed by continual production of thought, in other words, not achieving a state of meditation. And all of these complications arise from and are not separate from ignorance, which is the absence of discriminating awareness, the sixth paramita, which is quite simply not being able to tell the difference between self-deception and things as they are.

It is more practical for us tonight to discuss this sixth paramita of transcendent knowledge born from discriminating awareness which is called prajnaparamita, transcendent knowledge. In terms of knowledge, we speak of three types: first what's called basic or general knowledge; the second, higher intellectual knowledge; and the third, knowledge which transcends the other two. Basic knowledge is knowledge you learned from study of such things as language, medicine, things you learn in school, things you learn in order to produce some sort of skill, some sort of craft, whichever category they fall into, whether from the very fact of knowing how to mix cement to knowing how to teach in college. That's called ordinary knowledge, basic knowledge, or general knowledge. The second is called higher intellect, higher knowledge, which involves the study and practice of the hinayana path as we discussed: hearing, contemplating, meditating on the dharma. And this is called partial knowledge, because it is based on some final sense of security of knowing all the dharmas, having arrived at a complete understanding of all of the dharmas, 84,000 dharmas, whatever they are, and being able to quote historically from one text or another, in other words, keeping some vestige of ego through understanding the dharma, some sense of security. And the last one is called transcendent knowledge or prajna.

All these three knowledges are based on working with inquisitive or analytical mind. The last one, transcendent knowledge, comes about through intense practice and following the instructions of the spiritual friend. And what is that knowledge? That knowledge is called knowledge of the ultimately real. And the ultimately real is that all beings, the world, our own mind, and whatever exists in our consciousness is by nature unborn, unoriginated, and unceasing; therefore, there is no ego and also no enlightenment.

How are we to arrive at this prajna? If all that there is is unceasing, unborn, unoriginated, how can we arrive at this prajna? The point is that inquisitive mind is ego itself, and the only way to arrive at this state is to use inquisitive mind to annihilate itself. This inquisitive mind, as we talked about in the very first talk, basic ignorance or the big question mark, fundamental sense of separateness.

So we use inquisitive mind to unravel inquisitive mind. How to do that? Well, inquisitive mind has three types of attitudes which are called fixed attitudes: first is toward oneself; second, toward others; and third, toward experience. So we begin on ourselves and turn inquisitive mind on ourselves and look to see what this so-called self is all about. And we work backwards, looking at all the elements of our own consciousness and our own being, of who we think we are, what we think we are. And we come up with no substance at all, nothing to hang onto, nothing to call self. But inquisitive mind is still clicking, still vibrating. So if we think of ourselves and look back and

try to analyze this idea of self and come up with nothing, in other words, come up empty-handed, no solid substance, we automatically think of other and we begin to look outward and see, well, what there is solid, what really exists, what really is outside of ourselves. And inquisitive mind looks into the nature of the world and others' beings, whatever, 10,000 dharmas and finds nothing solid, nothing to hold onto there as well. The result is experience of having created a dualistic situation, having fixated ourselves with no basis whatsoever. So what is left is a feeling of being alone, fundamentally alone, experience of ego as loneliness or aloneness, monumentally alone, gigantically alone. Running down inquisitive mind until all that is left is experience.

But experience itself is not fixed, cannot be grasped. This is the basic root of ego, experience as not being fixed, solid, or graspable. What have we left? A vast unobstructed space which is called unborn, unceasing, unoriginated, and the ego which is a lonely little speck refusing to look at what is. From this unborn, unoriginated, unceasing space spontaneously arise generosity, discipline, patience, energy, and meditation unobstructedly. This is the mind of the Buddha; this is the state of being awake. Understanding this, the bodhisattva works unceasingly for the benefit of sentient beings.

If you have any questions, we could have a discussion.

#### QUESTIONS

Question: I'm unsure about the difference in one's relationship to one's thoughts from the hinayana to the mahayana. You talked about before as in the hinayana thoughts are just thoughts, but it seems that there's a difference in one's relationship to one's thoughts. In the mahayana, you talked about colors, but the whole question of one's attitude and not excluding other people from one's thoughts. I'm not sure of the transition there.

Vajra Regent: Between seeing thoughts as thoughts and not excluding others from one's thoughts? Is that it?

Q: Well, the whole emphasis on one's attitude in the mahayana.

VR: Well, to begin with, there has to be some sort of a spark, some sort of realization that staying by yourself will not work, will not achieve perfect enlightenment, therefore it is impossible to exclude others from your thoughts. In terms of meditation practice, sitting meditation practice, in other words, the rigidity of seeing thoughts as neurotic is relaxed, and realizing that thoughts, being transparent, there is no particular reason to discard them.

Q: But does that bring an attitude that one can use them as well?

VR: Yes, specifically, the attitude that one should not exclude others from one's thoughts, which is a thought, but it's also transparent at the same time. In other words, you're no longer hooked onto thoughts as being the enemy and producing more confusion, but rather you can use that transparent quality of thought in order to produce enlightened attitude.

Q: Thank you.

Q: It almost seemed, at the end of your talk, speaking of the paramitas and the mind of the Buddha, it almost seems theistic, that out of the space comes something.

VR: That's correct. Out of space comes something, but that something has no permanent substance. What else do you want to say?

Q: How it's possible that it could be so definable?

VR: Work on your analytical mind and find out.

Q: It's just the way it happens?

VR: Just work on your mind. Work on your own question mark.

Q: Could you comment on the relationship between the first two types of knowledge in terms of coming to transcendent knowledge, like the disciplines that we study at Naropa Institute, and how those two things come together?

VR: One is called samsara and the other is called nirvana, and they come together in prajna. In other words, we shouldn't be particularly satisfied with what we learn or what we experience in meditation, but we have to actually go deeper than that.

Q: So ultimately, sort of, any kind of "mundane" learning is transcended, then?

VR: What do you mean, ultimately?

Q: Well, in terms ... the distinction between prajnaparamita and, say, being able to speak on the nature of the 84,000 dharmas or whatever.

VROT. Ultimately it is transcended. Is that what you're saying?

Q: That's what I'm asking, yes.

VR: That's the point. That's what you're asking, so you find out for yourself.

Q: Okay.

Q: Is such a thing as nostalgia or just sense, emotionally, of something haunted, with some sense of something wonderful or something terrible that might have happened or might happen, is that kind of thing ego experience?

VR: Can we do something about that [problem with microphone]? Sounds like some sort of strange foreign accent. It's un-American activity.

Q: Is nostalgia or just anticipation emotionally, just the sense of anticipating something wonderful or something terrible, is that kind of thing ego of experience?

VR: Hm? Sure [laughs]. That's not a very good question. Try again.

Q: Well, I was wondering, that kind of thing, sort of just having sort of memory of something good or something bad, if that's ego or if that's other, sort of emotional memory, kind of, I guess is what I'm asking about, if that's the ego of experience?

VR: Yeah, yeah, something like that. That's right. Doesn't particularly involve looking at oneself of looking at other, but just memory, which we come up empty-handed, alone, as memory of experience is actually what experience is all the time. Every experience we have is memory, including this one.

Q: Thank you.

Q: If ego sets up a tug-of-war between I and other, how is it that one could realize egolessness and still be alone? I mean, alone seems to be dualistic.

VR: You can't.

Q: What?

VR: You can't.

Q: You can't be what?

VR: Alone.

Q: You were talking about aloneness as ...

VR: That's what we wind up with, which is our experience.

Q: You mean we start out alone, and then have to go beyond that, and end up there anyway?  
[Laughter]

VR: Yeah. Something like that.

Q: Okay. Can I ask you another question?

VR: Sure.

Q: Why is there a distinction made between unborn and unoriginated? They seem like the same thing.

VR: I don't know. That's what they say [laughter].

Q: Thank you.

VR: Maybe I made it up. Might have. Just memory, memory of an experience.

Q: At the last talk, you talked about training the mind and the notion of thinking of others. And you started off this talk ... It struck me as possibly in some way related to that, pointing out that the bodhisattva action is not fixed, is never fixed in any particular formula. So could you talk a little bit more about that?

VR: In which way? Do you mean toward others?

Q: Yeah, that notion ...

VR: That's very simple. Others are limitless as space, so you tell me how you could fix your attitude. Try to fix your attitude in this room, how you could relate to each individual here. There's so many possibilities. Are we talking about the same thing?

Q: Well, you could theoretically fix your attitude and just have that same attitude, regardless of how many people. It might be impossible, but still ...

VR: Yeah, but if you relate to just two of them, then the attitude would fall apart, because they'd be different.

Q: Oh! Okay.

Q: You said last week, when you start working with other people it's accompanied at first by sadness because there are traces of ego. Would you say something more about that?

VR: Did I say that last week? Oh boy! That's accompanied by memory, yeah. I said something about that already. Memory is what's left of your experience which we cling to, which produces

some sort of fixed attitude toward other. Hm? N'est-ce pas?

Q: Yeah. I'm not sure how that related to ...

VR: Being sad.

Q: Would you say it again please.

VR: Well, you have an experience with somebody and it becomes memory, and therefore we relate to the memory next time fixed. And that's very sad when we realize that's what we're doing [laughs]. It becomes extremely sad.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Is there such a thing as practicing the six paramitas, because ...

VR: Yeah, there is.

Q: Well, how is that? It seems kind of ...

VR: Contradictory?

Q: Yeah.

VR: Yeah, in the sense of making oneself be patient and then making oneself be generous and that kind of thing. Well, if we follow the path up to the point of actually taking the vow and then training ourselves in the right intention in the formation of an enlightened attitude, then all of them go together at once. In other words, they come up by themselves through contrast to how opposite. See, the point of the teaching is just to present these perfections as how the bodhisattva acts, therefore they come in contrast to how we do act.

Q: So it's like practicing is by noticing how you're not, how it's not working.

VR: More how you're not than how you are, you see. That would be very theistic, trying to put on those different hats: this is the patient hat, this is the generous hat, and the whole thing. But rather some sort of discriminating awareness which happens all the way through, that we see the not quality first. The other ones arise from unborn, unceasing, unoriginated.

Q: The other what?

VR: Patience, generosity, discipline, da-da-da.

Q: If the distinction between self and other is fundamentally deluded, in working with others, is the bodhisattva still really working with himself?

VR: What can you say to be self at that point? [Laughs] That's not a trick particularly. You have to understand that and actually have that arise in yourself or in your world or your mind, whatever you want to call it. At that point, if you say, "Am I still fundamentally working with myself?" it doesn't make any sense anymore. Go ahead. Push it out.

Q: Yeah, well, I mean, the bodhisattva obviously wouldn't be guided by any delusion ...

VR: Obviously [laughter].

Q: In his attitude towards other ...

VR: Or himself.

Q: Or himself? Hey, I can't use the words, so ...!

VR: So go ahead.

Q: But it just seems that other as concept is very important.

VR: Hm?

Q: It seems that other as concept ...

VR: Is very important.

Q: Yes.

VR: Same as self, though. Same as experience. Those three concepts go together. You can't think of other without thinking of self, without thinking of experience between the two. What do you mean you can't use the words?

Q: How dangerous is it in trying to be generous while still suspect of your motivation?

VR: Mm not that dangerous [laughter]. As long as you're suspect of your motivation, it's not that dangerous, because then you won't give away everything, you always hold something back [laughs]. Inquisitive mind. Yeah. That's what we're working with.

Q: Well, I seem to get in an awful lot of trouble being generous.

VR: That's such a little trouble, though. That's not any trouble, that's just kind of ordinary irritations. Not as much trouble as you get when you're more generous. Then you get in a lot of trouble [laughs]. Complications of limitless possibilities.

Q: Öel, it seems like the attitude of the bodhisattva is sort of an approach, like it depends on what you're doing, as compared to just ordinary mind or ordinary way of relating to the world. It just seems like the bodhisattva approach is one where you don't create further duality, that as long as you're experiencing, there's always duality is involved, there has to be I and other. But in the bodhisattva discipline, one doesn't perpetuate that and one comes to the fundamental sense of aloneness. I just want to know if that is somewhat in tune with what we've been talking about.

VR: Yes, except that one comes to the fundamental sense of aloneness which at that point, which at the next point actually, which is our next talk, which merges with the vast endless space. In other words, aloneness is no more a particular grain of sand.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Earlier you were talking about the sense of fluctuations in moods and the sense of fatigue which comes from the sense of clinging. Are you saying the opposite exists?

VR: Are you trying to catch me on some kind of philosophical thing?

Q: No, no.

VR: What do you mean, exists? [Laughter]

Q: Pardon? [Laughter]

VR: What do you mean by the opposite exists?

Q: Well, not so much the opposite of what you're talking about, the sense of self-consciousness



and impatience that brings upon the sense of tension and fatigue.

VR: Yeah, yeah. In other words, the opposite of the paramitas. Am I saying that the opposite of that exists? In other words, transcendent action? I don't quite get it.

Q: I suppose that with sense of prajna, insight into the situation, is that accompanied by that sense of energy?

VR: Yeah, prajna is accompanied by the other five. Two things, five previous are called skillful means, right? Compassion and action. And prajna is called transcendent awareness, transcendent knowledge. The two go together, inseparable. So they do accompany each other. So as soon as you begin to penetrate into the ultimately real, to the nature of reality, those things spontaneously begin to occur. See?

Q: Yeah.

VR: Si, si?

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Q: If you find that your thoughts about others are self-centered and ...

VR: That's impossible [laughter].

Q: Well, if you do. I mean, let me finish my question [laughter].

VR: Even if you think that so-and-so is a jerk and you're not. You mean something like that?

Q: Are you still thinking in terms of ...

VR: Yeah. Even if you think that John Doe's is there any John Doe here? Probably not if you think John Doe is a joke and you're not, still you're extending yourself into that embarrassing situation of thinking that silly thing [laughter].

Q: Then, you also mentioned the other night that thinking of others was dropping water into water and oil into oil, and I didn't ...

VR: Mm-hm. Oil into oil and water into water.

Q: Could you explain that a little further?

VR: Yeah. Oneself, when you actually think in terms of others, then you actually merge oneself with other. Of course, instead of thinking totally of yourself as kind of a cocoon being, of vibrating in this kind of awareness, huh? you actually go to say John Doe is a joke, which ends your cocoon awareness completely, you know, you're finished at that point. Yeah. So it's water into water, oil into oil, which is bound up in dualistic fixation, which, if we go far enough, produces, "Ppt," just being a little dot, and a huge space around a little dot, which is very frightening, extremely scary. And you have only two choices: to start all over again and build up or to let go and become the same as the space, in other words, compassionate action without end, and wisdom without habit-forming thoughts.

Q: Thank you.

VR: And thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and so-called students of Naropa Institute, and practitioners, laymen, experts and novices, founders, protectors, donors, deleters, whatever it is you

want to hang onto [laughter].