

Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

Talk eight of eight: Buddha Activity

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Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin: Having experienced prajna and the other paramitas, the bodhisattva continues along the path toward enlightenment. And this path has been described as a series of levels called bhumis. And bhumi, meaning level or ground, earth, which means we shouldn't misinterpret level to mean going higher and higher into the sky, but actually going more down to earth. The six paramitas roughly correspond to the first six bhumis and with prajna, the sixth, or the seeing of reality as it is, which is the experience of shunyata.

Having seen reality as it is, there is no obstruction for the bodhisattva to act. And the bodhisattva path, from the seventh to the tenth bhumi, is involved with tremendous activity. And that activity is called skillful means. And the bodhisattva who has experienced and has reached the seventh bhumi has no distinction between skillful means and himself as practitioner. In other words, seeing things as they are, there is no obstruction to action.

And the bodhisattva path—at this point action is extremely important. The more action, the closer to enlightenment. So the bodhisattva works with tremendous energy and tremendous effort which is somewhat different than before. From this point onward, the bodhisattva no longer feels the need to push, but rather that vision of enlightenment is straightforward. So there is an effortless push forward toward the goal of enlightenment, which at this point is skillful means or working with others completely. You could say that the bodhisattva at this point is not walking on the path, but rather the path is walking under him. It's that kind of sense of movement, of energy forward, goal being in reach, visible. It is very much like fruit on a tree: with the sun's rays penetrating, the fruit has no choice but to ripen. It is the same with the bodhisattva at this point. Ripening is inevitable in the sense that it's organically happening without choice.

So skillful means not being different than the person, there is a sense of vision and clear-seeing, and also a sense of tremendous resourcefulness that the bodhisattva no longer has to strategize on how to work with sentient beings. There's no longer a question of what to think about, what to say, what to do, but rather that happens naturally. Because of that pull toward enlightenment, there's no other way to go but forward.

And that sense of resourcefulness is based on immovable conviction, immovable state of mind which brings about a sense of power. And that power is not particularly power over other people or power to manipulate other people. But the sense of power here is fearlessness, because of the proximity of the goal and also because of the sense of celebration, the sense of joy that at this point

there is no more regressing on the path. And that power also has a sense of all of the bodhisattva's actions being fulfillment, things happening very fast, very quickly to the bodhisattva at that point, that there is not a sense of waiting for fulfillment of one's actions, but it actually happens on the spot. And that sense of fulfillment brings about a vision of innate wisdom, already existing wisdom, which is complete, which means that the bodhisattva at this particular level no longer has any personal hang-ups at all, and that sense of fullness or completeness dispels the clouds of ego, of twofold ego as we have been talking about, conflicting emotions and primitive beliefs.

At this point the sense of journey begins to disintegrate, but not exactly disintegrate in the sense of disappear, but that the journey itself doesn't have any end. It truly becomes goal-less at the tenth bhumi level. What is left of the bodhisattva at the tenth bhumi is a kind of vague sense of path, memory of path which is described as a vase or a jar without anything in it, just simply a memory of an experience, a memory of ten spiritual levels. And because of so much effort, because of such strenuousness put into the path, that sort of crescendo of energy begins to relax. The bodhisattva decides to relax, not so much that he or she decides actually, but relaxation begins to happen by itself.

At this point the bodhisattva decides to sit down, just as the Buddha did. Since the sense of motivation for journeying isn't there any more, the bodhisattva sits down, arranges his seat and experiences what is called vajrapama-samadhi, the vajra-like samadhi, or the indestructible-like meditation. And this is not so much a practice of meditation, but rather it is the stabilizing of the basic state of mind of the Buddha, the basic meditative state of mind. This experience of vajra-like samadhi cuts through completely any sense of dualistic clinging, any sense of habit-forming thoughts, any sense of ignorance or belief. This vajra-like samadhi is the attainment of enlightenment and the beginning of perfect buddhahood.

And this buddhahood has three aspects, three qualities of awake: the first is called the dharmakaya, kaya being form or body; dharma in this case means the highest, fullest experience of the dharma. And this dharmakaya is called the essence of all the buddhas. We could say that kaya is experience of dharma which has no reference point. So the dharmakaya is experience of no reference point, or that all beings, creatures, all worlds, universes, exist primordially without reference point; this is called the dharmakaya. And the second two aspects of buddhahood are called the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. Sambhogakaya means body or form of complete joy or complete enjoyment, which is absolute compassion. It means in this case that there is no inhibition whatsoever to communicate with sentient beings, that there is complete freedom to articulate what has been understood. There is complete freedom to articulate the dharmakaya for sentient beings. And the third aspect is called nirmanakaya, which is that awake quality exists in a human being, in a human form, embodied in a human body, the person, the body which lives among men and women and teaches the dharma, partakes in the existence of human beings, is born, lives, and dies as human beings do, which is complete fulfillment of compassion.

These kayas are of two types, the dharmakaya being formless, the other two called the form kayas, but it should be understood that they are not separate from each other. The two form kayas have as their basis the dharmakaya. Having achieved perfect buddhahood, there is no longer a problem with this and that. There is no longer a question, there is nothing further to be learned, nothing further to see. There is what is called buddha activity which can be described as the sun's rays shining continually without distinction, without partiality. There is simply the awake quality of

body, speech, and mind which has become manifest to all beings.

Well, this is all there is to say. You have any questions?

QUESTIONS

Question: When we're talking now of the bodhisattva path, it's unclear to me how the transition is made from the hinayana, concerned with shamatha practice. Or, another way to look at it would be, how shamatha practice relates to this bodhisattva activity and the bodhisattva vow and concern?

Vajra Regent: The basic point is that through the experience of things as they are, which comes about through sitting practice of shamatha and experience of vipashyana, brings about a sense of egolessness of oneself, which brings about a sense of going outwards toward others. Still the sense of dissatisfaction somewhat continuing, which pushes us outward toward others. At the same time there is also a sense of feeling of generosity because of having experienced egolessness in the sense of the shamatha-vipashyana practice which continues throughout the entire path, in other words, the basic state of mind.

Q: Thank you.

Q: When you were describing the qualities of the bodhisattva, you mentioned that the bodhisattva at a certain point has no personal hang-ups.

VR: That's right. The tenth bhumi.

Q: Does that mean that everybody likes him or her? [Laughter]

VR: I think so, yeah. Basically everybody can't resist [laughter]. Or if they do, it's not for very long.

Q: It sounds too good.

VR: Too true to be good [laughter].

Q: Too good to be true.

VR: Whatever you say [laughs, laughter].

Q: You know, like when we first started, we were talking about like the six realms and the problems of ego and conflicting emotions and then I could say, "Right, yeah," but this sounds a little like the Christian idea of heaven or something. Just the idea that there is not a flaw somewhere, just seems impossible.

VR: [Pause; no response]

Q: Amen.

VR: Hallelujah! [Laughter]

Q: In the story of the Buddha, there was a time before his enlightenment where the maras came in, the seduction by the maras. And I was wondering how that fits in with the seven through ten bhumis, whether that's before those or whether that's just before attaining enlightenment that you come into contention ...

VR: Well, let's say that the maras, the deception of mara, mara's daughters—oop, we don't want to get too funny about that, funds or whatever is happening throughout.

In terms of the Buddha, we have tremendous pride and tremendous conviction because he did the whole thing all at once and then taught the path. But in terms of those of us who follow his teaching, the actual sense of deception which is what we are talking about—daughters of mara means self-deception—is the process of the bodhisattva path, of working with self-deception entirely throughout the whole thing. So we shouldn't take it as if when at some point you decide or it happens that you begin to relax, that suddenly hosts of self-deception begin to attack you, but rather that's been happening all along. That's why such a path has been indicated and such a path has been taught. That's what's called the Buddha's infinite compassion.

Q: Thank you.

Q: I was wondering about the difference between the discovery of shunyata and the experience of the dharmakaya, since both are not involved with a reference point directly.

VR: Yeah. One is experience which has an experiencer and that's the sixth-bhumi level. There's still a sense of experiencer.

Q: And so in the dharmakaya it's more a matter of body of nonreference point rather than experiencing it?

VR: That's right. A total body of nonreference point which is all-pervasive. It's not a particular body.

Q: Yeah, right.

VR: [Laughs] You know, dharmakaya. Steve.

Q: This is sort of coming full circle back to the idea of tathagatagarbha. It seems like there's a definite connection between tathagatagarbha being present as a motive and the three kayas being pervasive.

VR: Yeah, definitely.

Q: Could you say something about that?

VR: Well, it's like this. You leave your hotel in search of a drugstore and you walk around town and you can't find one and come back to the lobby and find out that the drugstore is there to begin with [laughter]. But you had to look for it, because you didn't know [laughs].

Q: Perhaps I shouldn't make a division between content of experience and relating to it, but is the experience of the bodhisattva the same as the experience of any other human being, but his relationship to his experience is different? He reads more of a message into it, or ...?

VR: I beg your pardon? Reads a message into it?

Q: No, I don't know.

VR: It's not the same as any human being at all. It's someone who's actually directed toward enlightenment, who practices the mahayana way. It's completely different.

Q: But the experiences that come, they change like ... ?

VR: Do experiences change? Yes, they do, same as other human beings. But they change according to the path, along the way, if you follow the instructions and persevere. The pits [laughs].

Q: When you spoke of the three kayas, you seem to identify joy with sambhogakaya.

VR: That's right.

Q: And how does that work? You talked about communication.

VR: Well, there's no inhibition at all. There's no sense of having to say the right thing or the wrong thing. Everything that comes out is exactly the right thing, which is a complete joy [laughs].

Oh well, this is the end of our short journey together at Naropa Institute and I am very grateful to all of you for allowing me the possibility of saying these things and learning these things myself as we work together and have been together.

This is not a teaching which has no weight. This is a teaching which is completely solid and true and this is a teaching which must be experienced personally. This is not a teaching which is able to be tossed by the winds of intellectual speculation or either to be tossed by time or experience in time, or karma, or whatever you like to call it. This is a teaching which is definitely true forever. So I would exhort all of you to practice diligently and experience it for yourself. This is not a matter of speculation. This is just my sincere wish that you would do so. Naropa Institute has provided such an accommodating situation for us and I am grateful for that as well, that even though we struggle to survive, there is some sense of joy in that. There is some sense of being on the path, that our struggle is not particularly for ourselves but rather that we can be together at this time and this place, which is auspicious coincidence. And we can continue to do so with effort and diligence. So therefore I would like to leave that as some sort of parting wish on my part that you would do so and continue with effort and diligence and achieve enlightenment.

Thank you all very much.