

Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

Theory and Practice of Meditation

Talk 6

Naropa Institute Summer Auditorium, Boulder, CO

August 3, 1978

Audio filename (on vajraregent.org Timeline): 19780803VROT1024Rsm.mp3

Transcript filename: 19780803VROT1024R_ez.pdf

Transcribed by Evelyn Stack

Checked by Ed Zaron August 1, 2025

Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin: The very basic point is developing discriminating awareness, or *prajna*. This discriminating awareness is the essence of discipline and the foundation of the *paramita* practice which we have discussed. Hearing about the *paramitas*, the transcendent actions of the *bodhisattvas*, is at once uplifting, and at the same time confounding because we have certain fixed ideas. We have fixed ideas, but in this case these fixed ideas are not our own fixed ideas. Which is not to say that I am, at this point, redeeming everybody from fixed ideas. Hardly. But what we are discussing is the fact that fixed ideas are the same as the notion of oneself as a permanent entity, ego, a self.

The notion of a self as a permanent and fixed identity is the result of ignorance and delusion. Trying to practice the *paramitas* and still holding on to that notion of oneself as a permanent entity is impossible. In order to practice the *paramitas*, in order to walk forward on the *bodhisattva's* path there can not be any kind of residual hope and fear, any kind of residual waiting for something to be acknowledged. There cannot be any eventual reward. Now, that presents a problem to us. Using the word, "reward," or "satisfaction," is not all that much of a problem. Being sophisticated people as we think we are, there is no problem with those words. On the other hand, we still have some sort of hazy mind about how we as individuals could actually be *bodhisattvas*. How we could practice the *paramitas*. How we could be generous, and disciplined, patient. How we could have energy, and real meditation and knowledge without having to pretend.

Well that brings us to the discussion of mind as it is. According to the Yogacara school of Buddhism, which we are basing our discussion on tonight, there is nothing but mind. Everything we do, see, touch, taste, smell, think, deliberate, strategize, is nothing but a projection of mind. And mind-itself has two aspects. It's essence and it's manifestation. In it's essence mind itself has no distinguishing factors. That is to say, we cannot ascribe any condition to mind. Mind-itself is unborn, unoriginated. It exists, and it is permanent. Which is, ah, extremely hard to swallow, shall we say, from the point of view of beginning Buddhists who are taught to recognize their whole experience as impermanent. But mind-itself is pure, joyous, existent, and ongoing. I don't want to use the word eternal at this point but I think you get the message. This is the nature of mind. At the same time, this mind, this essence of mind has no distinguishing factors, no independent distinguishing factors.

And the second aspect of mind is its manifestation. And its manifestation is based on what is called consciousness. Now consciousness has eight aspects. Before we describe these eight aspects of

consciousness we should again remember that the manifestation of mind is also without substance. Now, everybody's problem, everybody's problem, is taking the manifestation of mind to be substantial. In other words, we take our projections and our process of perceiving as to be something independent of mind. Following? Well, anyway... we'll get there. But according to this particular view, the manifestation of mind-itself is also empty, has no permanent self-existence.

Basically, what we are getting at is this, in order to practice the Bodhisattva's path, one must have a firm realization of two things, that is, absolute existence and relative existence, absolute truth and relative truth. What we are to ourselves and what the world is to us.

And, to begin with, what we are to ourselves is nothing in itself, but at the same time, totally pure, totally ongoing, full, completely full, which is a description of emptiness. No particular characteristics whatsoever, and the manifestation, the same.

What we actually get hung up with in our life is the difference between who we think we are and what happens. We have a tremendous problem with that. We have a tremendous problem with what we call the world, and ourselves. So, acting as a bodhisattva, as we have understood, takes generosity, patience, and all the rest of it, but acting in that way takes a realization of mind as it is.

So let's get back to our manifestation. Mind manifests in two ways, deluded and non-deluded. The deluded mind results from ignorance, and that ignorance is the failure to realize that mind-itself is not differentiated. The failure to realize that in ordinary terms is what is called panic, or paranoia. That paranoia, or panic, at the level of differentiation is without name and without form. It becomes what is called the alaya vijñana. A Sanskrit term, vijñana means consciousness, alaya means storehouse, "storehouse of consciousness." This particular aspect of mind from the deluded point of view is that which accumulates tendency. Tendency to ignore the reality of mind and create eventual entities such as ourselves, our name, our form, our life as an ego entity. This alaya vijñana has no sense of a purpose, as such. It only has a sense of a fermentation. It is caused from delusion and ignorance and it arises simultaneously as consciousness. This alaya vijñana is the aspect of consciousness which holds any sense of future fantasies. Future sense of being, from the point of view of separateness, ego-centeredness.

From it there arises the possibility of cognition, thought [inaudible] alaya vijñana is called the eighth consciousness—we're going from eighth to one. Seventh consciousness is called the klistamano-vijñana, a Sanskrit term, mind consciousness, which means, "the further tendency to begin to think and deliberate." I think it's been called sub-conscious in western psychology, but I'm not quite sure that's exactly analogous. I think in western psychology the alaya vijñana would also be called the sub-conscious or the unconscious, but in any case, it doesn't matter. The point is, that from a certain seed possibility there arises movement. Movement in terms of the thought process. Thought process without direction. The direction comes in terms of what's called the mano-vijñana, or the sixth sense consciousness, which includes the five senses and what is called the mind. In this case mind being the organizer of the five senses, that which makes the appearance of the five senses continuous. We all think that we see, smell, hear, taste, touch—the whole thing—at the same time. We consider it as one unit. That is because of mind, or the sixth sense consciousness.

This unfolding of consciousness again has two aspects, one which is truly empty, and one which is deluded. If one practices shamatha-vipashyana meditation it is possible to work with the eight types of consciousness. In order to fully realize that tendencies to create further identifiable situa-

tions, in other words, identifiable situations are simply projection [spoken normally; “projection” as noun] and projec-tion [emphasis on the last syllable; “projection” as verb], objects of mind and perceiving objects of mind.

According to what we are discussing tonight, objects of mind have no reality at all, in themselves. Neither does the perception of objects of mind. From the deluded point of view, perception and objects of perception become real. From the enlightened point of view, perception and the objects of perception are not different than mind-itself. So, what happened? What happens? The failure to see things as they are results in the production of deluded consciousness—results in what is called samsara, cause and effect, continual redistribution of ancient hang-ups. How do we not do that? This is where the practice of meditation works. This is where it is necessary to understand, to discriminate between the practice of meditation and folly. The practice of meditation is the only way to be able to awaken that sense of prajna. Discriminating awareness, so that one knows—what? One knows that the production of consciousness is not separate from the essence of one’s own mind.

Sounds quite simple but actually it’s quite difficult, because we take perception to be outside—in other words, we create I and other—continually. Creating I and other is creating separation. It’s creating the lack of generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation and knowledge. That is the actual separating factor of the transcendent actions of the bodhisattva. Being able to discriminate that separation as not being real in itself enables one to follow the bodhisattva path. This is a very practical application we’re talking about.

Now, we have understood, so far, that the practice of shamatha meditation is seeing the exact moment and the components of that moment—thought process, and the highlights of the thought process called, emotions, bodily sensations, and environment—we have seen that we can actually look at those things directly and say, “that’s that.” Then further we can say, we can actually understand, realize, that “that” also exists in the sense of space, so that those things don’t become “things” as such. Now we’re talking about space not becoming a thing or the environment not becoming a thing. Mind itself is the same as empty space. It has no origin and no distinguishing marks. It has no good and no bad. It has no “confused” or “enlightened.” When we talk enlightenment we are talking from the point of view of confusion. Ignorance arises with consciousness. Consciousness is no different than mind.

Now then, let us look at it clearly. How to practice meditation? Why all things are workable is simply because the arising of consciousness is not separate from the essence of mind-itself. I’m giving you pretty strict Yogacara philosophy at this point. It’s not exactly philosophy but it is what happens to us.

Many of you have heard that our existence, our neurosis, is workable. We can actually work with it. How is that possible? If it’s bad, it’s bad. If there’s good, there’s good. How can we work with the bad and make it into good? We cannot. What is real, is real. What is unreal, is unreal. Neurosis is neurosis. Sanity is sanity. The point is, if you practice diligently shamatha-vipashyana meditation and begin to expand into the bodhisattva’s way, the paramitas way, we begin to see that the mistake we made was believing in separation between action and non-action, between absolute and relative truth. We begin to see that we do not have to believe in things as separate. This is the cause of the common cold. Mind in-itself projects. That is the nature of mind. It splits into itself and its projection. Because of that split we were shocked, we are shocked, continually in our life,

because we actually perceive something—or we think we do anyway.

The truth is we are not perceiving anything at all. We are generally perceiving our imagination of what's out there because of our fear of what's in here. The point is, what is in here has no name. It is not definable and that everybody knows.

So the point is for us to extend that and understand that what develops as perception and perceived also is of the same essence. Now when we talk about essence, let me say that I'm not trying to be anti-Buddhist about the whole thing. Essence, again, what is described as "essence," is unborn and unoriginated, non-substantial, with a nature like space, empty space. So that is what is called essence. You try and figure that out.

So the conclusion is, in order to practice the mahayana properly, one must understand that mahayana practices, the paramitas, are not a matter of fabricated ideas, absolutely not. The paramitas are not a matter of fabricated ideas, absolutely not. The paramitas are not a matter of imposing something on something. Because we practice meditation, we can see that the development of consciousness comes from nothing whatsoever, and it's essence is nothing whatsoever, but it appears to be all things. It appears to have shape and form. It appears to have smell, taste, sound. This is a... might be called magical. On the other hand it is quite simple. When one is freed from the delusion of thinking that mind is a "something," then one is also freed from the delusion of thinking that oneself and other is also something. Therefore, practicing the bodhisattva path is without effort. It is natural, the natural state of mind.

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

QUESTIONS

Vajra Regent: There's a hand way in the back, left hand side. Now it's touching hair, now it's raising up, now it's wiggling fingers. It seems to be a hand, but it's actually a hand. [laughter]

Question: It seems like, um, when you form this relationship to your mind then you begin to sort of freak people out. Like I'm thinking of Naropa Institute and how it freaks so many people out.

VR: I have no idea what you're saying. Could you start all over again? [laughter]

Q: Well, when you begin to see your mind as empty, then somehow that's very hard for people to take.

VR: Yeah, how could that be? That's impossible. If you begin to see your mind as empty then you begin to see others as empty as well. How could that be hard for you to take or for them to take?

Q: That's my question.

VR: Well, the question is you haven't seen your evolution of mind as empty as well. You just see the essence of mind as empty. What we're talking about tonight is how mind evolves itself. In other words, how you communicate with those people who don't see your mind as empty. [laughter] Sorry, you have to practice a lot. You have to really get into it. It's much too glib to talk about emptiness of mind and projection, to just talk about things like other people not seeing that your mind is empty. I mean that's completely... What can I say? I mean we're not talking about piddle stuff here. I'm talking about the real thing. [laughter] Like that laughter, you see. Is it reflection on you? Which one is real? Is it real according to my reflection? My answer? Is it real according to your response? Nobody knows. Everybody's in the dark. Which, from this point of

view, is no blame, particularly. Just haven't realized that in the dark is simply a misunderstanding. Anyway, I don't think I can help you with your question about these people who don't understand. Unless you have another one? It's alright. Come on, you know. She retired. Anybody else? Front row here. Seated person.

Q: I have a question about cultivation of states of mind. It seems that in the mahayana, thought process are employed deliberately such as Maitri Bhavana to turn the mind toward enlightenment.

VR: That's right.

Q: And it seems that it only works when you see the emptiness of thoughts and yet if you already see the emptiness of thoughts then supposedly there's no problem anyway, so, it seems very tricky.

VR: Ah, but that's what we're exactly talking about. The one-pointed or small-sided view is seeing the emptiness of thoughts therefore thinking there's no reason to do anything at all. What we're talking about tonight is that mind has two aspects. It's emptiness and it's non-emptiness. It's emptiness is unthinkable. Basically unthinkable, undescrivable. It's non-emptiness is describable in terms of non-thought. So, whenever you do whatever you do, you do it out of no purpose because it evolves itself.

Q: Does that mean that you don't deliberately decide to try to give up territory, to be generous, etc.? I'm confused about how to actually practice.

VR: How to actually practice? Yeah. Well, how to actually practice is, ah, basically to take all that you have heard in terms of paramitas and shamatha-vipashyana, what we've been talking about and continue to sit. That's how to practice.

Q: How about trying to be kind, et cetera, daily life?

VR: Um. How can you be kind? That's a good point. How can you be kind?

Q: You asking me?

VR: Yeah, you asking me?

Q: Yeah.

VR: Oh. Well, then, I would say is that [laughter] how to be kind is to recognize that kindness itself is a manifestation of mind. And, that mind in itself, has no essence. Kindness in itself has no essence, therefore, there is no push to be kind, but kindness is just simply a manifestation of mind. That's what I would say, since you asked.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Of course, you know, there's the bad stuff, you asked about kindness, so.... Ah, yes, what was it?

Q: There's the other stuff.

VR: You mean not kind.

Q: Yeah.

VR: Oh, yes, how to be not kind. Is that what you're asking?

Q: No. Well, ah, maybe, it seems what you're saying is that there's maybe too much, um... separa-

tion into good and bad there?

VR: Could be.

Q: And solidifying it?

VR: Could be.

Q: Okay.

VR: Bob. Front row. Sitting.

Q: You said that if you practiced diligently you begin to see the mistake you made in believing in the separation between action and non-action.

VR: That's right.

Q: And earlier you also described a big mistake that you make in believing in yourself and others, I and other. It seems to me there's a connection between those two sets but I don't know what it is.

VR: I think basically, action is other. Mind itself is inactive. Mind in it's essence has nothing to do. This is pure Yogacara, eh? Where's Lodro? Is he here? Mind itself has nothing to do. Therefore, mind does something. It begins to move. Hum?

Q: Okay.

VR: It begins to move. No motivation for moving, just moves. That is what happens when we begin to develop ego. That the state of equilibrium, or suchness, moves.

Q: That's the beginning of the development of ego?

VR: That's right. According to the deluded view. According to the view of mind-only, it's just simply the manifestation of mind. What we take it to be is, eh...[gasp] as something else.

Q: Um-hum. Which is in the realm of action, and in the realm of the world.

VR: That's right. It becomes the world. Takes a long time but it becomes that world. And it takes a long time in terms of steps. But basically, it takes a very short time in terms of experience.

Q: What I seem to be hearing you say tonight a lot about is the manifested mind. That there's some work to do there. And the question that occurs to me, I feel personally, there's a... I get a lot from working with my own hopes and fears. Like taking them almost literally, knowing there's a trick in them or that there's a catch to it, that I've heard that they're not real.

VR: How did you know that?

Q: Because I heard it. I don't know.

VR: Alright. Alright. Okay.

Q: But that's like a clue. So for me I feel there's a certain practice involved in taking a hope or a fear and really acting on it as if it were literal and watch the thing explode, or fly apart or turn into empty?

VR: Right.

Q: Which it does if I take it literally, but it never quite does if I act as if it were real and I don't quite do it to the hilt.

VR: Yes.

Q: So is there a practice in that? Is that a kind of practice different from sitting.

VR: No, I don't think so. If you take the sitting practice literally, shamatha practice and mahavipashyana and paramita practice literally, I don't see any problem at all. That's what happens. That is what organically happens. You begin to see that the outbursts of one's impulse is in itself not separate from whatever origin you find there is none, therefore there's nothing to get hung up about at all. There's no problem.

Q: Except, people start looking at you funny.

VR: Do they?

Q: Ah... yeah. Sometimes.

VR: Then that means you have some problems, because you're looking at people the way they're looking at you which is called a projection of mind.

Q: One final question. Is subconscious gossip, is that connected very strongly with hope and fear?

VR: Uh huh. Absolutely. That is the motivation of subconscious gossip. First you have what's called alaya vijnana which is just simply unformed tendencies, the space behind who we think we are, this kind of auxiliary being of who we think we are, is called alaya vijnana, which is sort of ah... almost like a Jewish mother, "Eat. Eat. Ess mine kinder, ess." But, unfortunately, in this case nobody is talking, right? But it's that kind of tendency, eat, eat, eh? [laughter] Beyond that, the seventh sense consciousness is beginning to nibble, in terms of thoughts beginning to develop. They develop into sense of sixth sense consciousness, mind and the five senses.

Q: Where is subconscious gossip?

VR: That's the seventh. That's the one where we talk about nibble. Beginning of the thinking process. The thinking process. Discursive thought. Pictorial thought. All the different kinds of thought. Emotions and whatnot. Gentleman right in the back there, with the blue and red... [end of recording]