

Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

Theory and Practice of Meditation

Talk 10

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Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin: We should review at this point what we have discussed throughout our time together in terms of the theory and practice of meditation. In doing so we should remember that what we are discussing is two-fold: one, hearing the teaching of meditation, and the second, our personal experience. And remembering, again, that the two are inseparable.

The basic point is that, we as human beings, living on this earth, in this particular time, would like to know, have a question to ourselves, about how to live our lives completely, fully. We all have an inkling that this is possible. We have some sort of suggestion produced by ourselves that it is possible to live one's life in full richness—which has nothing to do with materialism, but, “richness” in terms of experience and knowledge, which make wisdom.

The basic point, the basic journey that we are making is based on a firm foundation, according to the buddhist teachings, that all beings possess buddha nature, that each of us is capable of actually shedding the tough skin of hard-core aggression. It's actually possible.

But to do this takes deep commitment, tremendous commitment. As we have understood, as we have talked about, it is not simply a matter of being zapped, receiving something from somebody else. But it is a matter of taking it upon oneself, to transform confusion into wisdom.

And again, another primary point, in terms of the practice of meditation, is that confusion itself has the seed of wisdom. This is tremendous good news. In fact we could say this is the only good news that anybody has ever spoken of, ever. But, to bring it down to earth, we must recognize that without true discipline that seed has no water, has no sunshine. It cannot grow.

So the basis of the buddhist path of meditation is discipline. Without it we cannot go any further. Hearing teachings from ancient teachings... and listening to them for years and years and years can produce all sorts of interesting effects, but certainly not the result of enlightenment—which is the full recognition of who we are and what we are and what our world is. Speaking these words at this point to you and to myself, is by itself a recognition of what is, a recognition of a real intelligence. And everybody's listening and everybody's taking part. We hear a lot of things, we say a lot of things. We are bombarded with a lot of sounds and sights and tastes and all the rest of it. And we have our doubt.

Yet, even in our doubt, there is some spark of wisdom. We have some spark of wisdom which is the only reason—if you could call it a reason—is the only energy that makes this world as we

know it function. Everybody's concerned with annihilation. Everybody's concerned with the end of it all. All of us, and all of the rest of the human beings, crosses in front of our mind, that there could be complete chaos. Now, some people make a philosophy of that, in fact, most people do. Most people make some sort of stand in their life because that thought crossed their mind, that there could be no order whatsoever. There could be complete chaos. And that, just maybe, there is no purpose whatsoever to our life. It crosses like a cloud in the sky. And for most, it fades away. For us, who have heard this teaching, there is really no turning back.

It's not a matter of whether one calls oneself a Buddhist or not, or whatever credentials one piles up or aspires to. That's not the point. The point is recognizing in full sunlight, in full light of day, so to speak, that it actually occurred to one that all of this, all of what we experience and what we know, is actually perishable, has no permanent existence whatsoever. So this teaching of buddhism deals with this very primary thought, the basic existence of all of us, who we are before we said who we are. And doing that, it involves the practice of meditation, which is the only way to uncover the labyrinth of deception about facing that fact.

It begins with a very simple process which we call shamatha practice, a very simple process of relating to what occurs in our conscious mind, the top layer of the iceberg. What occurs to us first by practicing meditation—shamatha practice, which we've called the development of peace—we recognize that what occurs is very simply experience of five senses, together with the environment and a notion of body, and finally a notion of mind. That's what we have to begin with. We have the experience of five senses, notion of environment, notion of body, and notion of mind. And we look at those. We practice from the point of view of looking at those as nothing special, just what happens. By doing that, we begin to extract the poison of making something out of nothing—creating a huge fantasy out of smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, sitting—and we learn that being a meditator is not such a big thing after all. In fact, it doesn't have any credentials involved with it. We learn that. In learning that, we experience some sense of freshness, some sense of cheerfulness, that we don't have to take everything so seriously as we've been trying to all this time—to push ourselves to take our little bitty thoughts about, “I saw a daisy today. It was a wonderful daisy, fantastic daisy. It was a daisy.”—that we don't have to take it so seriously—or, “I dreamed last night that I murdered my mother. What's going to happen to me?” Right away, call the shrink, fifty dollars.

We begin to recognize that the production of a thought process—discursive thoughts, pictorial thoughts, whatever happens in our mind—can simply be seen moment to moment as it is without any judgment, just cleanly, purely. In doing so we develop a certain state of mind which is called peaceful, “development of peace,” and we have a seat, actually, we develop a seat. We develop a seat, meaning we develop who we are, not in terms of definition, but just in terms of basic presence, who we are, basic sanity of who we are. From that we begin to venture out because we're somewhat ventilated by seeing that thoughts are just thoughts. Therefore, we have a more relaxed way of being, more cheerful way of being.

And that cheerfulness becomes inquisitiveness—that we're not afraid to look at the details. We're not afraid to look at the tone of where we are and who we are and what we are. The color, the change, the nuance, we're not afraid to look at it. In fact, we're inquisitive. We begin to actually become attracted to it, which is the development of vipashyana, or insight, or awareness. We become interested in the total view of what's around us, our environment, because we're no longer

concerned about this, meaning, “Who am I?” “Who am I?” no longer is a particular question, it’s just actually presence. So presence begins to radiate slightly, looking around, inquisitiveness, looking around at the environment. And looking around at that environment means that we are finally shedding that sense of bias—looking at the environment from what’s actually happening in the environment.

From doing that—in doing that—in terms of shamatha and vipashyana practice, we begin to see that what happens in the environment is actually not opposed to what happens here with oneself. When that happens there is sort of coming together or clash, or spark, which is called insight. And that insight is that all things, all experiences, have no permanent existence. We begin to see egolessness in ourselves and in our environment, which is tremendously refreshing.

At that point there is the possibility of going further. Because it is so refreshing to see that oneself and one’s friends and one’s house, car, family, world, politics, nations actually are egoless, then we begin to develop wider vision. Wider vision means that we no longer consider mind to be our personal possession. That means the experience of awareness is, at that point, no longer our personal possession. That awareness itself begins to spread out into the environment and that becomes the sense of recognizing that basically, fundamentally, everything is quite sane—that the world and its history and space, what’s here, there, and everywhere is quite in place. Everything is almost like placing figurines on a mantel. We recognize that we place them exactly as they are placed. Therefore they have no meaning individually. But, as a whole, they have a good, solid, meaning.

But if we go further in our practice, and penetrate deeper and continue to meditate properly, we begin to say that even that good solid meaning of sanity itself has no ultimate meaning. Which is the experience of shunyata, no ultimate meaning, which means that we are completely free of origination, of a birth place and a name and a form.

That teaching itself is terrifying to those who have not gone through the process, the practice of meditation. The experience of shunyata is said to have caused the arhats to have heart attacks. And the Buddha finally said that everything is shunya, empty, and all those practitioners who had thought they had achieved something dropped dead on the spot. [The Vajra Regent blows into the microphone like a cataclysm. Laughter.] But, when we actually look at it, experience of shunyata is in itself what we call liberation, or the absence of any kind of ego-clinging whatsoever.

From that there is still the phenomenal world. People would like to think, in fact people have thought, that once there is the experience of emptiness, then there is no phenomenal world, therefore we have finally reached our goal and there is no problem whatsoever any more. But that is not the case. From the point of the view of the ultimate vehicle of the Vajrayana, that at that point, then the phenomenal world—things, this, that—actually become totally real. Not ultimately real, but totally real. Then and only then is it possible for the awakening of great compassion, true compassion, in which all actions, and thoughts, and whatever we called neurosis before, becomes food—becomes actual food that we can eat, digest, and live, finally live, without a second thought. True compassion comes out of shunyata. Without shunyata there is not true compassion. But without the teaching of the Vajrayana, shunyata becomes a precious thing.

So the Vajrayana brings everybody back to earth, brings shunyata into action, which we call meditation in action. The culmination of basic shamatha practice is that all things, all experience

becomes buddha nature, of the nature of the Buddha. Buddha means awake. All things, all experience, everything that is perceived, is awake. In that way, compassion is no longer the notion of doing good, but compassion is the transformation of consciousness, which is saying the same thing as the transformation of the world from that of idiocy to sanity. From that point of view it is very strict and very black and white. If there is some sense of genuineness enough to begin with, from the very starting point of our path of meditation, then that genuineness must take blossom, must blossom into complete fruition, which is that sense of upaya, skillful means, which is mastering the world in terms of the elements. Now when we talk about the elements we are not talking about anybody's psychology, or anybody's science, or anybody's numerology, or anybody's astronomy, or anything like that.

When we're talking about the elements we're talking about the basis of what this world is, earth, water, fire, space, whatever we have. This is ultimately our own makeup, not necessarily something outside, but is actually who we are, what we are. And finally, by the practice—thorough practice and discipline—there is no separation between what is and who we are, and that itself changes confusion into enlightenment. Or, to put it more frankly, recognizing, recognize that confusion to begin with was not confusion, it was simply mistaken identity.

So we have our path, and our practice. That is the way it goes. If you have any questions, we could have discussion. And don't be afraid, everything's alright. [Laughter]

QUESTIONS

Question: What is the particular workability of the various natures, various elements, buddha families and so on, in the shunyata experience? In other words, is there, there's not a particular obstacle, just as there wouldn't be an obstacle, as you said with confusion. There's not an obstacle, confusion has its way through. Now what does the recognition of the different qualities of energy have to do with the shunyata experience?

Vajra Regent: Well, it has to do directly with the shunyata experience, in that, if there is no solid basis for qualities of energy, then and only then, can energy be free to express itself in terms of qualities. If not, not for the shunyata experience, then energy would be bound up by reference point. In other words, "I feel good... Because I feel bad, later on—or before," or, "I feel energetic because... later, before I was lazy." You know, and it goes like that.

Q: It just, it seems to me just the sense that in some sense we recognize a lot of the pieces before there's the whole, or that...

VR: Well, that's why we have such a thing as path, why we have taught this particular course the way we have, is that in terms of who we are, what we are, we have to recognize first the sense of confusion. Otherwise, no point. Which some people I'm sure have taught. That's what I talked about in terms of "zap." Teachers have come along and said, "Kiddies, don't worry, just look at me. Do you understand?" And everybody goes, "Yes, yes, we understand," because they're scared, frightened. "If I don't understand, then maybe I really don't understand." Where we start off with is: maybe, not maybe, but we really don't. Let's have something to work with. We don't, so we work with that.

Q: Vajra Regent, um, in the discussion of the paramitas, you talked about six of them, and in a discussion group later on we talked about four others, that are skillful means, power, inspiration, and

wisdom. Inspiration and devotion seem to be very closely connected, for me, and I'm wondering why inspiration is considered ninth paramita and if we're talking about inspiration at a higher level of the other shore. How do we get that far without it to begin with? I mean, what is the difference between inspiration now and inspiration then?

VR: There's quite a difference, actually, there's quite a difference. There's inspiration with ego, inspiration without ego. Basically that's all we're talking about there.

Q: Could you talk about inspiration without ego?

VR: Inspiration without ego is that sense of not having to get there. How about talking about inspiration with ego? Inspiration without ego is very hard to talk about.

Q: I don't understand it.

VR: Well, that's basically when you boil down the whole thing, file down everything, everything, who we are, what we are, you file it down very finely, you have basically a split. You come to a split. Can't actually file any further because you're going to crack. Inspiration with ego has no reference to that. Inspiration with ego is just purely feeling sane and good and therefore you go on. Inspiration without ego is something much more raw, much more real.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Good evening. You mentioned earlier the term aggression. And I've had a lot of trouble trying to understand how certain types of aggression fit into, well, the concept of perhaps ego and egoless. For instance, I think I can see or understand aggression in the way that many governments run, the way that many people pursue their materialistic universe. At the same time, I'm very much wanting to work on how, for instance, I see aggression in Naropa, a great deal of it, in terms of fund raising...

VR: Naropa didn't have any aggression.

Q: Pardon me, I'll see if I can't rephrase that, ah, I see...

VR: You mean Naropa Institute?

Q: Yes, that is what I mean.

VR: That is different from Naropa, Naropa is a person.

Q: Definitely. I appreciate your perspicacity.

VR: Well, whatever it means, I appreciate it as well. [laughter] Well, let's get to the point.

Q: My question is serious, that I see a lot of what I consider to be aggression happening in the pursuit of expansion of our egos, or self development in terms of fund raising and...

VR: Especially in terms of fund raising.

Q: Well, I feel they're, I feel that this can be explained or put in a perspective that I could appreciate, and I wonder if you could...

VR: Yeah, I think, that's actually quite valid in a way. That, ah, well, it's like people coming upon delicious new, apple, and you know we've had lousy apples before in the store. Big, twenty-five, fifty cents for an apple and it was dry. Didn't have any juice. So we come to this market and there's

red, beautiful, delicious apple, and it's sixty cents, for a bite anyway, and it's good, and it's really good, and we get so enthused that we say, "Look," to our friends we say, "Look, you're buying these crummy apples. Get over here to this market. This is a wonderful market. Buy these apples here because they are the best apples you ever had." And they say, "Well, I'm used to buying my apples over there, ..." And you say, well, "You silly ass, you know, I mean this is really good, you know!" And then they say, "Well, wait a minute, you know I... ." And then you start to get a little heated up and you say, "Look, I know for certain that those apples..." It's pretty much the same way here, [laughter] that, that people feel so enthused, so good when they finally discover they're actually sane, they're actually human beings, right, that they start to make a big deal out of it. And then, you know...

Q: Is that aggression, at that point?

VR: Well, everything's aggression up to the point of recognizing that you don't exist. Everything. But, on the other hand, as we said, we're talking about what is workable in the path, on the path, and if there is a path which talks about non-aggression, at least talks about non-aggression, then, that aggression is workable, because eventually it will wash itself, if the individual, yourself, any of us, myself, practices. Everybody has great ideas about their new found thing, you know. Thank you.

Q: In one of the readings, of, I believe, the seminars, Rinpoche makes a one paragraph reference to the education of children, and whether that might lead to adults that don't have quite the same difficulties that we have.

VR: Poor us!

Q: Two questions: in view of the long history of this approach, is there any evidence of teaching of children producing adults that don't have problems we have? And secondly, if that is the case, how much energy is being put into teaching of children as a prevention rather than taking us already, ah, confused, completely confused people and trying to move backward?

VR: Ah, preventative medicine.

Q: Correct.

VR: Right. Well, I think we have to go one step further than preventive medicine. We have to go to basic health. Basic health in terms of parents and children depends solely upon the parents, solely upon the mindfulness and awareness practice. Which means that in terms of the parents and children, they think that they're doing a wonderful job. They have great ideas about being parents, but, in a moment, mind is influenced.

Q: Wouldn't that suggest that there should be courses here on parenting?

VR: Absolutely not. It would suggest that there's a meditation practice that everybody should do to know what mindfulness is, and awareness.

Q: And with that alone, then, the person who is a parent would have no problem in raising a child?

VR: That's right. Absolutely no problem.

Q: Do you have evidence that those people who have gone through this have children who do not have the problems that we have when we become adults?

VR: Yeah.

Q: Could I meet such a person sometime?

VR: If you're lucky.

Q: Do you know such a person?

VR: Yeah.

Q: Thank you.

VR: It's actually true. Actually possible. Aren't many, but I know some. [laughter] You want to say something?

Q: You talk about filing back and filing so much that then you crack. What about if you've already cracked and then you start filing? Don't you think...

VR: It's the same thing.

Q: It's the same thing, you're working in another direction?

VR: You just do it again.

Q: What's that?

VR: You do it again. You know, that's the point.

Q It sort of seems to have helped me.

VR: [Inaudible] people think that they actually crack. But they don't. They don't crack. They just make a thicker skin.

Q: I didn't think they cracked, but you said they crack.

VR: Did I say they cracked?

Q: Yeah. Maybe you said that.

VR: Well, would you tell me again what I said?

Q: What's that?

VR: What did I say?

Q: It sounded like you were, I think you said, people file down things and then they crack.

VR: File, file. Yes, file. I said file and then they crack.

Q: But you were just kidding, right, they don't really crack? [laughter]

VR: I might have been just kidding, but still.

Q: Sometimes, it's close.

VR: No, the point is that everybody thinks that they've gone to their last resort, but they haven't.

Q: There is no last resort.

VR: No, that's the whole point. There is none. We think well, finally this is the end, I can finally flip out and burst into the universe. And you find out you can't.

Q: Great, thanks. [laughter]

VR: [Laughs] I wish I could say it's my pleasure, but, it's actually not, it just happens. Gentleman here with the beard.

Q: Could you talk about faith in each of the three yanas?

VR: Faith begins in the first yana, which is the hinayana. It is a very simple thing. It's kind of faith in wisdom, faith in sanity. Faith in the mahayana, or the second yana, is faith in one's own intelligence, as separate from sanity as a concept. Thirdly, faith in the vajrayana is faith in the presence of enlightened sanity, in the presence of a human being. You got it.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Over there, beardo secundo.

Q: We were asked a very interesting question tonight in our discussion group to write upon, and I would really be interested to know what...

VR: You want me to write what you're going to say?

Q: Well, I've been thinking about it and...

VR: Alright, now I'll do it differently. Okay, go ahead.

Q: Okay, the question was, what is the relationship between sitting practice and studying, the studying of the teachings?

VR: Ah, good, now I'm going to give you an answer, and you can write on that, okay? When you think, is there a thinker? When you see, do your eyes have different color pupils? [laughter]

Q: Wrong tradition isn't it?

VR: Who cares?

Q: Okay, let me rephrase my question.

VR: Sure, I'll rephrase my answer in that case.

Q: Alright, one more time.

VR: Alright.

Q: I found last night, when I was studying and trying to write down an answer to these questions...

VR: What is the question again?

Q: Well, this is another question: What is the relationship between sitting practice and studying of the... or studying the teaching? Okay, I found that when I was looking back on the notes on mind as essence and mind as manifestation, I had a lot of problems with that, and I really didn't understand it, but it clicked last night, and at first I felt very, very happy because it all fell together and then when I really realized what I was understanding I felt very sad, because the joke of the whole mind as essence and mind as manifestation. This morning I didn't have any of those feelings. But, anyway, it was in response to studying, it was an emotional response to understanding buddhism, theoretically. Now, I have ambitions, you know, and I own up to that, you know. I think, "Well I've really enjoyed that experience and I'd like to learn more, maybe the next thing that I'll do is

the abhidharma,” you know, but I find a divergence between this kind of activity and the sitting practice. I find that one lags behind, they don’t seem to interweave. What is, what is... Can you give me a prescription?

VR: You’re on the right track. You’re definitely on the right track. That’s exactly the right track. It’s so right on. Congratulations.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

VR: You’re welcome.

Well friends, I think this is the end of our time together, which is very sad and very exciting—which is the same as you said, in that, we have shared some time together, which has been extremely volatile. We don’t know what happened. Has it been good? Has it been bad? At the same time, we have meditation practice, which has run throughout the whole thing, and good and bad become simply... maybe it’s strawberry topping, or pineapple, or whatever. In fact when we come to look at it quite clearly, good and bad don’t matter at all. What does actually mean something is that we have been here together, and if we are really honest, that doesn’t mean anything at all.

It’s so good that it doesn’t mean anything at all, that it is absolutely monumental truth. It is the truth that it doesn’t mean anything at all. Because of that we have learned a lot about who we are and what we are. Nobody’s excluded from that. Even whoever you are here tonight, from famous to infamous, from ordinary to extraordinary, from delightful to boring, here we are together. Good show. Jolly good show.

This is the first time that the Vajracharya and I have taught together this summer, and it’s seems to have worked but, then again, one never knows. That so many people practice meditation is only benefit to the world and to other beings. That is all that we can actually look forward to. That since you have practiced meditation, there is some sense of future sanity. We understand, in our way, that it is not necessary to make such a mess of our lives and the rest of the world. We understand in our little way, no matter what it is. All of you here tonight understand that, that it is not necessary to make such a mess. Good for us and good for others. We should have genuine pride in that. I thank you all very much for your roller coaster ride. You have been quite courageous and really good in sticking to it.

Well, there’s more to come. The interesting thing about this path, is that it has a horizon which doesn’t stop. It’s not like thinking that if we reach a certain place then we actually see the sun rising for the first time. In this case it’s not seeing the sun rising, particularly, but, it’s simply knowing that the sun of knowledge—which is wisdom in terms of how we are, who we are—is fully manifest. That is possible because of the supreme teaching of the Buddha, and because—simply—of our own intelligence, which is saying the same thing. Buddha, and intelligence, and who we are are the same thing. We’ve been saying that over and over again for two thousand five hundred years, and we will continue, whoever we are.

Well, thank you so much, and please come back. There’s always room here at Naropa Institute for everybody who wishes to be genuine. In fact there’s room here for people who don’t even think they want to be genuine. In any case, we have a large hook which is called yourselves. You hooked us, we hooked you. Thank you for your fund raising efforts in keeping Naropa Institute solvent and valid. Please help further, whoever you are, and whatever you are, it actually doesn’t matter.

I'll try. You try. Let's practice. Let's meditate. Let's be sane about the whole thing. There's no point in making a fuss.

Well, thank you all very much!

Well, I'll see you next time, if you're here! Good night and good bye.