Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

Cultivation Of Enlightened Mind
Talk 1

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Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin: I would like to welcome everyone to this Intensive Training Session. What we propose to do is to study the teachings of Buddhism as transmitted by the lineage of the Kagyu teachers with their particular understanding and their particular realization. And that realization is based on the foundation of personal experience. In the course of this training session we have talks, sitting practice, discussion groups, and the general environment of Karmê Chöling. All of that is meant specifically so that each practitioner, each student, can experience without a doubt the message of the teaching, and hopefully that message is uncluttered by any kind of wishful thinking or self-deception.

So in that case we should get to the heart of the matter, which is the cultivation of enlightened mind. The cultivation of enlightened mind, the subject itself, arises simply because we have some sense already that there is such a state of mind. If we had no personal sense of that, it would be impossible to talk about these things. That is our basic ground. In each culture, and throughout history, there has been some kind of presentation of that which is good, that which is wholesome, and that which is intrinsic to human beings, the differences being the ultimate realization and the means to that realization. In the case of the buddhadharma, we are talking again about ultimate realization of one's own nature and the means to do so. So, to begin with, we must have some kind of idea, some kind of theory, something to work on. What we are working on is a vague impulse on our part as human beings to achieve something or other. That vague signal, very faint signal, is the motivation to search for, to establish oneself on some kind of path, with some kind of practice, to realize what the actual motive is, to realize the impulse, to realize the signal. We could say that what we are going to talk about for the next few days is entirely wrapped up in that particular thought. What we would like to do is recognize and realize our impulse to be doing what we are doing.

According to the Buddhist teaching, enlightened mind is not mind which has to be manufactured. Enlightened mind is not that which is the result or the accumulation of any kind of addition to what we have already. And that very point is central to our practice. As we will be doing a lot of meditation practice in the next few days, it is important that you recognize the proper attitude and practice with that attitude. And that attitude is again that the mind of the practitioner is in itself sufficient to realize the awakened state. That could only be possible if the awakened state exists in that same mind. So, our impulse, our movement, our general sense of search or longing, contains within it awakening or enlightened mind.

Now, what is this enlightened mind? And if it is enlightened already, what are we cultivating? This enlightened mind is mind which has no preoccupation whatsoever, has no fear because of expectation and disappointment, has no birth and has no death. Now what are we cultivating then? We are cultivating ignorance—that part of us which ignores mind as it is. Where this ignorance of enlightened mind came from is not particularly important to us. I suppose when we begin to practice strenuously we feel that it should be important to us, because we feel somewhat silly that we didn't recognize it already. But on the other hand, let us be practical. We are here to follow a particular discipline, particular teaching. And that particular teaching says, from the beginning, that it is not necessary or beneficial, in fact it's quite the contrary, to try and figure out where the ignorance came from. We are ignoring our basic state of mind. Why is that so? If we say that, "I don't believe I am ignoring my basic state of mind as much as I believe that there is a basic state of mind. How can you say that we have to work on ignorance? Can you prove that ignorance is happening instead of basic enlightenment?" Well, what's the problem? If that is the case, what is the problem? Why is it that we are so concerned about passion and aggression? Why are we so concerned about our emotional state of mind? Why are we so concerned about whether we are right or wrong, whether we feel good or we feel bad? That is the case. We are concerned. And we are concerned because we have basically ignored our fundamental principle, fundamental mind principle, of who we are and what we are. And that process of ignoring ignorance is based on, comes out of, our original state of mind, our basic state of mind. That's the second point of how to practice. When you begin to meditate and you recognize that things are happening, you are becoming excited or depressed, anxious, all the rest of it; you must have some idea that whatever arises in your state of mind arises from that original ground, that basic ground which is unobstructed and has no allegiance to whatever occurs. This is a very practical point, because as you begin to meditate continually you undoubtedly take sides with your feelings and your emotions. You say you have a good meditation when you have good thoughts, thoughts that please you according to your past experience or future expectations. Or you say you have disturbing meditation, or bad meditation, when those thoughts and emotions which occur are contrary to what you want at the time. So, second point is, whatever occurs in your state of mind also originates, is born from, enlightened mind. In that case there is no need to fight.

So what we are doing by meditating is removing the obstacle of ignoring our basic state of mind. In ignoring we cannot involve ourselves so much with the details of ignoring, of ignorance. Otherwise we fall into the trap of the current psychologists, humanists, all the rest of it, thing, about trying to dissect, trying to pick apart your experience and trying to find out the cause. So it's not so much as trying to separate every hair as trying to get to the scalp. So removing the obstacle of ignorance is applying the practice of meditation to ignorance itself. By applying that practice of meditation we must exert tremendous amount of energy, and have what's called "good discipline." Good discipline is slightly stupid. On the other hand, it's based on that same impulse which makes you feel intelligent and alive. By constantly applying the techniques of meditation practice we begin to wear down our habitual tendency to ignore who we are, what we are. And the result of that process is rediscovering or awakening to our own state of mind. That state of mind is what we call egoless, minus ego, which means minus ignorance. In terms of what we are about to do, let us say that whatever occurs is included. We have tremendous opportunity of open field which has no original sin. And further, it is not at all involved with whether or not we succeed or fail. So Karmê Chöling does not provide any Kool-Aid. Basically, you're on your own. In terms of the teachings,

we have these talks which are meant to give just some sense of pointing, some sense of outline. By practicing, we come upon some sense of real and true being. That promise is our own promise. If it were not there to begin with, no one could say it.

So that's it in a nutshell. If you have any questions, we could have a discussion.

QUESTIONS

Question: I am not quite certain what you mean by, "cultivating ignorance." Are you saying that it's the same as enlightened mind?

Vajra Regent: Well, what I'm saying is the ground of ignorance is the same as enlightened mind. To cultivate ignorance means the same as cultivating a field. You have to plough it, turn it, plant it, water it. It's good soil.

Q: What's it made out of?

VR: It's made out of enlightened mind.

Q: Sounds somewhat self-conscious.

VR: Well it is right now. It is self-conscious. There's no doubt about that. So what?

Q: Thank you.

Q: Would you explain a little bit about what you meant by a discipline containing an element of stupidity?

VR: Well you see, the whole basis of ignorance, ignoring enlightened mind, is that once you ignore, you have to continue ignoring. When you continue ignoring, then you become smart. When you begin to practice meditation then you become stupid.

Q: Thank you.

VR: The gentleman in the back there.

Q: I have three or four questions but I'll only give you one if you only want one. If you want more I'll give you...

VR: I don't want any, but I'll take them all.

Q: Okay. Well, if you really don't want any then I, I won't give you any.

VR: Are you sure?

Q: Yes.

VR: Doesn't make any difference to me.

Q: So then, then you don't mind? Either way.

VR: Either way.

Q: I'm undecided.

VR: About whether you should ask a question?

Q: Yeah.

VR: Go ahead.

Q: Okay. The first one is, you said we will come to a point at which we are experiencing true being.

VR: That's right.

Q: What are we experiencing right now?

VR: I don't know.

Q: Hmmm. We are not experiencing true being now?

VR: What do you mean we?

Q: Me and you.

VR: Me and you?

Q: And all these people. Us. Well, the whole of existence.

VR: Which one are you talking for?

Q: All of us.

VR: Really?

Q: Yes.

VR: They wouldn't like that.

Q: I didn't say they would. [Laughter]

VR: That's pretty good.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Is there a problem?

Q: There is no problem unless I create one.

VR: So what do you want from me?

Q: Nothing.

VR: There we have it.

Q: Okay.

VR: Is that the rest of it?

Q: Oh, well, there were some other questions. Okay. What is the difference between sitting and doing anything else?

VR: The difference is that when you are sitting you are not doing anything else.

Q: That's true, so there is no difference. Is that what you are saying or not?

VR: It's not what I am saying.

Q: Ah haa. Well, what is that difference?

VR: You have to do it. Do you know? Did you sit? Have you sat?

Q: I have sat, yeah.

VR: Well, you know, you don't know yet?

Q: I don't really, I don't see the difference. I see externally there is a difference, I mean if I sit I am not standing. But as far as experience...

VR: How about, you know, the actual technique?

Q; Ah, I know what I am talking about. As far as quality, it is, is it, is it more qualitative?

VR: What?

Q: Sitting. Is it worth more than any other experience?

VR: At this point, definitely.

Q: At this point. And when does it lose that?

VR: You tell me.

Q: When I no longer believe that it's worth more than any other experience.

VR: No, when you no longer ask the question.

Q: When I don't ask a question is it worth more or not?

VR: Uh huh.

Q; Well, I could ask a question even though I already know the answer, isn't that so?

VR: Um mmm.

Q: No, that's impossible?

VR: Pretty much.

Q: Why?

VR: Unless you, unless you were entertaining yourself.

Q: Entertaining myself? Hmm. And what is wrong with that?

VR: Oh, it's like masturbation, you know. You might go blind. [Laughter]

Q: And what is wrong with masturbation?

VR: The only thing that's a problem there is that one becomes so self involved...

Q: Self involved?

VR: Self involved, that if you try to ask for a loaf of bread you don't know how to do it.

Q: I don't understand.

VR: It's very simple. You just become crazy.

Q: If I do what? [General laughter] Masturbate?

VR: Now you are answering your own question.

Q: I see. But is that what you had in mind?

VR: Not really.

Q: Okay. Then what did you have in mind?

VR: What did you ask?

Q: I, well, I asked what was wrong with masturbation.

VR: No you didn't. What was your question?

Q: Originally?

VR: Yes.

Q: I said, what is the difference...

VR: Difference between...

Q: Sitting and doing anything else.

VR: Well, the difference is that when you are sitting you are not doing anything else.

Q: But what is the qualitative difference between sitting and doing anything else? I mean because we make a—that there's a wall there...

VR: No, you don't. You don't. You didn't...

Q: I don't make any walls?

VR: You didn't make it up.

Q: No, you're right. I don't make a wall. But I see...

VR: You didn't make up sitting practice either.

Q I didn't make it up?

VR: No.

Q: No, of course not.

VR: You've heard about it.

Q: I'm already it.

VR: You heard about it.

Q; I've heard about it?

VR: And you did it.

Q: And I've already done it.

VR: Someone told you how?

Q: I already knew how in the first place. Isn't that true?

VR: What are you doing here, by the way?

Q: Why am I here? I'm here to meet you.

VR: Oh, hello!

Q: Hi. [General laughter]

VR: Nice to meet you.

Q: That's really what I'm doing here.

VR: The difference between sitting and doing anything else is that sitting is a specific technique to produce, in one's own state of mind, that sense of not doing anything else.

Q: But isn't that production sort of not reality? Because isn't reality...

VR: That's right. That production is not reality.

Q: So why do we need that production?

VR: Because what we exist on is production. The idea of sitting is to over-produce.

Q: Over-produce... until we get bored of it and then stop it finally... when we realize that it's really no different from other experiences.

VR: Then we stop.

Q: Then we stop.

VR: What do we stop?

Q: We don't stop anything. It's already been... already.

VR: How do you know?

Q: Because I've already realized it.

VR: Well then that's good.

Q: That is good.

VR: Extremely good.

Q: No, I know. But thank you. I mean, but it's really no big deal. That's also what I realized.

VR: What?

Q: Enlightenment.

VR: Is no big deal?

Q: No. Is that so?

VR: I don't know.

Q: Well that's my opinion.

VR: There's a million of them... you know... [General laughter]

Q: Yeah, yeah, no, I mean, no no. Do you think it's a big deal?

VR: Yeah.

Q: You do.

VR: I do.

Q: It is a big deal.

VR: Yeah.

Q: Why? This is what I have to find out.

VR: I don't know.

Q: You don't know why it's a big deal?

VR: I don't know.

Q But you know it is?

VR: Well, I think it is.

Q: You think it is, but you're not sure?

VR: Well, not completely sure.

Q: Well why not? [General laughter] If it is a big deal, why don't you know?

VR: A big...

Q: I'm not trying to put you on the spot or anything.

VR: What?

Q: I'm not trying to put you on the spot or anything. [General laughter] I really...

VR: You know what? I believe you.

Q: I'm really not. I really am not. But I just believe that enlightenment is not a big deal. And I don't mean to be taking this over. I mean...

VR: That's great? That's fantastic. Yeah. You have actually realized the ground of what we're talking about.

Q: Right. I think I've realized it.

VR: Now we've got to go a little further than that.

Q: But where is it to go?

VR: Well, we'll see.

Q: I mean right here and now. Right? Is there any other place?

VR: Yeah. There's tomorrow.

Q: No. There's right here and now as far as I know.

VR: Well there's also tomorrow as far as you know.

Q: Well... not really. I only know about here and now.

VR: You sure?

Q: As far as I know. Yeah.

VR: Not worried about tomorrow at all?

Q: No, I'm not worried.

VR: That's great. [laughter]

Q: It is. It's nice. But, at the same time, I don't feel any different from anybody else because I...

VR: Why do you ask me a question?

Q: Why did I ask you a question?

VR: Why?

Q: Why did I ask you a question?

VR: Hmm.

Q: Because I wanted to see if you knew the answer.

VR: I don't.

Q: You don't. Are you saying I don't also? Or, I do.

VR: You're asking the question. You should tell me.

Q: I think I do know the answer.

VR: And what is it?

Q: There is no difference between sitting and doing anything else. That's my realization.

VR: That's your realization? How did you come by that?

Q: Ah... by sitting and doing everything else.

VR: That's very good. That's exactly what I'm saying.

Q: I know that.

VR: And that one has to come to that realization by practice.

Q: Why is that? That I don't understand.

VR: You don't?

Q: No. Why does one have...

VR: [laughter]

Q:... to come to it by sitting if there's no difference between sitting and doing anything else?

VR: Okay. I think... I think you're cooking you goose enough.

Q: I'm only...

VR: But are you going to stay here for the rest of the time?

Q: Only if you want me to.

VR: Are you going to stay here and sit with everybody else?

Q: I'm not sure. It all depends on how I feel.

VR: Now wait a minute. Let's just get to the point.

Q: You want to get this set down now.

VR: Right to the point. Yeah.

Q: Okay.

VR: Are you going to sit here with everybody?

Q: If you want me to. I don't have anything against it.

VR: I would love you to.

Q: You would love me to sit?

VR: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

VR: Good. We'll talk tomorrow and next day and next day.

Q: Okay. Fine.

VR: Gentleman here.

Q: Just one thing on that, just what he's saying. I sort of sometimes have the same feeling that those people out there who aren't looking, who don't think something's wrong, are enlightened and it's only because we're...

VR: [to recording staff] Are you catching any of that? I didn't think so. Unconnected. There you go.

Q: Sort of get the same feeling some time that I'm playing a joke on my own self.

VR: Is that the same feeling as him?

Q: Well, he reminded me of that situation.

VR: All right, let's... let's be precise. Okay?

Q: Okay.

VR: Your feeling is there's something that you...

Q: My feeling is...

VR: All right.

Q: ...that if I didn't create the problem in the first place, I'd be enlightened. Those people out there...

VR: Exactly! That's what I just said by the whole talk.

Q: Right.

VR: So, is there a question?

Q: Then the whole problem is my searching in the first place. If I left it alone...

VR: You see, searching is just another word. The whole problem is ignoring your basic intel-

ligence. That's everybody's problem, including everybody who has the answer, same problem. Whether you have an answer or not doesn't matter.

Q: Well, then another way round... is the only way I can confront my basic intelligence through meditation?

VR: That's right.

Q: Or are there people out there who sometimes experience enlightenment or already have...

VR: If they do, it's a mistake.

Q: What?

VR: And they experience it, and then they start some kind of a cult. And then they destroy other people and make other people aggressive.

Q: How can they do...

VR: Without a doubt. I am completely certain of that.

Q: Then a human being has no chance of being sane unless he meditates. You know, maybe some other ways he may stumble onto it but basically it's our lot to... [audience microphone has not been working]

VR: [to technician] It didn't work? The whole thing?

Technician: We're picking it up on your mike.

VR: Oh. Okay, all right. It's a good one! Go ahead.

Q: Umm.

VR: You're saying basically a human being has no chance of being saved unless he meditates.

Q: Well, we're all going to...

VR: Is that what you said?

Q: When we're born into the world and we grow up we're bound to be neurotic unless we do something about it.

VR: Well, well, well, wha...

Q: Is that correct?

VR: No, not exactly. I mean, "You're born into the world." What do you know about that?

Q: I was born into it.

VR: How do you know?

Q: Well we have to start from somewhere. The reason I know is because that's where I'm starting from.

VR: That's what's called ignorance. You got it right on the spot.

Q: Well I have to start somewhere. You asked if that's it...

VR: That's exactly where we start also with meditation practice, is because. That's why we prac-

tice: because. Because we have because. If there's no question there's no blah, blah, blah either. But we have the question... So lucky for us somebody came along with the technique about the question. Not about the answer. Answer's already there. What we're concerned with is the because.

Q: And if we were not like those people who aren't here or aren't searching, then you don't... then you don't have the problem?

VR: No. Then you sleep until you wake up. Or else you would consider that. Let's consider that the basic premise is that all beings on any sphere possess this particular mind we're talking about of enlightenment. Then, why do we have aggression and hatred and pride, jealousy... all the rest of it?

Q: It's always been my feeling that it's a, it's a thing with security. "I don't know about tomorrow... I'm only hungry this much so we need an apple to satisfy my appetite, but I don't know what's happening tomorrow." So I take three or four apples... [inaudible]

VR: That's called ignorance. Exactly the point. When we use the word ignorance we're talking about that sense of clinging to right now because I can understand this but there is tomorrow. And, actually trying to jump off the past as well, because it might be unpleasant to remember. Yeah. You got it. Now you have to rub stones together, two stones together, create a fire. Fire makes some light and light wakes up darkness. You see, we can't do it with any other means except what we have. And what we have is ignorance, and enlightenment. Those two things. We rub them together through practice of meditation. Why so? Because practice of meditation has been taught by the Tathagata, the Buddha, as the only means which does not have any kind of allegiance to either enlightenment or confusion.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Look who's here. How did you get here?

Q: Airplane.

VR: Airplane.

Q: I don't understand what you mean by "cultivating ignorance."

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: I mean is that something that we do when we practice? Or is that something that we do continually in our samsaric lives? or both? or?

VR: Well, no, it's only what we do when we practice. In the samsaric lives we don't cultivate it, we dump it. We create it and dump it in the dump, in the "refuse gardens." That's a place, when I was on retreat, they had dump. It's called "Refuse Gardens." That's what we do. We accumulate it and dump it. Then it accumulates more and dump it.

Q: Could you say a little more about cultivating it?

VR: Cultivating it is, first of all, those two points that I made. Do you remember what they were?

Q: No.

VR: Anybody? Remember I said "one," then I said "two." Anybody taking notes? Remember?

Yeah. [to different person]

Q: Well, I remember two is something about whatever occurs in your state of mind.

VR: That's two. What's one?

Q: What's one?

VR: Anybody got one? First point? Microphone in front here.

Q: That the basic ground we're working with is enlightened mind.

VR: Right. Good point. Therefore, anything that occurs in your state of mind doesn't have to be rejected or destroyed or pro and con. Therefore when you sit and practice, you can practice without any kind of threat or guilt or expectation or problem. That's the logic, right? We're to build up theory and practice. What we're talking tonight is the theory, why we're practicing at all, and how we practice. Steve? [original questioner]

Q: So, it's... seems like it's experiencing your ignorance.

VR: That's the whole point, yeah. Cultivating. Experiencing. That's the original thing I said about this lineage. That it experiences reality. Doesn't talk about it. Doesn't have to write books about it. But actually experiences it.

Q: Thanks.

Q: Does one need a teacher to cultivate ignorance?

VR: Well in the beginning one does need someone to teach you the basic technique of meditation. Definitely. Well, in this case, it's like coming in contact with just the idea that there's a possibility of achieving enlightenment. Now that idea, that... that teaching has been passed on by others up to the present day, so therefore there are teachers who teach that. But if you're just a beginner at this practice it's not necessary to think so much about a relationship with the teacher. But what is necessary is the relationship with the practice that the teacher teaches. That's the main thing. Where it goes from there we find out. What's your name?

Q: Michael.

VR: You been here before?

Q: No.

VR: Hmm. Where you from?

Q: From Northampton, Massachusetts.

VR: From Northampton. Have you practiced any kind of meditation before?

Q: Um, sort of hit and miss for over about eight years.

VR: Aha. So everything is quite prepared. [laughs]

Q: Right.

VR: Gentleman in the back. Gray on gray on black. Yes, sir.

Q: You spoke of relationship, as I understood it, between ignorance and ego. Is that correct?

VR: That's it.

Q: Would you be so kind enough to elaborate somewhat on that point?

VR: Ignorance is the, is the seed which creates what we call personality or ego which, according to most people, is the only thing we could possible survive by, if we have this personality, this ego. According to the Buddhist teaching it's that which brings continual suffering and continual rebirth, death and birth, death and birth without ever recognizing what's going on. On the other hand, what's called egolessness, without ego, is just continuous intelligence which has no stake in the matter. It doesn't have to prove itself right or wrong because it is what is. So that's the difference between the two.

Q: Thank you.

Q: You said that the reason we practice is because of the basic ground of enlightened mind.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: Isn't that usually regarded as an obstacle to one's practice, practicing with the thought of getting something out of it? Of...

VR: Uh-uh. The reason we practice is because we're motivated by our own intelligence. The reason we have a problem practicing is because we don't believe it. We don't have actual experience of that.

Q: So, it's the intelligence that recognizes suffering and... [inaudible]

VR: That's right. And not only that, it's the intelligence which is suffering, not only recognizes.

Q: Do you mean that if we didn't have that intelligence...

VR: Do you think I mean that? [both laugh]

Q: ...we wouldn't suffer?

VR: You think I mean that? No, that's not what I mean.

Q: No, I didn't think so.

VR: That's what I thought you thought.

Q: Won't you say what you did mean?

VR: Oh, about what? About the intelligence being... what?

Q: About the intelligence being the suffering.

VR: Yeah. That is that... You see, the problem is we have a split, you know. We have the suffering and those who suffer. That's why it makes it really painful for us to experience pain. Because we keep having this echo. We not only experience pain but we experience the pain of it. Split means that ignoring the fundamental sense of being which is by itself unobstructed, uncomplicated and non-conceptual. It is the essence of what is. It is intelligence. It is enlightenment. The experience of pain or suffering in the ordinary sense is the experience of pain or suffering again. You see, once is enough.

Q: More that enough.

VR: Yeah, and in fact, it's complete. We don't have to do it again. It's not necessary to do it again. We don't trust our own intelligence that what we experience is what we experience. We experience pain and we think, "Was that really pain?" So we go after it, [laughter] which is called ignorance. Ignoring what we actually felt, experienced. What we are. Hmmm?

Well, we better close down. We gotta get up... what time? Six thirty. Six thirty and we're going to start the whole practice of meditation, everybody, one hundred percent. Lot of people have heard this before. Some people haven't heard it before. Doesn't matter. As long as you have a question, sit down. Sit on the cushion. And let's cultivate the field of enlightened mind. Don't think your question is bad or good, or something that's embarrassing because you practiced so long before, or embarrassing because you just started practice. If you look around, nobody's watching. If they're watching, they're not seeing you, which is very interesting point. [laughter] So take the cue. If we're going to do this, let's do it properly. Let's have something to talk about, aside from gobbledy-goop and blah-blah-blah. As a teacher of this particular thing, seminar, ITS, I would like to teach something. So, that's up to you. You have to come up with something. Right? And I'm sure with such a fertile mind as we have here in this group, as well, we'll obviously be experienced in the first few hours of sitting meditation tomorrow that there is no problem at all.

But let's just get right down to the matter. We have actually four points which we discussed today. I would like to go over them, briefly, for you. And that is: number one is that cultivation of enlightened mind is based on the ground—that enlightened mind is our intrinsic state of being. The second... second point is that cultivating means the removal of ignoring that state of mind. And that ignorance itself, that ignoring quality, is what we call ego, or ignorance, ego being the same thing. And third point is that the cultivating process is applying meditation practice to ignorance or to ego, and the result being the absence of ignorance or the realization of one's basic state of mind. Those are the points we have to begin with. So, go ahead then, and thank you all so much.

See you tomorrow.