Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin

Cultivation Of Enlightened Mind
Talk 3

Karmê Chöling, Barnet, Vermont

December 10, 1978

Audio filename (on vajraregent.org Timeline): VROT_1978_12_10_CultEnMind3sm.mp3

Transcript filename: VROT_1978_12_10_CultEnMind3_edz.pdf

Transcribed by Machine December 24, 2025

Checked by Ed Zaron December 26, 2025

Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin: We are discussing the second aspect or quality of the enlightened state of mind, that being expansiveness, accompanied by joy and compassion.

In terms of the meditator or the practitioner, experiencing a basic trust in one's own state of mind brings about a sense of confidence and peacefulness. And that is like recovering from an illness in a certain way, not being swayed by the round of thoughts and not being confused by definitions and concepts about the world and oneself.

That kind of trust has its own obstacle. And that is, we begin to develop some kind of insular quality, which is a further uncovering of fear—we could say a deeper level of fear. At the same time, we could say that it's a more accessible manifestation of fear. That is to say, having felt good about oneself and having recognized the primary ground of enlightened mind, there is the tendency to want to stick to it and not go further. The practitioner becomes attached to his or her own experience, and that is the first obstacle to expansive mind, being attached to one's experience of peacefulness or trust. Feeling attached to that, the practitioner tries to guard his or her involvement with the teachings and with his practice or her practice.

And that guardedness, or being guarded, is kind of trying to make security out of a meditation experience. Fortunately, we continue on our path, and in doing so, we come in contact with further teaching which talks about the absence of security, talks about openness. But at that point the practitioner would rather stay guarded, even to the point where one's own insight into the nature of the teachings is regarded as a personal matter, a personal possession, which in itself produces a condition of the absence of humor.

The practitioner who is feeling freed from insanity tries to fortify that condition. And by doing so, the absence of humor is manifest in lifestyle, the way the practitioner talks, walks, eats, sits, and all the rest of it. There's almost a feeling of granite. But not granite that's solid, it's porous somehow, and also quite obvious to others who have been there before, practiced in that way, which is a kind of desperation of trying to hold on to the experience of meditation. It's further not trusting in one's basic state of mind. Having felt good about oneself—that it's possible actually to be simply as you are—the distrust comes in, in relationship to having that experience change in any way. And further, that actually becomes a kind of miserly attitude, stingy, ungenerous. At that point, the practitioner isn't willing to take part in the mutual joke. Something humorous might happen, or seemingly silly, but the practitioner at that point considers that to be completely off the wall, off the

point, and begins to develop, again, kind of a pulling-in quality, so as to cut off others as a threat to one's own sanity. The idea being at that point that, "I achieved myself what had to be done and it's up to the rest of you to go ahead and do it. And please don't bother me." And that, "please don't bother me," is not simply a matter of imposition alone, but it's a matter of, "if you bother me, what I have might disappear," which is a threat.

So we have being attached to one's meditation experience, therefore guarding it, which cuts out any chance of humor and which is basically ungenerous. Now bringing in this idea of not being generous at this point is a further sense of awakening to what we talked about originally as enlightened mind. Being generous means that there's no need to rely on cause and effect in order to produce enlightenment. Going back to the very beginning, that enlightened mind by itself is completely awake, utterly awake, and was never anything but awake, so therefore it would be naturally generous.

At this point, in terms of the practice of meditation, we have already experienced the vividness of our own mind. We also have experienced the sequential quality, in other words, how confusion manifests itself. And we have seen that sense of transparency in all cases. But if we continue to practice, what happens is, is that our confirmations about dharma—the nature of the teachings and the nature of ourselves—begin to come apart in terms of reality. We begin to see for the first time that our basis for being a meditator, a practitioner on the path, is in fact extremely suspect, shaky at best. Why is this so? It is so simply because once we have confirmed what appears to be true, then what further is there for us to do? And yet there still remains uncertainty.

So we begin to feel that maybe we haven't actually understood the whole truth yet. And that not understanding of the whole truth starts to erode the regimen of our practice, the faithfulness and the stupidity of our practice which we began with. Having further doubt is unthinkable, and yet it occurs.

What is that further doubt? It is at this point, the sense of, well, the experience of, emotional texture. We have, first, ourselves as meditator, and meditation practice, and we try to join those two, combine those two into discipline, which is unwavering. But then we begin to have texture about not only who's practicing and what's being practiced, but further than that, about the reality of the whole project. At that point, the descriptions that we've been used to start to become meaningless—our confirmations of the description starts to become meaningless—and we begin to feel a sense of being lost. We begin to feel that—have the sneaking suspicion that—nothing and no one can actually stop or ward off or dam up the amount of emotion that is beginning to occur. The river of practice is rising and rising to the point that it becomes unmanageable.

At this point, it is necessary to go further in terms of the practice of sitting meditation. And going further in this case is acknowledging the transparency of practice itself. One does that by actually becoming a skeleton of a practitioner. That is, the certainty of meditation practice and the uncertainty of meditation practice are acknowledged completely as the breath goes out, dissolves into space.

Now again, let me remind everybody that these kinds of descriptions are simply meant as signposts to one's own experience. But if we follow the logic and follow the path very faithfully, we actually begin to see these things happening.

So that kind of skeleton approach occurs when we start to actually practice without intent. In other

words, sanity is not the goal at this point. The goal or the stuff of practice at this point is simply whether or not we actually exist or don't exist. And that thread or skeleton or outline of ourselves is completely involved with meditation practice, and at this point the practitioner actually has tremendous resistance to sitting at all. At this point there is no good word or new dharma that can motivate any of us to continue. So then what is it? It is simply that sense of being so involved that we have no way out. And also, that "no way out" is the clue to further awakening of enlightened mind.

So here what we're talking about is actually pressing discipline, pressing discipline. By pressing discipline we are squeezing any sense of self that exists in our personal relationship to the teachings and to ourselves, and further than that, to our experience outside the meditation hall. By doing so, by continuing in that way, without any hope, we begin to experience the actual nature of enlightened mind. And that nature of enlightened mind has been described as being shunya or empty. Empty of all concept. Empty of any particular reference point whatsoever, hope or fear, meditation or experience of meditation. The experience of shunyata is the actual birth of the practitioner as a future Buddha, and also the awakening, igniting of the insight or the knowledge, actually, of how to continue. Experience of shunyata levels the entire city of conceptualization to the ground, which makes the process of continuing on the path completely new and without any kind of foundation.

This experience of no foundation whatsoever is our closest link to original enlightenment. How we experience this shunyata has been wondered about for ages by practitioners everywhere. And I don't think it would be amiss to say that I couldn't possibly tell you how you can experience shunyata. That experience of shunyata itself is the negation of description. When two things meet, in this case, one's desperation and one's aspiration, meet in a tremendous force, in a moment there is no definition. That experience has been described as a flash, or gap, or beyond concept, having no reference point, having no seed of karma, not being aligned to this or that—we could go on and on. What it is, basically, is one's own confirmation of one's own ignorance, really, truly. So much so that we cannot generate further material.

This actually is not only experience but practice as well. When one practices sitting meditation from the point of view of just a bare outline, that outline, as the breath actually goes out into space, it creates an outline of space at the same time. And one is not particularly sure, at that point, which is the inside and which is the outside. Continuing along in that way, without wavering, which is the basic meditation practice that we have already established, technique falls away at a certain point and there is no further possibility of advancing oneself as a meditator. That is not to say that this experience is a once and for all thing. It is the outcome of continued practice, and it may be experienced in glimpses by all of us at any time.

But the whole point of practice again—in this case of continuing to chip away, to sculpt our ignorance into the fashion of the Buddha—when we have actually sculpted the Buddha for the first time, we recognize shunyata. And that may become blurry again. Because we have established the practice of shamatha and vipashyana and mahavipashyana, which is the outline—we talked about that outline, that is called mahavipashyana—therefore we can experience shunyata. Therefore shunyata returns itself to shamatha, vipashyana, and mahavipashyana again. So those of you who are thinking that when you experience shunyata that's the end of your problem, well that's not quite so. We could say that the experience of shunyata is the beginning of illumination of shamatha, vipashyana, and mahavipashyana.

So what happens then when we actually do experience that sense of no ground completely? We begin actually to recognize buddha nature as not separate from ourselves, enlightened mind is not separate from ourselves.

And there are several results we could talk about, and the first being the sense of energy... actually no... first being kindness, sense of kindness, which is the beginning of having a mind which is joyful. Once we actually experience personally that there is no primary cause and no reference point whatsoever, then who is the enemy and what are we fighting for? Recognizing that in a flash, one begins to feel tremendous sympathy for everybody who is struggling so hard just to maintain a dream. We begin to feel extremely kind toward other people—and we could care less if they were practitioners or not, which we would normally care about, previous to that experience—a sense of kindness to all things, all beings, that are experiencing pain and struggle, because we ourselves have had some recognition that that pain and struggle is extremely useless, and not only useless, it's self-perpetuating. So we begin to feel kind. Feeling kind, we recognize that our mind is starting to expand to include more than just ourselves, more than just ourselves is again textural in the sense of the world, the world becomes more joyous that it has not only a vividness of perception, but vividness of relationship as well. It's not just orange column, but orange column with the people sitting around it, and the whole feeling in the room, whether that feeling is pain or pleasure is not important, but there's a general sense of sympathy and connectedness to that which is.

And energy, second category, comes from being joyful. Recognizing the groundlessness of one's own mind, there's no need to try to crank up who we are, to try and fabricate and try to be victorious, win over our friends and make our project successful. We don't have to crank it up to do that. We begin to recognize that energy itself—or feeling of exertion, doing—is only hampered by that believing in some kind of myth of reality. Experiencing shunyata, in this case, the myth is disintegrated, so we have no place to draw our energy from, which actually frees up completely that sense of being awake and alive and doing things, because there's no reason at all.

Further than that, we begin to develop appreciation, sense of artfulness in our living. Since there's no basic cause, we begin to appreciate the finest detail, not in the sense of noting the finest detail as in fact we did previously in our previous practice of shamatha-vipashyana. In this case of appreciating, the is-ness or the not-is-ness of an orange pillar—even the roundness and the smoothness—has a sense of exquisite placement. We begin to see the world in terms of a work of art, not crude at all, not even threatening at all, but in fact beautifully placed lock of hair. We even don't get angry at garbage at that point. We can actually see garbage in reality and have some sense of appreciation even of that. That garbage is absolutely part of it. At the same time, garbage has no reality in itself, in terms of if you're a pro-garbage person or anti-garbage person, that's not important.

Then we have a sense of appreciation turning into a sense of personal presence, and, that is, one begins to actually radiate, radiate fullness and being there. Because there's continuous energy and there's generosity and appreciation, there's presence individually. We start to actually manifest enlightened mind. You see, the background and the foreground start to merge in terms of one's practice, in terms of one's person. As long as you spent in the mirror, you spend with others. As long as you spent making sure that everything was okay, in this case you have some sense of surety, some sense of surety based on no problem that things are okay. You have a presence because you don't have to check back. You might do a quick look-see, but even that produces humor. You look in the mirror, and it looks good or it doesn't look so good, but that produces humor

anyway. Also that presence is the manifestation of not being depressed. Being depressed is kind of like deflating the bag and puffing it up again and continually going through that process. Good practice, bad practice. Good realization, bad realization. Good day, bad day. Not being depressed has no reference point, in the sense that we can only be depressed if we involve ourselves with the thingness. And the thingness means, in this case, having some sense of a possession of one thing or another, whether it's emotion or material thing or relationship or whatnot.

So not being depressed and the sense of presence go together, which bring about vision. That is, we begin to see that there's no end to it, that who we are and what the world is is vast and deep, has no beginning and no end. Since it has no reason to be, it is endless, fathomless, total, very deep. Vision means recognizing that there is no project in reality.

That begins to give birth to the third aspect which we call compassion. When there is no project at all but just continuous depth and breadth of space, which is one's own mind, then we can't be short or long tempered. There is nothing in it. We cannot gain, we cannot lose. And we begin to see that the world from beginningless time has always been exactly like this. Therefore we start to feel such an overwhelming commitment to everyone who does not understand this, that what there is of a Buddha's teaching starts to emanate from us. And we lastly develop the quality of being inspiring to others. What do we inspire? We inspire that very same path that we took ourselves.

Well, we could go on and on with this. Maybe we should have some questions.

QUESTIONS

Vajra Regent: Mr. Wagonner?

Question: I have two questions. I mean, I thought this was a fascinating description, and I wondered if it was written down anywhere else in this particular set of categories, where you found it, because I hadn't heard it before. [laughter] Okay. And the second one is, how does no project relate to the innumerable and incessant projects that living in Vajradattu environment...

VR: Well, that's the connection with energy, you see. What's the motivation to do anything at that point, if there's no project? It's because whatever occurs to us at this point is some kind of joyous manifestation of things and people and places, which is also artful, which is also very generous.

Q: Right. It's based on a sense of manifestation at that point.

VR: That's right.

Q: And then sort of the...

VR: Well, we could say it's based on the sense of things being apparent.

Q: You have to wash the dishes. The dishes are obviously dirty. You wash them, and then it's time for the next cup of tea and so on. I mean, it sort of goes on that way.

VR: Well, a little more than that. I think it's a question of the fact that the dishes are there, and we have to wash them is really not important. It's the who's washing them and how they're washing them and how you feel about that and the whole thing that goes on there.

Q: Yeah, it gets pretty baroque.

VR: Well it's very...

Q: What I mean is, because of shunyata it seems that you could actually get more and more involved in those little details, whether it's appreciation, or who's doing what, or politics, all this stuff. It becomes almost endlessly interpenetrating little projects at that point. I mean, there's a question I have about maintaining some sense of perspective, which is the vision you spoke of in the midst of all those.

VR: Right. What? What's the question?

Q: How do you... ?

VR: You don't. You couldn't.

Q: Thank you.

Q: When you talk about doubt, which I've been feeling a tremendous amount of...

VR: Where?

Q: In my guts. I'm feeling doubt, like, for the first time. And it's when you were talking about doubt, what came up was this tremendous amount of resentment—especially when you were talking about shunyata—of tremendous anger. And how does that relate to inspiration?

VR: That's the outline. Extend it out, the same way you did originally. Now just extend it out with that kind of fine anger.

Q: But then why do you continue to be inspired to practice? You still do it anyway.

VR: Right.

Q: Why? Or does it matter?

VR: You tell me.

Q: Well, I know it doesn't matter. To tell you the truth, because you just do it.

VR: Really?

Q: You do.

VR: And it doesn't matter.

Q: Well, it matters in the sense that it's... there's intelligence there.

VR: What is that intelligence?

Q: To make it real.

VR: Guts. Same guts, same intelligence. Fine line out into space. Go ahead. Sit that way.

Q: I wish I could.

VR: Wish you could.

Q: I want to.

VR: Go ahead.

Q: I will.

VR: Michael.

Q: Well, I was hoping you could say something about where the commitment to other sentient beings comes from, because I do feel an incredible sense of futility about that; although, I feel the warmth, too, that would cause you to be committed.

VR: Well, it depends on your particular involvement in the practice. Basically, commitment to sentient beings comes from the fact that you begin to realize that sentient beings have no solidity, the fact that there aren't any sentient beings.

Q: Sorry, there are no sentient beings? [laughter]

VR: I didn't say that. [laughter]

Q: You just said that.

VR: I did?

Q: I'm not sure what you said.

VR: Well, you have to just keep practicing. You can't put the cart before the horse. One's commitment to sentient beings is a completely 100% outcome of practice. It is not strategized in the least. There's no way you could commit yourself to sentient beings when you feel as rotten as they do. When you begin to feel their whole rottenness, then that rottenness begins to dissolve, which is the same thing as one's own mind beginning to dissolve. You see, when we start to look at sentient beings, we look at individual sentient beings but that's not the point. There's an endless sea of sentient beings, an endless mess.

Q: Well, that's why I feel so futile about attempting anything in these directions.

VR: Right. Well that's fine. At the same time, you have something pushing you. Everybody feels uncomfortable about that. [Laughs] So how? Here's how.

Q: Why do we feel boredom and restlessness at the same time in meditation practice?

VR: Well, it's hearing the skeletons and bones, it's beginning to rattle, that who we are is really in question.

Q: Who we are is the restlessness?

VR: No, who we are is the question. The restlessness and all the rest of it is the experience of who we are. Get it?

Q: Not yet.

VR: Think about that. Okay?

VR: Skipper.

Q: I have two questions.

VR: All right.

Q: First one: does enlightened mind know any form of fear?

VR: No. It doesn't know any form. [laughter]

Q: Does it know any fear?

VR: Well that's saying the same thing. Fear and form are the same thing, according to ignorance.

You see, when something is born it has form, which is the beginning of some sense of separation, which is fear.

Q: Perhaps that leads to my other question. Where does "I awareness" go when asleep without dreams?

VR: Well, that's a complicated question. It goes back into consciousness, which is a diffused I, but it's still I. It's not I as a kind of formed, completely formed entity, but it's I as kind of like smoke in a room. But still I.

Q: I notice that question really doesn't bother my sleep any. I still sleep fine.

VR: Well [laughs], it depends on who's sleeping, you know. When it bothers your sleep, then you're awake and not sleeping well, and when it doesn't, then you're asleep. Still there's I, sleep or awake.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Once you experience enlightenment, is it accessible to you all the time or do you have to keep shooting up with meditation? [laughter]

VR: Well, I think you have to keep shooting up with enlightenment. In other words, you might experience what we described as enlightened mind in a flash, occasion, but our whole point here is to stabilize that. Stabilize means that the experience of enlightened mind starts to dissolve. Experience is still that sense of a phenomenal thing, something which happens to one, even if it doesn't.

Q: Can you kind of turn it on and off?

VR: Who?

Q: No, enlightened mind.

VR: Who? Can who turn it on and off?

Q: The perceiver.

VR: You didn't catch yourself in a Buddhist logic trap? Is the perceiver different than the perceived?

Q: At moment of perception, no.

VR: Who's turning then?

Q: Pardon?

VR: Who's turning?

Q: I don't understand.

VR: Who's turning on or off? Is the perceiver turning it on or the perception?

Q: When the perception is there and the perceiver perceives that perception...

VR: Well you say, "when the perception is there, when the perception is there, the perceiver is here."

Q: ... and the perceiver perceives that perception...

VR: Well, which is there first?

Q: Well it's not realized until the two come together.

VR: Really?

Q: My experience. No, well, what I'm saying is, yes, I think I have saw the flash once or twice.

VR: Well, keep grinding it out then.

Q: Okay. Well does it get into a steady state?

VR: Who knows?

Q: You know we don't.

VR: Hello Norman.

Q: Hello sir.

VR: Nice to see you again.

Q: A delight.

VR: What do you have on your mind? [laughter]

Q: It used to be said that A-bombs blew everything all over everywhere, and B-bombs blew everything all over nowhere.

VR: B-bombs, we have B-bombs?

Q: B-bombs, yeah. I wouldn't speak about H-bombs. Would you say a little more about the spaciousness, which comes from the liberated mind, some sort of extraordinarily ordinary quality of experience?

VR: Yeah, it's great. Joyful. Compassionate.

Q: Somehow, just to say that it's...

VR: Hurts like hell. Feels good like heaven. It's very complicated. But has no characteristics at all. Tastes good, but leaves an aftertaste. Has no color, but is clearly defined. What else do you want me to say?

Q: Hasn't it illogic?

VR: Has no logic, therefore it's completely logical.

Q: It couldn't be other than...

VR: It is. [laughter, laughs]

Q: So what.

VR: It's always nice to see you again, Norman.

Q: Definitely.

VR: Okay. Last shot at it. There you go.

Q: I got lost in the background foreground coming together. I mean, I've probably been there for a long time, but no. I mean, what you said. I'm lost in my notes right now. Could you say something

more about that, please?

VR: Yeah, I think it's basically one's own experience of meditation and one's experience of the world when they start actually coming together. It's that when you're sitting in practice, the background and the foreground start becoming a fine line because neither is confirmed by the other.

Q: Which is which? I don't know.

VR: That's what I mean. Neither is confirmed by the other. You can't actually say, this is the meditator, this is the meditation, this is the result. Okay? You can't quite say. You find yourself there, somehow. Same thing with life. That extends all over the place in your experience. You can't quite say if the lunch, the biscuit, the blueberries on the top of it, and muffin around it, even the butter that you put on it, has a beginning or end. Somewhere. In your experience, you can't quite say, "this was the best lunch I've had," "the worst," you can't even say, "this was blah."

Q: Well, you don't just stop talking. I mean, you're here.

VR: Maybe you do.

Q: Maybe you do?

VR: Maybe you do.

Q: There's no script.

VR: Who knows?

Q: So who knows? Well, I don't.

VR: Thank you very much.

Q: You're quite welcome, and I'll be glad to say that to you anytime.

VR: Well, ladies and gentlemen, basically don't try and sort it out. That's not it. Don't try and sort it out according to your idea of what should be. Basically what we have said, it's a matter of experience, should be experienced as such, can be experienced as such, doesn't need to be, in any way, made up.

So tomorrow is nyinthun day. Sit steadfastly, with a sense of openness.

If you're not so good at it, don't be angry. If you're angry, don't be so good at it. [laughter]