

The Open Way

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR by now that in order to find the open way we must first experience self-deception as it is, exposing ourselves completely. We may even be hesitant to consider such a hopeful subject as the open way, because we are so wary of our ambition. But our caution is a sign that we are ready to think about it. In fact, hesitation at this point could be another form of self-deception: ignoring the teachings with the rationale of trying to be perfect and extremely careful.

The approach to the open way lies in the experience of exposing oneself—an experience we discussed in the lecture “Initiation”—opening oneself to life, being what you are, presenting your positive and negative qualities to your spiritual friend, and working your way through. Then having presented yourself, having experienced initiation, the meeting of the two minds, you might tend to evaluate your credentials. You have experienced such an extraordinary incident; you were able to open, and your spiritual friend opened, and you met both yourself and your spiritual friend in the same moment. It was exciting, beautiful.

The problem lies in the fact that we are always trying to secure ourselves, reassure ourselves that we are all right. We are constantly looking for something solid to hang on to. The “miraculous” situation of the meeting of the two minds is such a fantastic experience that it seems to confirm our expectation of miracles and magic.

So the next step on the path of self-deception is the desire to see miracles. We have read many books describing the lives of great yogis and swamis, saints and avatars. And all these seem to speak of extraordinary miracles. Either someone walked through a wall or someone turned the world upside down—all these miracles. You would like to prove to

yourself that such miracles do exist, because you would like to be sure that you are on the side of the guru, the side of the doctrine, the side of the miracles, sure that what you are doing is safe and powerful, sensational in fact, sure that you are on the side of the “goodies.” You would like to be one of those few people who have done something fantastic, extraordinary, super-extraordinary, one of the people who turned the world upside down: “I actually thought that I was standing on the floor, but I found myself standing on the ceiling!” The sudden flash of the meeting with the spiritual friend, the meeting of the two minds, is definitely real, a genuine experience, quite sensational, a miracle in fact. Perhaps we are not quite *absolutely* sure, but certainly such a miracle must mean that we are on to something, that we have found the true way at last.

Such intense attempts to prove to ourselves that what we are doing is right indicate a very introverted state of mind; one is very aware of oneself and the state of one’s being. We feel that we are a minority and that we are doing something very extraordinary, that we are different from everyone else. This sort of attempt to prove our own uniqueness is just an attempt to validate our self-deception. “Of course I experienced something extraordinary; of course I saw the miracle; of course I had the insight; therefore I am going on.” Which is a very closed-in, introverted situation. We have no time to relate to anyone else, our friends or relatives, the outside world. We are concerned only with ourselves.)

Eventually this approach becomes tedious and stale. We begin to realize that we have been deceiving ourselves and we begin to move closer to the genuine open way. We begin to suspect that all our beliefs are hallucinatory, that we have distorted our experience by evaluating it. Then, I had a flash of instant enlightenment, but at the same time I tried to possess it, grasp it, and it went away.” We begin to discover that self-deception does not work at all, that it is simply trying to comfort oneself, trying to contact oneself inwardly, trying to prove something to oneself rather than really being open. At this point one might begin to punish oneself saying, “If I am trying not to deceive myself, then that is another kind of self-deception; and if I try to avoid doing that, then that is self-deception too. How can I possibly free myself? And if I am trying to free myself, then that is another form of self-deception as well,” and so the chain reaction goes on and on and on, the chain reaction of overlapping paranoias.

Having discovered self-deception, we suffer from tremendous paranoia and self-criticism, which is helpful. It is good to experience the hopelessness of ambition, of trying to be open, of trying to cheer ourselves up, because this prepares the ground for another type of attitude toward spirituality. The whole point we are trying to get to is—when are we going to open, *really*? The action of our mind is so overlapping, an ingrown toenail, introverted: If I do this, then that is going to happen; if I do that, then this is going to happen. How can I escape the self-deception? I recognize it, I see it, but how am I going to get out of it?

I am afraid each of us has to go through this individually. I am not giving a guided tour to enlightenment. I do not guarantee anything. But I am just suggesting that perhaps there is something wrong with this approach.

Perhaps we do feel that something is wrong with this approach and we seek advice from our guru.

"I am completely convinced that this path is right for me, of course—we do not even have to discuss that. But something seems to be wrong. I have worked and worked on myself, and yet I find myself involved in a chain reaction of overlapping defeats."

"Okay then, what next?"

"Well, I am too busy to do anything else because I am so obsessed with all this."

"Okay, relax yourself."

"What can I do? Haven't you got any suggestions?"

"I am afraid I cannot give you an immediate solution to your problem. I have to know what is actually wrong with you, to start with. That is what all professional people would say. If there is something wrong with your television set, you do not immediately plug in a new tube. First you must examine the entire set. Which part does not function? Which tubes do not work?"

"Well, there doesn't seem to be anything wrong exactly. But the minute I try to touch on the subject it just goes berserk, it doesn't click anymore. When I try to do something to correct it, I get no results at all. Something seems to be fused."

"Big problem."

"You see, each time I try to work my way out, as you and other gurus told me to do, I try and try and try but there doesn't seem to be an end to the problem at all. Things keep going wrong all the time. If I start

practicing asanas, pranayama, zazen, anything, much as I try to do it correctly, still the same familiar problems come back again and again and again. I have great faith in these doctrines, teachings, methods—of course I do. I love the teachers. I love the methods, I really do. I have complete faith in them. I know that a lot of people turn out beautifully as a result of traveling the same path I am attempting, but what is wrong with me? Maybe I have bad karma, maybe I am the black sheep of the family. Could that be so? If it is so, then I will go on a pilgrimage on my knees to India, I will make any sacrifice needed. I could starve myself. I will take any vow, but I just want to get it, really get into it. What can I do? Isn't there anything else in your sacred books prescribing something appropriate for a person like me? Isn't there something appropriate for a person like me? Isn't there some medicine I can take, a sacrifice I can perform?"

"I'm not sure. Come back later tomorrow and see me. Perhaps we can find something."

That is what a spiritual friend might say: "See me again tomorrow or on the weekend. Let's talk it over but don't worry." You go again, you see him, you think that you have some tremendous problem and that he has all the answers worked out especially for you. And again he will ask:

"How are you? How are you getting on?"

"What do you mean? I was waiting for your answer. You know how I am—I'm in terrible shape!"

You become very grumpy, and quite rightly in a way. Nothing happens, as usual, and then weeks and weeks go by as you come back again and again and again. You despair, suspecting nothing will come of the whole thing, entreating the secret wish that maybe this is the time, maybe the fourth week or the fifth week or the seventh week. Seven is very symbolic, a mystic number. Time goes on: complete despair. You are about to investigate the possibility of other solutions. "Maybe if I go and see someone else," you think. "Perhaps I should return home and work with my own people; this situation is too alien to me. There seems to be no communication between him and me. He is supposed to have some kind of communication with me, but it is very disappointing, nothing happens at all." So you sit and wait. Whenever you see him, you almost immediately know what his words to you are going to be: "Go back and meditate," or "How are you? Have a cup of tea." It is the same thing, again and again.

What is wrong? In fact nothing is wrong at all, absolutely nothing. The situation is quite beautiful, as far as your spiritual friend is concerned. But this period of waiting on your part, trying to get over something, is in itself wrong, because a waiting period means so much concentration into yourself, working inward rather than working outward. There is a tendency toward centralization and there is the notion of the "big deal" involved with your psychology, your state of mind. That is what is wrong.)

Perhaps I should tell you the story of Naropa and his teacher Tilopa, the great Indian sage. Tilopa was a guru who spent twelve years with his student Naropa doing practically the same kind of thing we have been discussing here. "If you fetch me soup from that kitchen, I will teach you, I might teach you," Tilopa would say. Then Naropa would bring the soup, having endured a terrible beating at the hands of the kitchen staff and householders in order to get it. He would arrive bloody but happy, and when he had presented the soup, Tilopa would say, "I want another cup, go and fetch it." So Naropa would go and fetch the soup, returning half dead. He did this because he yearned so for the teachings. Then Tilopa would say, "Thank you, let's go somewhere else." This sort of incident occurred again and again until Naropa's sense of expectation had reached its crescendo. At just this point Tilopa took off his sandal and slapped Naropa in the face. That was the abhisheka, the highest and most profound, the greatest—you could use many more adjectives to describe it—the greatest abhisheka. The slapping of a sandal against a man's cheek and suddenly there was nothing more for Naropa to work with.

But we must not get carried away with this mystical scene. The whole point is the open path, the open way. We have thoroughly examined and experienced self-deception. We have been carrying such a heavy burden, like a tortoise carrying its shell. We have continually attempted to seal ourselves into this shell, trying actually to get into "somewhere" with such aggression and speed. We must give up all our speed and aggression, the whole demanding quality. We must develop some compassion for ourselves, and then the open way just begins.

At this point we should discuss the meaning of compassion, which is the key to and the basic atmosphere of the open way. The best and most correct way of presenting the idea of compassion is in terms of clarity, clarity which contains fundamental warmth. At this stage your mecha-

tion practice is the act of trusting in yourself. As your practice becomes more prominent in daily life activities, you begin to trust yourself and have a compassionate attitude. Compassion in this sense is not feeling sorry for someone. It is basic warmth. As much space and clarity as there is, there is that much warmth as well, some delightful feeling of positive things happening in yourself constantly. Whatever you are doing, it is not regarded as a mechanical drag in terms of self-conscious meditation, but meditation is a delightful and spontaneous thing to do. It is the continual act of making friends with yourself.

Then, having made friends with yourself, you cannot just contain that friendship within you; you must have some outlet, which is your relationship with the world. So compassion becomes a bridge to the world outside. Trust and compassion for oneself bring inspiration to dance with life, to communicate with the energies of the world. Lacking this kind of inspiration and openness, the spiritual path becomes the samasric path of desire. One remains trapped in the desire to improve oneself, the desire to achieve imagined goals. If we feel that we cannot achieve our goal, we suffer despair and the self-torture of unfulfilled ambition. On the other hand, if we feel that we are succeeding in achieving our goal, we might become self-satisfied and aggressive. "I know what I'm doing, don't touch me." We might become bloated with our knowledge, like certain "experts" we meet who know their subject thoroughly. If anyone asks questions, especially stupid or challenging questions, they get angry rather than trying to explain anything. "How could you say such a thing, how could you even dream of asking such stupid questions? Don't you see what I know?"

Or we might even succeed at some form of dualistic concentration practice and experience a kind of "mystical state." In such cases we might appear quite tranquil and religious in the conventional sense. But we would constantly have to charge up and maintain our "mystical state" and there would be a continual sense of appreciation, the repeated act of checking and indulging in our achievement. This is the typical distortion of the hinayana practice of self-contained meditation, self-enlightenment, and it is in some sense a form of aggression. There is no element of compassion and openness because one is so focused on one's own experience.

Compassion has nothing to do with achievement at all. It is spacious and very generous. When a person develops real compassion, he is un-

certain whether he is being generous to others or to himself because compassion is environmental generosity, without direction, without "for me" and without "for them." It is filled with joy, spontaneously existing joy, constant joy in the sense of trust, in the sense that joy contains tremendous wealth, richness.

We could say that compassion is the ultimate attitude of wealth: an antipoverty attitude, a war on want. It contains all sorts of heroic, juicy, positive, visionary, expansive qualities. And it implies larger scale thinking, a freer and more expansive way of relating to yourself and the world. This is precisely why the second *yana* is called the mahayana, the "great vehicle." It is the attitude that one has been born fundamentally rich rather than that one must become rich. Without this kind of confidence, meditation cannot be transferred into action at all.

Compassion automatically invites you to relate with people, because you no longer regard people as a drain on your energy. They recharge your energy, because in the process of relating with them you acknowledge your wealth, your richness. So, if you have difficult tasks to perform, such as dealing with people or life situations, you do not feel you are running out of resources. Each time you are faced with a difficult task it presents itself as a delightful opportunity to demonstrate your richness, your wealth. There is no feeling of poverty at all in this approach to life.

Compassion as the key to the open way, the mahayana, makes possible the transcendental actions of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva path starts with generosity and openness—giving and openness—the surrendering process. Openness is not a matter of giving something to someone else, but it means giving up your demand and the basic criteria of the demand. This is the *dana paramita*, the *paramita* of generosity. It is learning to trust in the fact that you do not need to secure your ground, learning to trust in your fundamental richness, that you can afford to be open. This is the open way. If you give up your psychological attitude of "demand," then basic health begins to evolve, which leads to the next act of the bodhisattva, the *shila paramita*, the *paramita* of morality or discipline.

Having opened, having given up everything without reference to the basic criteria of "I am doing this, I am doing that," without reference to oneself, then other situations connected with maintaining ego or collecting become irrelevant. That is the ultimate morality and it intensifies the

situation of openness and bravery: you are not afraid of hurting yourself or anyone else because you are completely open. You do not feel uninspired with situations, which brings patience, the *kshanti paramita*. And patience leads to energy, *virya*—the quality of delight. There is the tremendous joy of involvement, which is energy, which also brings the panoramic vision of open meditation—the experience of *dhyana*—openness. You do not regard the situation outside as separate from you because you are so involved with the dance and play of life.

Then you become even more open. You do not regard anything as being rejected or accepted; you are just going along with each situation. You experience no warfare of any kind, neither trying to defeat an enemy nor trying to achieve a goal. There is no involvement with collecting or giving. No hope or fear at all. This is the development of *prajna*, transcendent knowledge, the ability to see situations as they are.

So the main theme of the open way is that we must begin to abandon the basic struggle of ego. To be completely open, to have that kind of absolute trust in yourself is the real meaning of compassion and love. There have been so many speeches about love and peace and tranquillity in the world. But how do we really bring love into being? Christ said, "Love thy neighbor," but how do we love? How do we do it? How are we going to radiate our love to the whole of humanity, to the whole world? "Because we must, and that's the truth!" "If you don't love, you are condemned, evil; you are doing a disservice to humanity." "If you love, you are on the path, you are on the right track." But how? Many people get very romantic about love, in fact get high on it at the very word. But then there will be a gap, a period when we are not high on love. Something else takes place which is embarrassing, a private matter. We tend to seal it off; it is "private parts," shameful, not part of our divinity. Let's not think about that. Let's simply ignite another love explosion and on and on we go, trying to ignore those parts of our being we reject, trying to be virtuous, loving, kind.

Perhaps this will put off a lot of people, but I am afraid love is not really the experience of beauty and romantic joy alone. Love is associated with ugliness and pain and aggression, as well as with the beauty of the world; it is not the recreation of heaven. Love or compassion, the universal love, cosmic love, whatever you would like to call it—one must accept the whole situation of life as it is, both the light and the

dark, the good and the bad. One must open oneself to life, communicate with it. Perhaps you are fighting to develop love and peace, struggling to achieve them: "We are going to make it, we are going to spend thousands of dollars in order to broadcast the doctrine of love everywhere, we are going to proclaim love." Okay, proclaim it, do it, spend your money, but what about the speed and aggression behind what you are doing? Why do you have to push us into the acceptance of your love? Why is there such speed and force involved? If your love is moving with the same speed and drive as other people's hatred, then something appears to be wrong. It would seem to be the same as calling darkness light. There is so much ambition involved, taking the form of proselytizing. It is not an open situation of communication with things as they are. The ultimate implication of the words "peace on earth" is to remove altogether the ideas of peace and war and to open yourself equally and completely to the positive and negative aspects of the world. It is like seeing the world from an aerial point of view: there is light, there is dark; both are accepted. You are not trying to defend the light against the dark.

The action of the bodhisattva is like the moon shining on one hundred bowls of water, so that there are one hundred moons, one in each bowl. This is not the moon's design nor was it designed by anyone else. But for some strange reason there happen to be one hundred moons reflected in one hundred bowls of water. Openness means this kind of absolute trust and self-confidence. The open situation of compassion works this way rather than by deliberately attempting to create one hundred moons, one in each bowl.

The basic problem we seem to be facing is that we are too involved with trying to prove something, which is connected with paranoia and the feeling of poverty. When you are trying to prove or get something, you are not open anymore, you have to check everything, you have to arrange it "correctly." It is such a paranoid way to live and it really does not prove anything. One might set records in terms of numbers and quantities—that we have built the greatest, the biggest, we have collected the most, the longest, the most gigantic. But who is going to remember the record when you are dead? Or in one hundred years? Or in ten years? Or in ten minutes? The records that count are those of the given moment, of now—whether or not communication and openness are actually taking place now.

This is the open way, the bodhisattva path. A bodhisattva would not

care, even if he received a medal from all the Buddhas proclaiming him the bravest bodhisattva in the entire universe; he would not care at all. You never read stories of the bodhisattvas receiving medals in the sacred writings. And quite rightly so, because there is no need for them to prove anything. The bodhisattva's action is spontaneous, it is the open life, open communication which does not involve struggle or speed at all.

Q: I assume that being a bodhisattva means helping people, and people make specific demands. So a bodhisattva must perform specific acts. But how does this idea of being totally open fit in with the need to perform specific acts?

A: Being open does not mean being unresponsive, a zombie. It means being free to do whatever is called for in a given situation. Because you do not want anything from the situation, you are free to act in the way presumably appropriate to it. And, similarly, if other people want something from you, that may be their problem. You do not have to try to appropriate yourself with anyone. Openness means "being what you are," and communication arises automatically and naturally. It is like the idea of the moon and the bowls of water which we have been discussing: if the bowls are there, they will reflect your "moonness." If they are not there, they will not. Or if they are only half there, then they will reflect only half a moon. It is up to them. You are just there, the moon, open, and the bowls may reflect you or not. You neither care nor do you not care. You are just there.

Situations develop automatically. We do not need to fit ourselves into special roles and environments. I think many of us have been trying to do that for a long time, limiting ourselves, pigeonholing ourselves into narrowly defined sets of circumstances. We spend so much energy focusing our attention in just one place that to our surprise we discover that there are whole areas we have missed.

Q: Can one act with compassion and still get things done as they need to be done?

A: When there is no speed or aggression, you feel that there is room enough in which to move about and do things and you see the things which need to be done more clearly. You become more efficient and your work becomes more precise.

Q: I believe, Rinpoche, that you made a distinction between the open path and the internal path. Could you amplify what differences you see between the internal and the external?

A: Well, the word *internal*, as you are using it, seems to imply struggle, turning back into yourself, considering whether or not you are a sufficiently worthy, functional, and presentable person. In this approach there is too much "working on oneself," too much concentration inward. Whereas the open path is a matter of working purely with what is, of giving up altogether the fear that something may not work, that something may end in failure. One has to give up the paranoia that one might not fit into situations, that one might be rejected. One purely deals with life as it is.

Q: Where does the attitude of warmth come from?

A: It comes from the absence of aggression.

Q: But isn't that the goal?

A: As well as the path, the bridge. You do not live on the bridge. You walk over the bridge. In the experience of meditation there is automatically some sense of the absence of aggression, which is the definition of *dharma*. *Dharma* is defined as "dispassion" or "passionlessness," and passionlessness implies absence of aggression. If you are passionate, you want to get something quickly to satisfy your desire. When there is no desire to satisfy yourself, there is no aggression or speed. So if a person can really relate to the simplicity of the practice of meditation, then automatically there is an absence of aggression. Because there is no rush to achieve, you can afford to relax. Because you can afford to relax, you can afford to keep company with yourself, can afford to make love with yourself, be friends with yourself. Then thoughts, emotions, whatever occurs in the mind constantly accentuates the act of making friends with yourself.

Another way to put it is to say that compassion is the earthy quality of meditation practice, the feeling of earth and solidity. The message of compassionate warmth is to not be hasty and to relate to each situation as it is. The American Indian name "Sitting Bull" seems to be a perfect example of this. "Sitting Bull" is very solid and organic. You are really definitely present, resting.

Q: You seemed to say that compassion grows, but it was implied that you do not have to cultivate it.

A: It develops, grows, ferments by itself. It does not need any effort.

Q: Does it die?

A: It does not seem to die. Shantideva says that every uncompassionate action is like planting a dead tree, but anything related to compassion is like planting a living tree. It grows and grows endlessly and never dies. Even if it seems to die, it always leaves behind a seed from which another grows. Compassion is organic; it continues on and on and on.

Q: There is a certain kind of warmth that comes when you start to relate with someone, and then somehow that energy becomes overwhelming and catches you up in such a way that there is no longer any space or room to move.

A: If the warmth is without implication and self-reassurance, then it is self-sustaining and fundamentally healthy. When you make yogurt, if you raise the temperature or try to nurse the yogurt more than necessary, you do not make good yogurt at all. If you leave it at the right temperature and just abandon it, it will be good yogurt.

Q: How do you know when to abandon it?

A: You do not constantly have to manage yourself. You must disown rather than attempt to maintain control, trust yourself rather than check yourself. The more you try to check yourself, the greater the possibility of interrupting the natural play and growth of the situation. Even if what you are doing is chancy, even if it seems possible that the whole affair will blow up and become distorted, you do not worry about it.

Q: What happens when someone creates a situation and you do worry about it?

A: Worrying does not help at all. In fact it makes things worse.

Q: It seems the process we are talking about requires some sort of fearlessness.

A: Yes, very much so. It is positive thinking, the mentality of wealth.

Q: What if you feel the necessity for a violent act in order ultimately to do good for a person?

A: You just do it.

Q: But if you are not at that point of true compassion and wisdom?

A: You do not question or worry about your wisdom. You just do whatever is required. The situation you are facing is itself profound enough to be regarded as knowledge. You do not need secondary resources of information. You do not need reinforcement or guidelines for action. Reinforcement is provided by the situation automatically. When things must be conducted in a tough manner, you just do it because the situation demands your response. You do not impose toughness; you are an instrument of the situation.

Q: What do you do for a bridge when you don't feel compassionate?

A: You do not have to feel compassion. That is the distinction between emotional compassion and *compassion* compassion: you do not necessarily feel it; you are it. Usually, if you are open, compassion happens because you are not preoccupied with some kind of self-indulgence.)

Q: Does the bridge of compassion require continual maintenance?

A: I do not think so. It requires acknowledgment rather than maintenance. That is the mentality of wealth; that you acknowledge that the bridge is there.

Q: What do you do when you are afraid of someone, perhaps with reason? For me, this destroys compassion.

A: Compassion is not looking down upon somebody who needs help, who needs care, but it is general, basic, organic, positive thinking. The fear of someone else seems to generate uncertainty as to who you are. That is why you are afraid of that particular situation or person. Fear comes from uncertainty. If you know exactly how you are going to handle this frightful situation, then you have no fear. Fear comes from panic, the bewilderment of uncertainty. Uncertainty is related to distrust in yourself, feeling that you are inadequate to deal with that mysterious problem which is threatening you. There is no fear if you really have a compassionate relationship with yourself, because then you know what you are doing. If you know what you are doing, then your projections also become methodical or predictable, in some sense. Then one develops prajna, knowledge of how to relate to any given situation.

Q: What do you mean by projections in this context?

A: Projection is the mirror reflection of yourself. Because you are uncertain about yourself, the world reflects that uncertainty back to you and the reflection begins to haunt you. Your uncertainty is haunting you, but it is merely your reflection in the mirror.

Q: What do you mean by saying that, if you are compassionate toward yourself, then you know what you are doing?

A: These two aspects of meditation always appear simultaneously. If you are opening to yourself and have a positive attitude toward yourself, then automatically you know what you are doing because you are not a mystery to yourself. This is jnana, "wisdom," "spontaneously-existing-awareness-wisdom." You know that you are spontaneously existing; you know what you are, therefore you can afford to trust yourself at the same time.

Q: If I really were to make friends with myself, then I wouldn't be afraid of making mistakes all the time?

A: That's it. The Tibetan word for wisdom is *yeshe*, which means "primordial intelligence." You are yourself at the beginning of any beginning. You could almost call it "unoriginated trust in yourself." You do not have to find the beginning at all. It is a primordial situation, so there is no point in trying to logically find the beginning. It is already. It is beginningless.