

The Complete Teachings of Mahayana

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## Talk 1: Hinayana and Mahayana

The subject that we are going to be involved with is mahayana buddhism. It seems we need some kind of footing in the difference between hinayana and mahayana to clarify the basic pattern. What we're going to discuss is spirituality in terms of a discipline and how to exercise that discipline in day-to-day life situations. This is quite different from purely discussing religious theory. I would like to make that quite clear: we are discussing experience which involves a purely spiritual approach rather than a religious one. The reason that is so is that our basic ego or confused neurosis would prefer to find new crutches to support our existence. We do this by latching onto particular ideas which tend to enrich the ego's feeling of self-existence. Both hinayana and mahayana represent a process of cutting through that basic tendency of ego, which is called spiritual materialism.

From whatever angle we might approach it, still it is the same thing. The approach is not based on becoming higher, greater, better persons as such, but the approach is to discover the tendencies towards being awake which exist within us. It is an uncovering process rather than a venturing out as such. We have to realize the different techniques that might be involved, such as the hinayana or the mahayana, but those are different techniques rather than entirely different backgrounds. In the hinayana approach there is a sense of working with the basic characteristics of neurosis. This is a way of cutting down the unnecessary chaos that arises from ego's mentality. It could be called a narrow-minded approach in the sense that it makes no allowances for any entertainment or therapy. So it is a direct and definite, stubborn approach: no therapy, no kind of entertainment of ego-oriented style is permitted at all.

The general approach of hinayana takes the narrow path in order to develop an understanding of the open path, the open way. The narrow path involves experiencing that life is dwelling in pain, growing up in pain, experiencing pain. The whole process of life is wrapped up in pain because the basic tendency of ego is to yearn so much towards pleasure. By doing so we try to ward off pain and the notion of pain. But yearning towards pleasure means that the notion of pain gets a lot of attention. Consequently, the pain is increased because it is being fiddled with so much, so to speak, teased so much. It's like scratching a wound—by doing so you get it more infected. So the hinayana way is to realize that situation and to accept the fact that you have a wound but you don't have to scratch it even if it might itch. Relate with your wound, that you have a wound. Accept part of your bodily chaos, irritations, whatever. It's accepting the life situation.

We just had a seminar on the meaning of death and pain which still seems to be relevant. We can't really build the fortress of mahayana without a good foundation. It seems important to know that the life situation is so much to the point. On the one hand we might say that the life situation is very complicated, chaotic. It's difficult to keep up with all the problems that we go through. On the other hand, the life situation is extremely simple. It can be simplified into one phrase: ego pain. Unless we realize the narrowness of life—narrow in this case meaning that we can't escape from those basic things, ego or the pain—we can't have the greater vision of mahayana, the great vehicle, at all. We have to start from one atom, one basic point, which acts as a catalyst for the larger world. Existence is based on the continual birth and death of pain, and ego tries to make that process continuous and hang on to it.

Someone told me that ten years ago he read a book on buddhism and found it extremely depressing. He said to himself, "Who wants to get into this?" and instead joined the love-and-light path. Somehow he found himself saying that again, which brought him back to the basic

meaning of pain. Sooner or later we have to realize life is very simple, extremely simple. Life consists of the notion of escape, trying to avoid pain, and the notion of giving one's existence an identity, trying to increase ego. In order to understand mahayana and its ideals, we also have to understand matter-of-fact situations. Mahayana is the inspiration of the open way, allegiance to the Buddha. But hinayana is allegiance to samsara, associating yourself with samsara and relating with the samsaric process by way of renunciation. In other words, buddha cannot exist without samsara; nirvana cannot exist without samsara; being awake cannot exist without being asleep, and so forth.

At the beginning we have to realize that the view of life which consists of erroneous beliefs of all kinds led us to this point, to our search for the teaching—which could be an erroneous belief as well. We are here because we made lots of mistakes, piles and piles of mistakes. That we happen in fact to be here discussing this matter together is a result, you could say, of the right mistake or the wrong mistake. But still it's an accident which happens to be bringing us together in this life situation, discussing the whole question of spirituality. From that point of view, spirituality is experiencing the narrowness of the life situation. We don't have any areas to escape to, any areas in which to improvise anymore. It's like birth—we can only come out of one channel, out of a mother's womb—there's no way of improvising.

Having realized that situation fully and completely, having worked on the discipline of relating with pain, impermanence and so forth, then we might have a new area to explore which is that life is not as grim as it seems, but there's a spark of light happening here and there. The very fact that you are agitated by your life is a spark of intelligence which implies hope, hope for enlightenment. The fact that you are dissatisfied with your life is the message of mahayana coming through.

In traditional language, that kind of intelligence is referred to as bodhicitta, which means the heart of enlightenment, the seed of enlightenment, which is always there. Instead of constantly cutting ourselves down, condemning ourselves, purely seeing the negative aspect of life situations, we come to another conclusion, which is that we are already awake. We have tathagatagarbha, which means the essence of enlightened mind, in us, buddha-mind in us. The good news. But seemingly you can't create good news without bad news to begin with, so the hinayana approach deliberately creates the bad news that you're trapped, that you are hopeless, helpless, that the meaning of life is pain. The mahayana approach, the good news, is that maybe life is pain, and you're imprisoned in samsara, but how do you know that? If you know that, if you have some notion of discovering that, maybe there is something in you which is actually able to see that, which is good news. So from that point of view, hinayana and mahayana are reciprocal. The mahayana approach is based on a sense of self-respect, a sense of openness or hope, and the hinayana approach is based on a sense of hopelessness or narrowness, a sense that there is no other way, there are no alternatives--which is equally important.

This notion of buddha-nature, embryonic enlightenment, is one of the dominant inspirations. It is embryonic because it is still looked at with suspicion—it may not happen. It is still conditioned by the hope of becoming solid. But also buddha-nature is very pragmatic. In order to acknowledge such an embryonic situation your first have to work at awakening it. Contemplating or theorizing alone doesn't help at all. It takes a tremendous energy boost to exercise you, to make you realize you are already awake. Maybe you are half asleep, but still you have to be awakened and have to acknowledge your buddha-nature as if you were completely awake. That is trusting in the heart—believing you could relate with yourself in spite

of your imprisonment in samsara, acknowledging the possibility that you could still make love to yourself, you could love yourself, you could appreciate yourself.

The foundation of mahayana is that life is workable after all. It can be handled. A certain amount of warmth and sympathy towards yourself is necessary to begin with. And it's necessary to start with the hinayana approach to pain first in order to develop the mahayana. Perhaps we should stop at this point and have discussions.

Q. Is the seed of enlightenment you spoke of always alive in us or can it perish?

R. It seems that as long as there is a question about the subject it can't have perished. Acknowledging the restlessness of life is the seed. Seeking for pleasure, warding off pain—those little things seem to be the seed. So in other words, unless we are a robot or a jellyfish, then something is happening, which is the seed. Even a jellyfish might have it.

Q. Rinpoche, you spoke of hinayana as being the way of renunciation, and renunciation as being the way of relating to samsara. Could you say more about that?

R. Well, renunciation at this point is completely relating with the fact that you're trapped in an extremely strong prison. The only way of communicating with the situation is not to try to get out, but to try to make yourself at home communicating with the things which caught you. Literally, the net around you makes the whole thing very narrow because escape is not possible anymore, and therefore a better, more pleasurable situation is not possible. In other words, renunciation is accepting that you have only one or two situations to work on. There are no other areas that you can dream up. Even if you dream, your dream is cut down. Renunciation means realizing the nuisance of yourself, in some sense.

Q. In our daily life it's possible to experience both narrowness and openness. What does one do? Does one simply acknowledge the experience or experience it without examination, or does one try to examine it?

R. The first step is to acknowledge, and then, having acknowledged, you have to take some kind of leap to bring that realization to a functional level. That is to say that you feel the imprisonment in a narrow way, feel that there is no alternative in life. Life has only one track which is suffering and ego. Realizing that, you dance on the one track. So the one track isn't purely further depression but further excitement as well, because you have no alternatives to play around with.

Q. But what if you experience both states at the same time? Do you dance with both of them?

R. Sure. I think that's possible.

Q. That becomes quite a confused space.

R. Well, then explore the confusion, which is also another dance. You have something very solid happening anyway.

Q. You said something about compassion towards ourselves. How much compassion should we have towards ourselves? Are we too harsh with ourselves?

R. Generally, we are too compassionate with ourselves. We constantly seek pleasure, try to be kind to ourselves and delude ourselves with ourselves. We try to shield ourselves from our mistakes as if nothing happened. The hinayana way begins with the realization that everything is very serious, that you have no alternatives. You are trapped in your idiot compassion. You are trapped in your attempt to be too kind to yourself, which also creates further pain. If you become

more familiar with that, and realize the alternativelessness, then you could become more compassionate. I think that is why hinayana is important at the beginning—to realize that you can't just treat yourself as if you were what you'd like to be. To begin with you have to cut down your indulgence. You have to realize that if you indulge yourself, that creates further pain. That realization itself is hope. It brings more encouragement. So compassion in this case does not mean creating pleasure but rather creating a sense of trust in yourself and not condemning. This can be developed if you have the relative notions for doing so.

Q. Isn't it indulgent to try to change your situation at all? Simply geographically, or getting a better job? If you give up alternatives, do you simply stick with the boredom of your situation?

R. Changing jobs doesn't seem to have anything to do with it particularly. Moving from a chair to the sofa which is more comfortable, or drinking tea instead of coffee—those don't have anything to do with the larger situation. That is, I don't mean to say that you have to punish yourself constantly. Indulgence is the general attitude of wanting to achieve a state of solid pleasure. That's the basic point, which is obviously a psychological approach. Trips with the physical situation don't particularly make any difference. So it's a question of trying to secure your being.

Q. When you talk about loving oneself more, are you talking about not judging oneself for being in samsara, not being pleasure-seeking nor being involved in ego, but just accepting that that's where you are?

R. That seems to be the point. It's accepting both positive and negative situations, whatever there is. It's not only loving alone, but regarding the whole thing as fertile ground, as a workable situation—like a field with manure on it.

Q. You talked about trust in the heart providing the energy that stirs you towards enlightenment, but it seems very confusing finding that particular level to relate to. Some sort of an identification seems necessary and there's always the problem that what you're experiencing is so totally dependent on the confusion of your moods, on insubstantial stuff. I don't really know how to get to the heart. It seems to suggest a ground.

R. Yes, it does suggest a ground but the ground doesn't have to be flat ground. The ground could be the current that flows through. It's like relating with the ocean as ground as opposed to the land as ground. The dissatisfactions could be regarded as the ground. It's like the ocean: it goes up and down, but still it's an existing situation.

Q. The only way I can relate to that is by reference, looking backwards and seeing the relationship of something to other things that have happened.

R. That seems okay. You can't really start with an ideal situation. That's in fact somewhat the product of discriminating intelligence which compares grounds, and then finds that the present ground may be completely insubstantial. But still there is some energy going on that could be worked on as well. I think you have to allow yourself to have some kind of stepping-stone. It may not be as solid as you would like, but still it is a stepping-stone of some kind.

Q. Rinpoche, you said a few minutes ago that it really didn't make that much difference what the physical situation was, that the difference between coffee and tea didn't seem that fundamental. But in the past you've said we were like ping-pong balls—we get bored and bounce to another thing as entertainment for a few hours, whatever. Should we try to hold back the ping-pong ball, or does it matter?

R. Well, it's a question of whether you are relating with the situation as workable or whether you are taking advantage of frivolity. I think that's one of the basic points. Frivolity could be related to as ground somewhat, but still, you shouldn't be possessed by it, because in frivolity you are not experiencing the seriousness of the pain anymore.

Q. But might there be some point when you feel a choice?

R. Well, you should start with the present situation rather than the possibility. That seems to be the point of having ground. The possibility is a hypothetical situation that hasn't materialized in that particular case.

## Talk 2: Buddha-nature

Yesterday we discussed the inspiration which comes from experiencing the spark of intelligence or enlightenment in us. Discovering that potential seems to be one of the fundamental characteristics of the mahayana approach. We have already looked into the feelings of inadequacy, pain and confusion and seen them as neither good nor bad, but as a workable situation. I suppose we could say that in our day-to-day life we find that the search for pleasure, either materialistic or spiritual, is no longer convincing. There is something behind the whole thing. In other words, there is a sense of dissatisfaction and a sense of continual struggle.

We consider that experience of dissatisfaction to be the discovery of the first noble truth or dukkha. Discovering pain and its universality, realizing that pain is constantly there, is also discovering buddha-nature. The very realization is not stupid or ignorant, but intelligent. So the nature of the struggle that we go through is the expression of enlightened mind. The bad news in itself is good news. That potential for discovering pain is fundamentally intelligent and basically warm—those are the two components of that instinct.

Discriminating awareness allows us to look at situations of life critically or hopefully, even to the point of searching for spirituality, the ultimate goal. And warmth is there even though we may condemn ourselves as being bad or weak or confused. By its very nature, that condemnation is an expression of warmth, strangely enough. There is some sense of ambition in that often, condemning ourselves is the ultimate hope; by looking at ourselves critically we expect something good will come of it.

Those virtues of intelligence and warmth may be entirely spiritually or psychologically materialistic but, nevertheless, the very driving force, the very existence of such potential is the buddha-nature operating. The realization of that potential is entirely dependent on the realization of pain, which becomes a kind of crutch, a stepping-stone that we can start from. But still it is an embryonic potential. It is embryonic because it is a glimpse of hope, rather than an actual experience of complete hope, hopefulness.

The great teacher, Taranatha, talks about the embryonic awakened state of mind being eternal, solid and permanent. His approach has been challenged by others, who say that that is ultimate ego, not the experience of real buddha-nature. They say that it is precisely the function of ego to be ambitious, to strive towards achievement, and to try to associate with a solid, positive, hopeful situation. It is true that buddha-nature could be regarded as ego. The reason the enlightened mind becomes ego is that a sense of security has been imposed on it, a feeling that you will live forever. So from that point of view, ego is purely a lot of attitudes which have been imposed on buddha-nature. Buddha-nature and basic sanity have been exploited and used as backing to reassure us of our existence, to reassure us that we are secure and healthy, that we will never experience death. On the other hand, if there is no sense of permanent security, no sense of using buddha-nature as a pawn or of maintaining a relationship with simple-minded hope and fear, then buddha-nature becomes just simple straightforward buddha-nature, or enlightened mind. So on the whole, the attitude toward enlightenment is obviously something very solid, something very continuous, something extremely definite without any mistakes.

There are all kinds of attributes of tathagatagarbha or buddha-nature. To begin with, it is continuous and solid because it is unborn. In other words, it doesn't have to be given birth to by effort or preconception, in the sense that giving birth to a child requires a father and a mother. In this case, parents would be synonymous with preconceptions, something already existing which conditions further situations. Buddha mind or enlightened mind is not dependent on that, so it is unborn, and therefore it is unoriginated.



Another attribute is that it is ‘unobstructed.’ Its flow cannot be prevented by any causal characteristics which depend on karmic chain reactions. So it is free from karma. Your intelligence, your restlessness, does not need nursing or securing. It is constantly, intelligently critical of pain or whatever; the restlessness is unobstructed and it does not need to be nursed. Another attribute is that buddha-nature does not dwell on anything, which means that we cannot categorize it as being associated with good or bad, pleasure or pain. Enlightened intelligence shines through both pain and pleasure.

In other words, the unconditioned cognitive mind that functions in our basic being is the true enlightened mind. There’s nothing very obscure about this. It has nothing to do with a mystical experience or anything like that at all, but it’s just functional, simple, direct, intelligent, sane, pragmatic, and so forth. That seems to be the basic point about buddha-nature: this restless mind is the buddha-nature. Because it is so intelligent, it is restless. It is so transparent you can’t put any kind of patch or any kind of mask over the irritation. If you do, the irritation still comes through. We can’t hold the irritation back or mold it into a comfortable ego style anymore. The purpose of ego is to search for permanent, solid comfort of some kind. This might cost a lot in terms of sacrificing and inflicting pain on ourselves temporarily, but we think that hopefully, we will finally achieve that ultimate comfort or security. And each time we begin to achieve it, something else goes wrong.

In the tantric literature, buddha mind is referred to as a lamp in a vase. The vase can be broken or the imperfection of the vase can be seen because of the light that is shining out from inside. In the mahayana literature, the popular analogy refers to enlightened mind as the sun and ego’s security as the clouds which prevent the sun from shining through. So the idea of buddha mind is not purely a concept or a theoretical, metaphysical ideal, but it is something extremely real that we can experience ourselves. In fact, it is the ego that feels that we have ego. It is ego which tells us, “My ego is bothering me. I feel very self-conscious about having to be me. I feel that I have a tremendous burden on me, and I wonder what the best way to get rid of it is.” All those expressions of restlessness that keep coming out in us are the expression of buddha-nature, the expression of unborn, unobstructed and nondwelling.

It is said in the Guhyasamajatantra that all sentient beings are good vessels for the mahayana teaching; nobody is excluded. Therefore, one should take delight, cheer up. In one of his opening speeches, so to speak, the Buddha discusses which vessels are appropriate to receive the teachings—who could be excluded; who could be included—and he concludes, “Let everyone come and join. Invite everybody.” This approach of seeing buddha-nature as all-pervading is one of the basic threads of the tantric approach as well. The upsurging energy of “awake” is the energy that one should use and transmute in the tantric teachings.

Taking the bodhisattva vow is acknowledging that you have a great many family characteristics, characteristics of the family of the Buddha. You are acknowledging that potential. In other words, any kind of ambition that we might have in our life situation, such as trying to maintain or advance ourselves, could be regarded as an expression of enlightened mind. It has been said that even the most vicious animals have the instinct to take care of their young and be loving to them, which is an expression of buddha-nature. I don’t necessarily mean that people have a glimpse of buddha-nature. Rather than a glimpse in terms of viewing something, the experience may be a gap. That’s the experiential situation which comes out of seeing through the veils of ego. But whether we have a glimpse of it or not, there is still the pure functioning of the buddha mind occurring in us all the time. It occurs in the most bizarre, cheap

and confused styles we might present, as well as in whatever extremely profound, dignified and wise experiences we might have. Both extremes are the expressions of buddha-nature.

I think that one of the foundations of the mahayana approach to life is the realization that samyaksambuddha, the completely perfect enlightenment, is no longer a myth: it is real. For the hinayanist, enlightenment is pure myth. First one has to attain the arhat stage which is a stage of absorption, and from there one has to advance to the enlightened attitude. But in the mahayana approach, as Taranatha puts it, everybody carries in his heart a perfectly produced image of the Buddha, beautifully made, cast in gold. Everybody has such an image in his heart. That seems to be true. It's very real—delightfully real. And the unreality of it makes it more real.

So that, we could say, is the groundwork of the great vehicle. Before you think big, you have to think real. That seems to be the starting point of the lion's roar, or the proclamation of mahayana. It has to start with that faith, the conviction that nobody is condemned or confused.

### Discussion

Q. Take, for example, sitting down to read a book on buddhism. We've come to the book through confusion. We don't understand our life, so we pick up the book and we start reading. Are you saying that the impulse to try to find greater clarity or truth which prompts us to pick up the book is in itself enlightened mind coming through?

R. Yes. Whether you understand it or not, the very attempt is it.

Q. Then where the ego would come in, in reading the book, is in adding something on or trying to get things all sewn up?

R. Ego's approach is the mentality of the lucrative, the profitable: "I should be getting something out of this book, otherwise my effort is wasted." It's an unrealistic, sort of business-like mentality. If things don't make sense, then your search is wasted.

Q. You said that the ego is buddha-nature.

R. Yeah.

Q. Could you also dwell on your ego without having buddha-nature involved?

R. Well, if you're trying to separate them, that is the work of ego. The very project becomes ego's project.

Q. But it could be checking on yourself?

R. Not necessarily checking. Buddha-nature is the very existence of the driving force. The impulse to go forward is the buddha-nature. But maybe any kind of afterthoughts are ego. The first impulse, the first clear driving force to test or experience is buddha-nature.

Q. Did I understand you to say that seeing ego as buddha-nature depends on your attitude?

R. That's right.

Q. If your attitude is that there is nothing good in ego, that there is no buddha-nature there—is that all ego?

R. If you begin to have such an attitude, then that is an affectation laid over the basic sanity, which becomes neurosis. Trying to make things better is an attempt to make things solid by means of your attitude.

Q. What would be the attitude that would bring forth buddha-nature?

R. I suppose we could say having no attitude, just being simple and straightforward.

Q. Does it become dangerous for a person to believe that he has had a glimpse of buddha-nature? At what point does trust in the heart become dangerous?

R. It could become dangerous if you begin to use it as a credential, as a way of expanding your power either over yourself or over others. The same thing applies to any kind of practice. If practice is just pure, direct practice, that seems to be very simple; but if one's practice becomes somewhat heroic, connected with finding definite proof, then it is dangerous.

Q. Rinpoche, you said that the impulsive afterthought is ego, while the immediate thought is buddha-nature. How do you distinguish between the impulsiveness and the spontaneity?

R. To begin with you could say impulse is not spontaneous. It may seem spontaneous, but it doesn't have the relaxed quality of spontaneity. The impulse comes out like a sneeze, as the result of some pressure. Whereas you could say the spontaneity is like yawning: it has less pressure; it takes its time. The glimpse of buddha-nature is not violent, whereas the impulse is very violent; it's desperate.

Q. Is the impulse buddha-nature?

R. No. The spontaneity is buddha-nature.

Q. Then the impulse is ego?

R. Yeah.

Q. What you react to first, then, is the ego?

R. Not necessarily. Impulse never reaches the first stage: impulse always trails behind. Impulse is never up to date. It is the rebound. First you see, then you react. Impulse never comes first hand. It's a reaction.

Q. Well, then what's restlessness? Didn't you say that was buddha-nature also?

R. If there is a general dissatisfaction, a restlessness, that is very accurate.

Q. It sounds as though buddha-nature is somehow intermittent.

R. Well, the restlessness is the sharpest and most immediate situation being experienced, whereas buddha-nature is something you can't catch hold of and put in a container. That's why it is associated with light.

Q. That raises the question of whether it flashes in at one point and not at another, or --?

R. No, it's constantly happening. I mean, it's so much so, that it's constantly happening. Ego doesn't have a chance to register it. It's constantly ahead of you—you being ego at this point. It is constantly ahead of you.

Q. So you are continually dissatisfied?

R. Yeah, the intelligence is shining through.

Q. Could you relate this with the image of falling? You once talked about our situation as being one of constantly falling. Does buddha-nature contradict that feeling of having no ground at all?

R. That seems to be the whole point. Buddha-nature bring the realization that there is no ground.

Q. But it doesn't seem like you're seeing any thing.

R. Well, it isn't seeing, really, in terms of reporting back to your brain or anything like that. It isn't seeing—I don't know what word you could use. The word "jnana" is more "knowing," but you don't even know. That's very difficult. I suppose we could make a distinction between looking and seeing. You see first; you look afterwards.

Q. Could you say that buddha-nature sees that there is no ground because it sees ego? It sees that the ego is there, and sees that ego keeps coming up, over and over again. So the simple wisdom of buddha-nature is always up against the effort of the ego to make some big problem out of it?

R. Well, buddha-nature is not regarded as another kind of cognitive mind functioning. It is part of your cognitive mind, but it supercedes your cognitive mind. It naturally sees the fruitlessness of struggle, as well as encouraging struggle in order to prove its fruitlessness. The whole thing is sort of an automatic, inbuilt, natural situation which is trying to wear itself out. In other words, without buddha-nature, ego cannot exist. Ego is constantly teased by buddha-nature into activating itself. So either it is perpetuating itself or wearing itself out.

Q. Why do we have to concern ourselves with this? I mean, it seems to happen spontaneously as we go along. If we're practicing and learning and becoming more aware of our groundlessness, why do we have to discuss the buddha-nature? I don't understand that.

R. I don't know. Well, we find ourselves questioning ourselves, and that is saying the same thing—why do we question at all? But that in itself is a question.

Q. Rinpoche, what does it mean to be a member of the Buddha's family?

R. Well, it means to realize that you have potentials, to realize that you are subject to condemnation, that you have tremendous potential already.

Q. Subject to condemnation?

R. Yes, in the sense that you are hopeless. There's no gap.

Q. Rinpoche, when you talk about having no ground, it seems to imply that there are no rules; it seems to bring in confusion.

R. No rules?

Q. No rules about what to do, really, or about whether the thing you are doing at a certain moment is good or bad. It seems very confusing; it seems as though it leaves you hanging on a cliff.

R. Well, that seems to be the whole point—you don't have any reference point to hold onto. And that fear is the fear of losing ego. But losing ego doesn't mean that you wouldn't know how to brush your teeth or make a cup of tea. In fact, you would probably do those things better. It's quite fearful, even in theory, and the experience is going to be even heavier.

Q. Rinpoche, if an individual is not into buddhism, or a path, or whatever—he's a businessman and he's restless and ambitious to make more money, to make his life better, but he's not aware of his ego or of duality—is his restlessness still considered a spark of intelligence, or buddha-nature?

R. Yes, I think so, in the long run. That seems to be what's happening in this country already. In fact, this whole question has come up as a result of that restlessness. I mean, your father, your great-grandfather, and your great-great-great-grandfather, were all preoccupied with building a

brand new world. So they built it and then the whole thing turned around. In fact, we could say that our talking about this subject is a result of those people putting in their effort. There were no missionaries, there were no people proselytizing these ideas in the country. The country itself awoke to this situation. So, I suppose it might take a long time for people to realize their buddha-nature. The businessmen might have to freak out—but still, the cost is not wasted. It might take several lifetimes to come about, but still—(laughs).

Q. Rinpoche, how about the case of traditional societies that seem to go along their leisured way and don't change very much, societies in which people seem content to do things the way their forefathers did them?

R. Generally, you can't have an ideal solid society operating for thousands of years. I suppose you could say Tibet was close to it. When I left my country recently, it was still a medieval society. But then force from the outside thrust us out. Since we didn't make any new discoveries, somebody else made a new discovery of us. We were pushed out. So there's no such thing as a permanent traditional society. There cannot be—as long as people desire to be comfortable and happy. I suppose the more speed there is, the more buddha-nature comes through. We could say that.

Q. If we are aware of the buddha-nature, isn't that a type of security in itself?

R. Well, I don't know which way it goes. If we are aware that we have a buddha-nature, that is security; but we are also aware that we might lose our ego by being involved with the buddha-nature, and that is not security. Knowing that you cannot witness your own burial is quite uncomfortable.

Q. Isn't there a paradox here? You're saying that buddha-nature and ego are interchangeable. Isn't there some difference?

R. I suppose you could say the fundamental idea is like a healing wound. When your wound is healed, the scab falls away, but the scab is also part of the wound as well. It's something like that.

### Talk 3: The Spiritual Friend

We have buddha-nature, and the question now seems to be how we can provoke or awaken that basic potential. Traditionally, the aspiration to develop compassion comes from experiencing the misery and pain that you and your fellow beings are going through. Allegiance toward the spiritual friend and a sense of dedication are also needed so that you are not afraid to apply your experience to working with sentient beings.

As we know, buddha-nature is not particularly regarded as a peaceful state of mind, or for that matter as a disturbed one either. It is a state of intelligence which questions our life and the meaning of life. The foundation of our search is that a lot of things haven't been answered in our life situation. We are still searching for the questions. This questioning is buddha-nature, a state of potential. It is a healthy situation when there is dissatisfaction, questioning and doubt. It is healthy because we are not sucked into ego oriented situations anymore and we are constantly being awakened. We may feel that we've been able to relax, let go and take pleasure out of our life. But that feeling is momentary and we are awakened constantly by unrest. The unrest could come either as a great dramatic situation or as a small petty one, but that pattern of relaxing and being awakened goes on constantly.

The point here seems to be that we have to begin with the development of maitri. Maitri could be translated as love or as kind, friendly attitude. Having a friendly attitude means that when you make friends with someone you accept his neurosis as well as his sanity. Both the extremes of your friend's basic makeup would be the resources for your friendship. If you make friends with someone because you like certain parts of that person, it is not complete friendship—it is partial friendship. So in this case maitri is all-encompassing friendship, friendship which relates the creativity as well as the destructiveness of nature.

Maitri does not necessarily begin with developing friendship towards others, however. The first step of awakening buddha-nature is friendship with ourselves. This tends to create a situation where we don't have other alternatives or side tracks anymore. We are satisfied with ourselves so we don't feel we have to imitate anyone else. We don't try to be like anyone else because we don't hate ourselves. We are on our own ground and are our own resources. We finally end up just relating with ourselves. Friendship in this case means complete acceptance of our being. The agitation of buddha-nature coming through, questioning and feeling dissatisfaction, produces all kinds of insightful discoveries. The development of maitri involves settling down to your situation, not looking for other alternatives at all and just being with your situation.

The first step in awakening potential, embryonic enlightened mind is called trust in the heart, trust in ourselves. And such trust could come about if there is no categorizing, no philosophizing, no moralizing and no judgments, but instead, a simple direct relationship with our being.

One of the reasons this trust in ourselves develops as a workable situation is because we are constant people; we are completely constant and predictable. We are predictable in the sense that there is a continual upsurge of energy, a continual upsurge of wanting, wanting to change, wanting to grasp, wanting to find out the details, and constant seeking for pleasure. That happens constantly, and that constant unrest and constant energy could be regarded as the stepping-stone we have to work with. We might feel that we are going through ups and downs, so that first we feel highly excited and good and then we feel terribly depressed and shaky. Whatever it is, we are still going through this constant situation all the time. We are questioning,

doubting, looking from this angle, looking from that angle. Maybe we look from a slight distance, or maybe from completely close up. This game that goes on is not regarded as something bad particularly. Rather, it is the expression of our agitated enlightened mind trying to have a revolution, trying to throw off the seeming expressions of ego. As long as we are able to relate with that as a workable situation, as a very real situation, then there's tremendous potential in us. In this way, we could make friends with ourselves. Maitri could be developed in us.

Having managed to do this, we can begin to relate with our father and our mother, our friends, our enemies, the people who taught us how to walk, how to talk, how to behave. And we can relate to the people who taught us the unpleasantness of life as well as the people who taught us how pleasant life is. In some sense this is relating to the other, but nevertheless it is still us at the same time, so it is a very dubious relationship. We feel we have inherited so much from the people around us ever since childhood. If we develop friendliness to ourselves we feel we could extend this friendliness to these people, but that still involves a dubious relationship. Such an "other" is not exactly the real other, which constantly bounces back on us. It is still a way of making friends with ourselves, predominantly, basically. Obviously, father, mother, brother, sister, friends, and enemies have done their best to relate with us, and we have become their product in some sense. But "other" means us at the same time.

This expanding of maitri cuts the neurosis of wishful thinking, thinking that you should just be a good person. Maitri is intelligent friendliness which allows acceptance of our being, which doesn't exclude friend or enemy, father or mother, whether you regard your father as friend and mother as enemy, or brother as friend and sister as enemy, or friend as friend, or friend as enemy, whatever. That whole situation becomes extraordinarily spacious, suddenly workable. Maybe there's some hope after all. It seems tremendously delightful that I could make friends with my parents and myself, or make friends with my enemy and myself.

At the same time, creativity goes on. Something begins to break through, to become actually real rather than imaginary. It becomes real because we don't have any hypothesis about how the good person should be or how we should improve ourselves, no such hypothetical situations apply anymore. It is something real, something there. Relationship does exist; love and hate do exist. Because of such existence we're able to work with it, starting as a stepping-stone.

At that level we are inspired to spirituality. In this case, the idea of spirituality is nothing religious, nothing sacred. It is just purely relating to something beyond the simple level of me and my pain, me and my relatives, me and my friends. It is something beyond that. We begin to feel that we can afford to expand ourselves, and begin to let go without protecting ourselves. We can go beyond the limitations of what is familiar to us. There are further areas to explore, which becomes important, prominent, in fact.

This is the level where we begin to relate with the spiritual friend, kalyanamitra, or guru. Unless the fortifications of home ground have been broken down we can't relate with the guru, kalyanamitra at all. At this point the guru is somebody else, quite different from your parents, relatives, or friends. He is another person, some other guy, the epitome of a foreigner, someone who is not your father, not your mother, not your friend. He represents an entirely new perspective, a new area outside of home ground. At the beginning the idea of relating with such a person may be rather frightening for the very reason that we prefer to come back home and relate with the people with whom we are used to having a relationship. That feels very safe and this idea is a bit dubious, uncertain. Nevertheless, there is inspiration which keeps constantly

expanding. The radiation of maitri is still happening. We can't just keep our relationships as incest, maintaining the stagnation of alternating father to friend, friend to enemy. That becomes a bit too localized, too simplified; we begin to develop the tendency to explore a greater area. This is precisely what mahayana, the great vehicle, means—encompassing a greater area with a sense of exploration.

At that point the odyssey begins to take place. We don't want to, but we can't keep ourselves from relating with the kalyanamitra. Finally, we begin to make the mistake, the right mistake; we fall into the right accident. We feel uncomfortable, but it's so tempting that we have to step out of our old realm, and get into a new approach, a new perspective. We can't help it, as if we feel that we have been very naughty, but still can't help not being naughty. Now our people, our friends might say, "Don't talk to those foreigners, we don't know about them, they could be dangerous." But we still want to find out more about them, for the very reason that they think differently, behave differently, and their style is outlandish and fascinating.

The reason it is referred to as spiritual friend rather than guru is because the idea of guru is of a person who possesses spiritual power and insight, who is omniscient and wise. The popular notion of guru is that he has enormous understanding about life, the world, reality or whatever, and also tremendous power and skill. He could cause the world to turn against us if we are on his wrong side. So on the other hand we feel embarrassingly small and stupid, undignified and frivolous. Feeling so small ourselves, being in the presence of such a large situation, is very threatening. Even if we have received spiritual instructions from the guru, we still feel uncertain as to how to handle that message. We feel so unaccommodating, so poverty stricken that we can't possibly digest it, we can't even hold it in our hands. Our vision is so limited, our hearing is so limited, our brains are so small and inadequate that we feel that we can't really do anything. We might try, but it still feels as if nothing is really communicated. That seems to be the wrong notion of guru. It is sort of a myth, a flea trying to study with an elephant, and one day trying to become an elephant himself.

The right approach according the Shantideva, Gampopa, and Buddha, is that a kalyanamitra is much more powerful than a hierarchical guru. A kalyanamitra brings a sense of extending your friendship as you have done already. You made friends with yourself, prepared yourself to search for a kalyanamitra, spiritual friend. And you find somebody who's the spokesman of the world outside your home ground. You can work with him, talk to him. At least he speaks your language. It's a workable situation. Also that person is a human being. That person is a full-fledged human being; he needs food to sustain himself, needs to take a rest at night, he gets up in the morning, has breakfast like we do, and lunch like we do, dinner like we do, wears clothes, breathes like we do. He is a human being.

The Buddha is referred to as the supreme being amongst men. And the Buddha is never referred to as a heavenly being outside of this world. He's referred to as the teacher of men, a leader of men. He was a man himself. He was an extraordinary one, a healthy one, but he still maintained a communicable situation. The spiritual friend from this point of view is not a person who undermines your existence and your neurosis, but a person who speaks the same neurotic language you speak—an extraordinarily adaptable person. That person represents the dharma, the teaching, the message of enlightenment. By judging that particular person we find that maybe enlightenment is not all that far out as we had imagined. Supposedly this person is such a spokesman, soaked in the awake state of being himself. He speaks and behaves as we do. He has something to teach us, and he is seemingly friendly as well. He is "seemingly" friendly to



you at the beginning because you are still suspicious of his friendliness. So that's the meaning of a spiritual friend; you are working with a man, the son of a man.

Relating with such a spiritual friend is the first introduction to the realization that your adventure is not a bad one after all. Of course your spiritual friend does not speak your domestic language, your petty language, but in a very strange combination he is able to speak your language, while at the same time, not being wrapped up in the things that you usually get wrapped up in. It's a very strange kind of a performance, almost magic, to be a human being and not be caught up in the pettiness. It's an extraordinary thing. You often wonder whether that person is an accomplished actor. Or maybe it's your own fantasy and you are thinking you are seeing somebody whom you wanted to see, but it is actually not happening. Those thoughts flicker in our minds naturally, but I don't see anything wrong with that. Those things are necessary, necessary to give us a break from the heavy-handedness of our spiritual friend, so we have a little snack, an intermission. You don't expect that you're going to be heavy-handed yourself, transform yourself completely.

Nevertheless, according to the scriptures, and my personal experience, a kalyanamitra, spiritual friend, is a trustworthy, good person. Relating with a spiritual friend is a trustworthy situation because whenever there's doubt or fear, the spiritual friend doesn't try to justify himself or herself but the doubt or fear bounces back on you to remind you to awaken buddha-nature. The spiritual friend is a very powerful mirror, a mirror that can reflect back your own reflection, with super clarity to the point of irritation. Even if you try to escape from that embarrassing encounter, that escape is also recorded and bounces back on you as well. So you can't get out of it. You find yourself on the path, having encountered a spiritual friend who will let you go, let you escape—but even escape itself becomes an encounter.

The spiritual friend can perform miracles purely by working with the ordinariness of life situations, nothing fabulous, or magical. It's a question of how much one is involved with the ordinariness of life. You'd be surprised how much magic there is if you are completely ordinary in your life situation, thoroughly and fully experiencing the highest quality of ordinariness and the simplicity of your life situation. When you take off into some fantasy which you think is your ground, up pops the spiritual friend who is at the ordinary level. You might think it is a miracle, that somebody has conjured up chaos. But in fact it is not a miracle in terms of magic; it is a miracle in terms of self-existing energy which has been connected. So the spiritual friend is very powerful because he or she has direct access to ordinary life, rather than anything fanciful.

Relating with a spiritual friend brings us out of our home ground of seemingly domesticated maitri to the level of compassion, karuna. That seems to be the turning point of commitment to the teaching. The agent of teaching is the spiritual friend and the teaching is not a myth anymore. It's a real, livable, workable, pragmatic situation. At the same time our intelligence of buddha-nature begins to function.

## Discussion

Q. You mentioned a little earlier in the talk that there were certain processes which would make you ready to form a relation with this spiritual friend. Could you reiterate that?

R. The preparation is done by stepping out of your home ground, and developing enough maitri towards yourself so that you don't feel threatened by being open anymore.

Q. It seems like sitting practice exercises maitri, that it gives ourselves room. I've been following my breath, sort of shutting out the chaos. But I'm a little confused about this.

R. Well, it is the shutting out of chaos in some sense, which is necessary at the beginning. But at the same time, when you let go of the technique you find that you have more space than you imagined. So the technique is sort of creating a situation rather than the technique being valid just by itself. It is like dropping crutches—then you can begin to bounce. The idea of technique is to accentuate whatever comes afterwards.

Q. Sometimes I have a fear of relating with the spirit within me. How does one develop the maitri to get beyond that fear and really accept oneself?

R. When you talk about how to do it, as I've discussed before, you are asking for a technique which won't bring you into an uncomfortable situation, but at the same time will achieve what you want to achieve. Instead of using your hands you use some machine or a pair of pliers, or gloves. You are not willing to relate with things directly. So it seems there's no how to do it, but one has to push oneself into the situation. If you are pushed into water maybe it creates a situation of panic, but at the same time you automatically swim.

Q. What's the relationship to the spiritual friend when one cannot accept friendship with oneself, or one's family? Or say that there is not a full acceptance of friend, or self and or family? What would be the relationship?

R. I suppose the relationship with the spiritual friend demands relationship with yourself, so it works two ways at once. You have to learn to relate with yourself, because the spiritual friend is trying to make sure that you have no other choices. And the heavy-handedness of the spiritual friend is also bouncing back a mirror reflection on you, so you are also your friend, as well as spiritual friend being your friend.

Q. Could the process work from the spiritual friend backwards instead of from the self outwards?

R. If you have a relationship with a spiritual friend, that automatically means that you have done some work already, in any case. Otherwise you wouldn't look for such a person at all. That must mean there's something going on inside you.

Q. You said that buddha-nature is not a peaceful state, it's still searching for questions. That kind of confused me when you used the word "searching". I could understand how questions keep happening, but I don't know about searching for questions.

R. It is because, as you remember, in describing buddha-nature I'm using the analogy of a revolutionary who is trying to throw off the expressions of ego. Ego is there, of course. The reason why we use the term nature, or garbha, is that it is embryonic.

Q. I thought you said that buddha-nature acts as if there was no ego, in other words that it's unobstructed.

R. The revolutionaries might act as if there's no authority, but they still have to fight with authorities.

Q. But buddha-nature seems the same in a certain sense, it seems that it is the same with ego or without ego. It's always the same so it's a set logic.

R. Well, in some sense, yes, but as long as it is nature—garbha—it has to try to break out, and the function of buddha-nature is breaking out of the shell.

Q. But in a previous lecture you said that within the shell buddha-nature encompasses cognitive mind. Is there cognition in the shell that it is trying to get out of?

R. Yes sure.

Q. There's cognition. I thought there was no cognition.

R. Buddha-nature doesn't have a cognitive mind, you mean?

Q. Yes, there's no cognition, so there would be no questions.

R. Well, it has cognitive mind because it is nature, it is imprisoned within the boundaries, therefore the cognitive mind is buddha-nature. In other words, you don't have a revolution in the country if there's no suppressor. So suppression and revolution work with each other in an integral situation. The really interesting point of renewing revolution is that it is like Mao Tse Tsung's theory that you have to have a cultural revolution repeating every ten years or so to make sure that things are refreshed. Without any person to attack you can't renew your revolution. This is an interesting point, that an upsurge needs suppression, tension. That's exactly the job of buddha-nature.

Q. Does the bodhisattva transcend the whole struggle of samsara and nirvana?

R. Well there are ten stages of the bodhisattva path, and each stage is a struggle, so I don't think he transcends. You can't get rid of struggle at the start, otherwise there's no journey.

## Talk 4: Compassion

With the idea of maitri, the approach is one of expanding, taking steps outward, instead of internalizing, purely developing maitri in oneself alone. The spiritual friend acts as the entrance to that journey, which is in fact one of the most crucial points of the bodhisattva path or the philosophy of mahayana. We could say that mahayana is a way of expanding. Having made a relationship with a spiritual friend, one finds that that suggests not only relating with one friend alone, but with many friends, finding friends everywhere, although the friends may seem either threatening or attractive.

“Friend” in the bodhisattva’s language is identical to the idea of a guest. There is a phrase, “inviting all sentient beings as your guests.” When you have a guest you have a sense of the importance of the relationship. You wouldn’t invite a guest unless there were some highlights that guest would offer, some important friendship or exchange of hospitality. Guests are usually fed with specially cooked food and receive special hospitality. So the life of a bodhisattva is relating with sentient beings. He is inviting everyone as a guest, a feast is constantly offered. There’s a constant sense of the impermanence of the relationship—not that the guest is going to turn into an enemy, but that the guest is going to leave—so this is the opportune time, and there’s constant appreciation. You don’t want to seduce your guests into your territory and hold them with you for your benefit. Nor do you want to go along with the guests and leave your home to ease your loneliness. You don’t take a journey with your guests. You stay at home—guests come, you entertain them and relate with them, then guests will thank you and you will say good-bye and go back to running your home. So there is a sense of the preciousness and the impermanence of the relationship.

The notion of inviting all sentient beings as your guests is the first application of compassion: how to relate with your guest. The guest may be your husband, your wife, your child, but still everybody is the guest of everybody. Nobody completely lives up to his credentials. Each relationship on a day-to-day level is seen as relating with a guest.

Compassion is a combination of maitri and generosity, and is a journey outward, communication. So we could say that compassion is on the one hand feeling friendly towards yourself, and on the other hand experiencing a sense of richness that you can expand the warmth you feel towards yourself to the rest of sentient beings. Compassion from this point of view is quite different from pure sympathy which looks down upon someone with the attitude, “I am in such a secure situation that you couldn’t live on my level. You need to be helped; you need to be raised up to my level, helpless little person.” Compassion in this case is radiation of mutual warmth to yourself and to others.

We might go through the details of the nature of compassion and how you feel compassionate. Compassion has the sense of communication. It is said in the scriptures that fish cannot live without water, likewise compassion cannot develop without egolessness, without shunyata experience. That brings the idea that compassion is something quite abstract, rather than a literal, logical conclusion. Compassion is something abstract because you just feel the sense of awareness. In fact, compassion is the heart of the practice of meditation in action. When you feel the presence of compassion, you have a sudden glimpse which goes with a sense of clarity and warmth simultaneously. And that’s the notion of recollection or awareness which we might experience after intense sitting meditation practice.

During sitting we find ourselves completely chaotic. All kinds of things are going on. We try to swim out of those overcrowded situations of this and that, out of subconscious mind

and discursive thoughts and so on. Although sitting meditation is supposedly physically quiet and simple, psychologically it is quite a nightmare—at least it is annoying, rather inconvenient. There's a sense of uncovering corners of whole areas that you haven't discovered before. Trying to deal with them creates further problems—which is a result of holding on to definite ideas. In fact, it is a result of not having enough maitri or compassion, enough of a sense of security or warmth. You feel that you are attacking; you are dealing with a problem; you are trying to get something out of it.

When the sitting meditation is completed, when the gong rings and you decide to stop, you find that you are experiencing better meditation at that point. All the struggles have gone; all the chaos is dissolved. You have a sense of relief as if you were entering into nirvana, as if meditation was a samsaric act. At that moment there is an absence of struggle, a sense of warmth, a sense of freedom. If you deliberately try to create that, it is impossible. It just comes about by accident. The crescendo that is created by sitting meditation practice brings that kind of release, freedom. And the nature of awareness, the real meaning of satipatthana, is that feeling of presence, that feeling of release. At that point you can say that compassion and the shunyata experience are happening simultaneously.

In daily life you don't have to create the whole concept of letting go, of being free or anything like that at all. You can just acknowledge that there was that freedom already, just by the memory of it, just by the idea of it. It's a quick glimpse, a sudden glimpse, and that sudden glimpse becomes the act of compassion, the awareness that occurs in everyday life. You don't have to keep up with that and hold it for a long time—it's just a quick glimpse that goes on always. It's almost a sense of experiencing without time to label anything, without time to feel good or bad or compassionate or empty, whatever. There's just that, constantly. We could create that situation right now, at this very moment—a quick glimpse—just to see that there is simply awareness. Not watching or confirming. A quick glimpse.

The scriptures talk about bodhisattvas who develop instant compassion, and awareness at the same time. Even if they were about to lose their awareness in the chaos of a samsaric situation, they would correct themselves in the process. It's like a healthy person with good balance slipping: in the process of slipping he corrects himself and doesn't fall. The force of the slipping itself is used as a way of balancing. That doesn't require any mystical experience: just one look, then let go. And according to the scriptures that glimpse, if you analyze it, takes one-sixtieth of a second. It's so fast and so sharp. The sharpness part is intelligent compassion, compassion in this case being open, communicable. Compassion also contains warmth because you have the desire to do such a thing.

If we split the one-sixtieth of a second into sixty parts, there is the analogy of sixty petals of a flower being suddenly punctured with a needle. If you look at that in slow motion you see the needle touching the petal, penetrating through the petal having completely penetrated, and then getting into the next petal and touching it, piercing through, and so forth. Likewise, with the sense of compassion there is the sense of warmth, maitri, in oneself first, then a sense of cutting the neurosis, and a sense of openness. So the whole thing falls into three parts. It's very quick.

That's why what is known as the post-meditation experience or meditation in action is regarded as a highly powerful thing. The whole thing is very abrupt. There is no time to analyze; there is no time to walk out or hold on. At the same time there is a gap. In other words, there is no time to refer back to oneself—"I am doing this." There is no time to relate

with “me” or ego awareness at all. It’s just awareness, simple awareness. So that awareness is regarded as the heart of meditation in action. That is compassion.

A person might develop the patience to repeat that many times in a day. That glimpse of compassion and shunyata cuts the chain reaction of karmic causal characteristics. At the same time, you are communicating fully and completely when the penetration is going on, when you are cutting the chain. You are catching a quick glimpse of buddha-nature at the same time. So if the process is divided into three sections, first there is maitri, trusting in the heart; secondly there is a gap in which you experience the openness of tathagatagarbha, buddha-nature; and then thirdly there is a sense of communication, having already woken up at that level—a sense of freedom to expand, to relate with whatever you are doing.

But if we begin to hold onto it, or begin to analyze it, then analytical mind begins to pollute the freshness of that sudden glimpse. So that seems to be how we develop compassion.

In a sense we don’t have to develop compassion as such but just purely acknowledge situations that are there already. We are just seeing them, looking at them. One of the analogies used in the Bodhisattvacaryavatara is that if a person sees a picture of the Buddha painted on the wall while he is in a state of rage, the merit of seeing a picture of the Buddha is not wasted, which is still referring to the idea of compassion. Seeing the picture brings up all kinds of associations of the friendliness and compassion of the Buddha and that sudden glimpse then cuts through the rage or aggression. It might not cut through completely or ideally. You wouldn’t just flop like a punctured balloon necessarily—that would be in a sense expecting magic. But at least it de-intensifies the pressure of neurotic speed.

Compassion also brings a sense of communication with other people, because you are relating with other people in everyday-life situations, not just when you have developed a state of extreme emotional upheaval. That awareness constantly flashing again and again produces the friendliness. In other words, you begin subconsciously to realize that you are no longer as vulnerable as you think. There is something going on behind the façade of emotions, protective defenses or whatever. So you begin to develop subconsciously or consciously a sense of confidence that you can afford to be open-hearted, to invite all the guests into your territory and work with them, entertain them. Compassion is not only the logical conclusion that you are going to be okay but almost a subconscious trick, you might call it, to create deliberately that sudden glimpse, constantly, of looking back, looking back or looking forward—that openness. Seemingly that looking destroys the ground of ego, but surprisingly that doesn’t give ego a sense of loss or put it in a state of shock, but it becomes something fundamentally sane and fundamentally workable and smooth.

This type of compassion is what bodhisattvas practice. It seems that we can get into it ourselves, very simply, as long as we don’t try to recreate past experiences of the glimpse or have future expectation, but just look, look, look. The idea of compassion is direct. You might realize that the possibility of becoming an enlightened being one day, from this point of view, is not very far ahead, if you are not one already. It seems to become very real and very direct, ceases to be a dream. And as that basic ground of compassion is set, then magically, I suppose we could say, there is a sense of openness and ambition on the path—almost ambition—in the positive sense that you would like to extend an invitation to your guests all the time.

That gentleness also becomes powerful. You are not afraid to cut down, and you are not subject to idiot compassion anymore at all. It is the pressure of ego’s speed which causes aggression and stupidity because it doesn’t give you a chance to examine anything; you are just being carried away by this great speed. And as you drive yourself along with this speed you

collect all kinds of garbage, which is passion. The sudden flash at least cuts the speed, slows it down, as if somebody had punctured your car tire. You collect less dust, less garbage on your wooly tail. The situation becomes more spacious and workable.

This cutting applies not only to you as an individual, but it also applies to working with other people as well. You might develop a sense that you want to help somebody; you feel very strongly that you want to help. You feel so excited about helping this person that you become very ambitious about this project. You want to make a clean sweep; create this person. But your style is so ambitious, so speedy, that you fail to see the details of what the person needs, what kind of help is needed. And you become a clown from the point of view of that person. He thinks you are pretending to help him. There is no respect on his side, and on your side, you feel you have no time. You just want to make a clean sweep but instead you create a thicker skin for that person, who begins to see through you and your speed. Your attempt to help becomes an uncompassionate act. Seemingly your attempt is made in the name of compassion, but there is no room to be compassionate. There is no time taken, no sudden glimpse, the compassionate glimpse, which becomes extremely powerful, naturally workable.

### Discussion

Q. Could you briefly describe idiot compassion?

R. Idiot compassion is the highly conceptualized idea that you want to do somebody good. At this point “good” is purely related with pleasure. Somebody might say that a certain person needs an operation, and you would argue against his having it. “He’s sick already so why do we have to go further and cut his body in an operation? We don’t want to hurt him. We are trying to cure him not destroy him.” It’s very primitive. Idiot compassion also stems from not having enough courage to say “no.” Saying “no” means saying “yes” in the long run. But you are afraid to say even that. It’s like what often happens in Mexico and India. When you ask people the way, they don’t want to say “no.” Instead they say, “Yes, yes. It’s very close. You turn right, and turn right again and you’ll be there.” They don’t say, “I don’t know.” That’s a primitive form of idiot compassion.

Q. I’m getting the sense that one should try to be fully compassionate several times a day, try to open oneself.

R. Well, the idea of opening yourself is quite different from the primitive approach of repeating God’s name or thinking higher thoughts a few times a day. It’s just abrupt awareness, seeing yourself, which doesn’t have to be strategized. It’s an abrupt glance. Krishnamurti referred to this experience as “choiceless awareness”—you don’t have to choose to have it but it comes to you. It seems that awareness is not as simple as that. You have to make some effort to decide to look and then not hold onto it.

Q. What exactly do you mean by patience? How does it develop? Is it just slowing down the speed?

R. Yes, slowing down the speed.

Q. As to the strength of awareness, is that what creates the confidence underneath it all?

R. It seems to do everything. It does everything that we can think of. Everything “goody.”

Q. Rinpoche, when you were analyzing this sudden glimpse the first time, you said that it has three stages: the first is warmth, or maitri; the second is cutting through neurosis; and the third is openness. Then a little later you went through it again and you gave the three stages slightly differently: the first as maitri; the second as gap or openness, tathagatagarbha; and the third as communication.

R. Piercing the chain of karma is regarded as creating a hole, so to speak, creating a gap, which is openness. But at the same time communication is also another form of openness. It is openness in the sense of not just creating a gap between you and your neighbor but going out across it, which is saying the same thing.

Q. Are transitions between the stages automatic or is there a kind of perception used to make them?

R. At this point it is almost useless to talk about even three stages, because the glimpse is so quick and so sudden that there is no point in taking notice of it. There is no point in analyzing it. But that is the nature of the experience. It does have those three possibilities, those three situations happening, but it's not especially important to take notice of them. It just happens.

Q. It seems as if there's a possibility that the awareness of the open space might be so attractive that you would want to stay there.

R. Well, at that point you have to be able to give up. You deliberately have to push the awareness away. Disown it deliberately.

Q. The experience?

R. Yes. That's extremely important. Otherwise you kill the whole thing. This glimpse is very simple: just look. That's it, you know. There's no problem about that.

Q. Are we cognizant of the glimpse?

R. You are aware at the beginning and at the end, obviously. When somebody takes your photograph with a flashbulb, when it flashes you don't think; you are just purely dazzled by the flash. After that you say, "Now my photograph has been taken." And before, you say, "My photograph will be taken." Those things are okay; we can't start perfectly.

Q. Is this moment—the moment of compassion from the mahayana point of view—the same as the moment of hopelessness from the hinayana point of view?

R. Well, hinayana's point of view is satipatthana or intense awareness. Yes, the narrowness.

Q. Earlier you said that you just had to recall the idea, and then later on you said that you can't use the past to try and recreate...

R. Yes. Well, the thing is that you have a recollection that such a situation does exist, and then you look. But you don't hold onto it. Rather than an attempt to recreate the flash—"That experience yesterday was a better flash than today's flash"—recollection is a boundary, an outline. Deliberate action exists only at the boundary. Once you are inside the boundary, there is no point in making further boundaries. In fact, you can't; it is so quick. Before you think you have made a boundary you have lost it already—not lost it but passed it. It is very sudden.

Q. So you can use these past experiences to slow yourself down, to prepare for the flash?

R. To prepare for it, yes.



Q. It seems to me that it is so fast that it almost has a foolproofness to it. Even if you try to recall your previous experience that would just be the mistake of wanting to know the boundaries. It's so fast you couldn't do it wrong.

R. That's the whole point. You can only go wrong at the beginning, by preparing too much. Then your flash would be a very clumsy one. Actually, you are fooling yourself—you are not flashing. Or else you are congratulating yourself afterwards and trying to hang onto the tail of it.

Q. When neurotic patterns get set up between people, they often describe a vicious circle. It is a circle and all you have to do is cut it at one point. Once the circle is cut there's a way out.

R. Once you cut the circle at one point there is a possibility of bringing chaos to the whole circle, but still you have the memories of the circle, so you will go on. The way out has to be repeated many times. The circle has to be sliced thoroughly all over.

Q. You were talking about compassion. Well, what about Shantideva? He says he would do everything for everybody, more or less.

R. What about it?

Q. Well, you're saying that you shouldn't do everything for everybody.

R. Of course you should do everything for everybody; there is no selection involved at all. But that doesn't mean to say that you have to be gentle all the time. Your gentleness could have heart, strength, so that the compassion doesn't become idiot compassion. You have to use your intelligence. And there could be the self-indulgence of thinking that you are creating a compassionate situation when in fact you are feeding the other person's aggression. If you go to a shop and the shopkeeper cheats you, makes a profit on you the first time, and you go back and let him cheat you again, that doesn't seem to be a very healthy thing to do for others.

Q. Is it better not to help people if you are in a speeded up state and you don't have the awareness and the gap? Is it better to do nothing at all? Or is there a possibility that that gap can be created in the process of helping people?

R. That's it. You try to create a gap as you are helping people. You shouldn't give up.

Q. You shouldn't go away and prepare yourself?

R. Well, everything happens on the spot. There's really nothing to prepare as such. Things are exposed to you in a given situation and the preparation and skillful means happen simultaneously.

Q. When you reach a climax of hope and fear there's a sudden relaxation. There's a really vivid moment of intense relaxation and emptiness and it seems as if there's a background of void and you're only likely to stay in it for a couple of seconds. Is that kind of thing like the situation you are talking about, or is that something different?

R. You mean if you want to stay in it?

Q. It's something very dramatic. It might last for a few moments like a flash in sitting: "OK, there I was," or for a longer period in the course of our lives. Is that what you are talking about?

R. I think so, yes. Any kind of clarity is part of that. Though the experience of clarity might last for half a day or half an hour you can't repeat it. The sudden glimpse is part of that clarity; it has a similar quality.

Q. Within the experience of clarity, are there gaps between the moments of clarity or is the clarity the whole thing?

R. It's just one sudden thing you can't define. The scriptures talk about touching and penetrating and releasing compassion but that is almost a myth because it happens so fast.

Q. Is the time between the glimpses a state of pure hell?

R. Well, whatever you like to call it. It is this.

Q. If you think in visual terms, the glimpse seems to be glimpsing the whole Wheel of Life. At different times we might be in the deva world or in the hell world, but would you say that that's what the glimpse is, stepping out of the wheel?

R. Not necessarily. The glimpse is just cutting the umbilical cord. Just that. Seeing the no-man's land.

Q. If you don't let go of the experience I suppose that would make everything worse afterwards. You would be struggling to get back there.

R. Yes, very much so. Then the experience becomes a trip. You know, trying to get higher and higher, better and better. Quite possibly we could categorize this by serial numbers: glimpse one, glimpse two, glimpse zero, which becomes a big trip.

Q. Aren't some of Gurdjieff's numbers like that? Cosmic vibration numbers corresponding to different heights?

R. More likely in Ouspensky.

Q. Or the jnanas in hinayana?

R. Well, that seems to be slightly different. The jnana states are less abrupt—just rest, different intensities of rest. There is no flash of clarity but rather a kind of absorption. It's like being concerned with whether you had a good sleep, a bad sleep, or a relatively good one.

Q. How do those relate to the glimpse itself?

R. Well, the glimpse cuts through that absorption as well. There are two levels: developing the experience of the realm of the gods which is the result of the jnana states, and transcending the jnana states, which is the development of wisdom. So buddhism transcends the deva loka as well. The glimpse is some sort of nirvana experience rather than a samsaric one.

## Talk 5: Skillful Means

It seems that we haven't had enough time to go through the bodhisattva path thoroughly. What we have discussed so far has been just a preliminary glimpse of the bodhisattva path, of the basic psychology of the bodhisattva or the bodhisattva mentality and how one develops. Particularly since today the bodhisattva vows were taken, I thought that maybe we could follow up the idea of commitment to the bodhisattva path.

The basic bodhisattva's mentality consists of two aspects. The first is the general meditative state of mind, or the awareness which we discussed the other day—the glimpse and so forth. That is referred to as the absolute. The second is the relative aspect which is the actual application in our day-to-day life situation. So it seems that the commitment of a person's whole being to the bodhisattva path would involve not only commitment to the day-to-day life situations that come up. This refers not only to contemplative situations, but to situations which require decisions, situations which require the functioning of discursive thoughts to make the right decisions.

So from that point of view it's not a matter of joining the bodhisattva path out of faith alone, but there should be a sense of conviction, and some kind of intellect. A certain sorting out process becomes important. It's a question of skillful means and unskillful means; how to work with situations, how to handle them. If you regard the bodhisattva path as purely a system of existing laws, containing all sorts of bylaws for this and that, you can't keep track of things unless you know the bodhisattva's bible by heart. But once you relate to the bodhisattva path as an existing feeling or basic understanding, then the sense of skillful means is not based on prescriptions given by the books alone, but on prescriptions that are given by your own innate nature or basic understanding.

There's a tremendous sense of excitement that you have committed yourself to the bodhisattva path. You want to do everything extraordinarily situationally. You feel that you could save people on the spot, that you could help people by sacrificing your next meal or next nap. But somehow that doesn't seem to be quite enough. And in fact, quite possibly, if you didn't take care of your body and your energy, your bodhisattva action would become very sloppy. You would become bored and tired as a result of putting too much energy into working with other people without regarding your basic health. So the bodhisattva's skillful means involves not only going outward after having taken the vow, but it also involves tremendous concern for one's own body, one's own basic being, at the same time. There is a sense of responsibility in all directions.

Another possible obstacle on the bodhisattva path is a sense of excitement, feeble excitement, in which you want to convert everybody into your trip. You would like to make everyone a replica of yourself. This is one of the first big mistakes that an adolescent bodhisattva can make. There is so much inspiration, so much energy, that he begins to feel that he could conquer the whole world. There is so much conviction that the bodhisattva is actually blinded by it. He is not able to see the situation beyond that emotional conviction, beyond that sense of excitement.

At the same time that conviction should be nursed. The idea is not just purely to play it safe—security is not in question, particularly. The problem in that situation is that there is a limited sense of vision. You are purely interested in converting other people into the bodhisattva path, and you are unable to see the panoramic vision of how the whole thing works, how the whole situation functions. There is a sense of totality. There is a sense of comprehensive

vision—seeing what needs to be done in the present situation but at the same time not being rushed into it, and also experiencing what comes next. There is more emphasis made on future situations—creating the right atmosphere in each particular working base and relating with other people.

It is a question of whether or not the bodhisattva's attitude is involved with self or ambition of ego. Even if the bodhisattva's ego is associated with enlightenment, it is still ego; it is still related with spiritual materialism. So there is a sense of giving away and destroying your ambition at the same time that you are building your inspiration. That is one of the basic points of skillful means: you have enough power to exert your energy in a situation, but at the same time you have enough gentleness to change your decisions to suit the given situation.

So the bodhisattva's approach is a gentle but powerful effort which is based on prajna. Prajna involves skillful means and knowledge. Developing basic prajna is almost like becoming an enlightened politician. You are aware of the surrounding situation, and at the same time you are also aware of your version of the situation. You don't just give in to what is happening, but your version of it has something to do with the situation as well. Every corner has been seen with the skillful means of the bodhisattva approach.

The scriptures that describe the bodhisattva discipline talk about not presenting the dharma if the listener is uninterested; not associating with heretics; and not refusing an invitation to teach. All those situations, if you look at them very generally, seem to be illogical and confusing. But once you begin to look at real, definite situations, they have a logical working basis. When there is a pull towards ego itself, that could be cut. When there is a hesitation towards stepping outside of ego, a fear of losing one's grip, then one could just let go. And when there is hesitation about being able to make a correct decision one could actually push oneself into the situation so that the direction would evolve naturally.

Skillful means from this point of view, or prajna mentality, could be said to be partly paranoid or fearful of consequences. This is a product of egolessness, because if you don't have the project of achieving things for yourself, of drawing things in your direction, then there is an absence of ambition. And that is emptyheartedness, which could be said to be paranoid. At the same time there is the inspiration to deal with situations perfectly, directly, which is also a kind of pride. It is not pride in the pejorative sense, but pride in the sense of clear perception—seeing that what needs to be done should be fulfilled. So the bodhisattva mentality is that sense of ambition or inspiration together with a sense of tentativeness. That seems to be what skillful means consists of. Tentativeness means allowing suggestions to come to you from outside, so you can utilize situations. The inspiration is being unafraid to utilize situations in the same basic process. So there seems to be a tremendous subtlety of perception involved. That arises from a sense of basic warmth, or compassionate mentality, along with the shunyata mentality of openness, which operate simultaneously.

It seems extremely difficult to develop skillful means just by magic, by doing some unrelated technique like standing on your head or saying certain formulas which supposedly will provide sympathetic vibrations toward that practice. But according to the bodhisattva's way, we have to get into it. We have to do it, by means of generosity and patience, discipline, energy, meditation, and knowledge, as if we had all those faculties already in us. So, on the whole, some sense of leap seems to be necessary, some sense of developing basic confidence. You might feel that you are inadequate, but nevertheless you pretend you can do it and push yourself into the situation. The bodhisattva vow has to be taken in that same way. It is still a tremendous

pretense: we are uncertain whether or not we have the ability to tread on the bodhisattva's path, but still we decide to do it.

This confidence is what is known as pranidana, which means vision. Fundamentally there is some kind of hope or some kind of space which accommodates that vision, in which it can work. It is the same kind of thing as looking towards the future—which is equally necessary, particularly in the actual practice of the bodhisattva's way in day-to-day life. There is a sense of fearlessness and a sense that basically there is a solid working basis happening. We don't have to shy away from what is happening, and at the same time, we don't have to exaggerate it either. We could just accept the given situation and work with it directly and simply, as it happens.

We could have a discussion on that.

### Discussion

Q. The bodhisattva has committed himself to save all sentient beings, yet he himself is a sentient being, one of the ones to whom he is committed. How is he different?

R. It seems that he has some kind of vision: he is already inspired where the others are not, so he has to work with them. As far as he is concerned, his salvation is there already; he doesn't particularly have to cultivate it. What he has to cultivate is working with others who lack his openness.

Q. Rinpoche, in terms of what you're saying, should a bodhisattva take care of his body and energy in order not to overextend himself? How can he do that, without living a sort of self-centered life?

R. I think that comes naturally. One has a natural sense of the limits of one's own physical strength. A bodhisattva wouldn't punish himself or say, "That's just my imagination; it's just a comfort-oriented trip." The difference between impulse and real need would be quite obvious.

Q. Could there be a problem because a person wants to take the bodhisattva vow for the wrong reasons, or might he not be in contact with the real reasons he hasn't taken it?

R. That's possible.

Q. Well, in a situation of that type of uncertainty, would it make sense to leap over the uncertainty anyway? Or would that be a further obstacle and just add to the confusion?

R. Well, if the bodhisattva has a wrong attitude, there will naturally be some chaos that creates obstacles to his journey. Things won't fit together; things won't fall into a workable situation. Obviously, instead of giving away his ego-oriented ambition, he is working towards rudrahood.

Q. You talked about a certain seriousness in deciding to make a leap. I'm wondering if it is possible, having made that leap, to realize you were wrong. You have made that decision and are sort of going along, working on that particular branch, when you realize that maybe you should have done it another way. Could you change directions at that point or would it be better just to continue along with the situation you are in, with the decision that you have already made?

R. I don't think you can maneuver around in that situation. You have to make a definite break and start afresh. The problem there is that you are unable to surrender your ego. So no matter how subtly you try to get back to the right path, you can't do it, because that way there would be

no basic giving, no basic generosity and surrendering. And you have to be humiliated. Sooner or later your ego has to be humiliated; you have to face that fact. So an operation or big jump, a drastic change, is required. You don't keep following your original direction, but you acknowledge that it is not very positive, and come back and change your mind.

## Talk 6: Identification with the Teachings

The skillful means of the bodhisattva also depends on a sense of identification with the practice. If there were no identification with the teaching or the bodhisattva practice, if a person were purely relating with his intellect and cherishing some hope that the spiritual friend would be able to guide him, there would be some discrepancy. One of the important points of the bodhisattva's way is that there is tremendous identification with the dharma. The dharma no longer means following the books, the scriptures, or the doctrine; but to the bodhisattva, dharma is purely following the conviction which has been awakened in him. The teachings become pure confirmation to him.

If a person hasn't completely taken refuge in the dharma as path, and if he hasn't completely taken the bodhisattva vow, then he still has an impersonal attitude towards the teachings, and making a decision of commitment is very complicated. "Should I make the decision to commit myself or not?"—he is still thinking in terms of joining a club or society rather than regarding his relationship with the teachings as a real pursuit.

In this case, commitment means that the person has already surrendered his notions of intellectual speculation on the teachings, already surrendered his desire for proof: "If I do this, what result am I going to gain?" The person has given up theorizing and searching for the security that what he has gotten into is foolproof and does work. He has given up the mentality of buying a new gadget, the feeling that there is no point in possessing the particular gadget if it doesn't work. So in the case of the bodhisattva, commitment has nothing to do with purchasing something or joining a club at all. It is simply commitment to the practice, to the teachings. And the commitment comes from the individual rather than from some external reinforcement.

There is another interesting point. The bodhisattva's way of relating to his spiritual friend is similar to his way of relating to the teachings; the spiritual friend is purely the vanguard or the spokesman. And the bodhisattva is working with the spiritual friend along with his own involvement with and commitment to the teachings. So the spiritual friend and the teachings become complimentary. The bodhisattva doesn't have to make a definite decision one way or the other, whether being involved with the spiritual friend is the most important, his only hope, or whether purely dealing with the teachings without the spiritual friend is the big deal. But the two become complimentary.

Basically, we could summarize the teachings of the bodhisattva path as being a way of transcending aggression, a way of working with aggression. When you begin to work with aggression, automatically commitment becomes part of your practice. Doctrinal studies do not bring out your aggression; they only talk about how to deal with it. But living your life brings aggression, speed. And leading your life automatically shows you how to relate with the complexities of your mental activities and emotions.

Identification with the teachings also means developing a sense of friendship with the doctrine. The teachings are regarded as a friendly message rather than purely as a menu to be read. When you read a menu, you develop a business-like mentality: "How much does it cost? Which is the most delicious food to order?" That mentality involves rejecting one dish and getting into another. However, if you have a sense of friendliness towards the doctrine or the dharma, you can't pick and choose: "I prefer generosity rather than patience, so I'll have that." Instead it becomes a general process, a complete process. For that matter, you can't reject hinayana and accept mahayana at all. You have to begin with hinayana and slowly proceed along to mahayana. If you are able to do that, that is the real demonstration of identification with

the teachings. And as you identify with the teachings, you can also identify with the teacher, the spiritual friend, at the same time.

There are certain kinds of “watchers,” or certain aggressions, which keep us from identifying with the teachings. One is the business-like mentality: “Which is the safest and best thing to do, the most efficient?” You are watching yourself developing, or watching yourself not developing. And you are bored with what you are doing: you toy with the possibilities of changing your course, moving into another class, or another department.

Another obstacle is your sense of personal dignity. You feel indignant: “I don’t want to be reduced into a nonexistent person.” Each time the penetrating words of the teachings begin to come through, you feel that you are being humiliated. “I didn’t know those things; somebody else knew better than I did” --there is constantly a sense of challenge and a sense of competition.

Another kind of aggression is wanting to impress other people--your friends or your students. You are looking for topics or subjects with which to impress other people. And you don’t tell them that you just read it this morning, but you pretend that you have known it for a long time. All of those situations—a sense of indignation, wanting to impress others, and wanting always to choose the best—are perverting the teachings, failing to identify with the teachings.

In the hinayana, the dharma could be regarded as a way of identifying yourself with it and also as a whip that drives you. You are pushed into disciplines and given all kinds of recommendations. And also, the truth of suffering is somewhat external; it pushes you—like a whip behind a slave. But the mahayana is much more open than that. It’s only your identification with the dharma and your inspiration that push you. There is no external dharma in which to take refuge as a command. Here the dharma is something that you identify yourself with. If there is any discrepancy or any doubt— “Should I get into this? Should I jump into it, or shouldn’t I?”—that is a sign of being unable to identify with the teachings as the truth. And that means you are still approaching the teachings with a business-like mentality, as if you were taking out an insurance policy.

At the beginning of the bodhisattva path there is the development of maitri, or making friends with yourself. It is a personal experience. If somebody were to tell you how to make friends with yourself, then you would be pushed into it, and that doesn’t work. You have to make friends with yourself. You have to discover the logic that you’re good and bad, and you can work on yourself; that everything is not necessarily either threat or praise, but is rather something you have to work on.

And then there is the spiritual friend. Finding a spiritual friend is a way of involving yourself further with the teachings. The spiritual friend acts as a mirror reflection. Your doubts and hesitations are thrown back to you, so you feel extremely threatened and confused. Your own private parts are exposed, mirrored back, by the spiritual friend—which is further involvement with the teachings.

Then comes the development of compassion and the paramita practices: generosity, patience, discipline and so forth. This also is a further personal involvement with the teachings rather than some particular trip you’re being converted into. There is a sense that you are constantly being challenged by situations, and you have to get yourself into them. It is rather like experiencing hunger or thirst. When you are hungry you eat food, when you are thirsty you drink water. You don’t particularly have faith in the food or the water, but you experience a personal demand for them: food to satisfy your hunger, water to quench your thirst. So you



create the food, you create the water. Nobody pushes you into eating and drinking. You feel a real need.

When you feel tired, you fall asleep; you feel you need to rest. In the case of generosity, you feel you need to open more, so you get into it—you become generous. It's the same as the experience of hunger.

With discipline, you feel you need to put yourself in a situation in which you can work with the details of life rather than ignoring the whole thing frivolously—so you get into discipline. It's the same as eating food when you are hungry.

Patience is also necessary: You feel that without having something to work on there is constant boredom, constant lust for some substance in life. So you get into patience to create some further substance, some further solid base to your life situation.

Then comes energy, working hard: You feel that you are being worn out, used up, by the sense of constant speed. You feel that your energy has been lost, so instead, you have to build up your energy and work hard, diligently. That's the same as eating food when you are hungry.

And likewise with meditation: You feel that everything is scattered. There is no structure and your subconscious mind, discursive thoughts and emotions are shooting out all over the place. There is no focus for your attention, so you develop meditation to simplify all these complications. That's the same as eating food when you are hungry.

Then there is prajna, knowledge: You begin to feel that you are tremendously vague and diffused, that you have no definite understanding of how things are as they are—so you develop prajna, knowledge. That's the same as eating food when you are hungry. So none of these paramita practices are imposed on you. Nobody says, "This is good for you although it is painful"—but the paramitas are something you feel you need.

As long as you wake up to the attitude of heroism of the path, there is a constant journey taking place. The heroic attitude says that you are going to proceed along and you are not going to rest. Even when you rest, that is also part of your journey. Maybe you are not walking, but you are resting in order to regain energy to walk. As long as you have a sense of ongoing process and don't try to stay in the snugness and self-indulgence of ego's neurosis, there is a constant journey taking place.

That constant journey also has certain demands, certain requirements: skillful means are necessary. And these skillful means also come along as you feel you need them. On the whole this process is the result of your commitment to the teachings. You feel one with the teachings in the same way that you feel one with your body. Because you feel one with your body, you feel what your body needs—rest, food, clothing, shelter, drink, whatever. And all these skillful-means practices of the bodhisattva path come in a similar way because you to feel one with the teachings, you feel intuitively what needs to be done.

In other words, unless there is a sense of involvement with the teachings, a complete identification with the teachings, whatever you try to do is purely shooting arrows in the dark. It is often ineffective, it doesn't fulfill the demands of the situation, or achieve what you want to achieve. So we could say that the basic definition of the bodhisattva path is that sense of involvement, that complete identification with the teachings and with life situations. It is identification with bodhicitta, identification with buddha-nature, and identification with the paramitas, the spiritual friend and so forth. And there is something real about the whole thing; you are not afraid to get into it, to latch onto it.

One of the important points of the bodhisattva path or the mahayana teachings is that rather than having to be smart and always having to choose which item is the best thing to have,

you identify yourself with the teachings. At the same time, it is not blind faith because you feel what you need and you involve yourself in it. And your action is based on a sense of sympathy or compassion towards yourself as well. If you didn't relate with your body, with your basic being, so to speak, there would be no sympathy towards yourself. And without sympathy, you would purely be involved with a fantasy, a dream world. The bodhisattva actually experiences what needs to be done—which is an act of intelligence rather than of blind faith.

That seems to be the summary of the mahayana practice—complete identification with the teachings. The bodhicitta is implanted in your heart. Therefore, you are part of bodhicitta; your being is part of the awakened state of mind. So you are no longer dealing with foreign elements coming from outside, you are awakening your intelligence as you go along. And your intelligence becomes greater and greater, more and more powerful. It begins to eat through the skins, the layers and layers of ego-manufactured walls and barriers. So that's why the idea of waking up is important in the bodhisattva approach rather than the idea of being saved. We could have a discussion on that.

### Discussion

Q. Often you have emphasized that we should approach the teachings with a cynical attitude. When we choose the bodhisattva path, do we give that up or is giving the cynicism up blind faith?

R. Well, I think giving it up is blind faith. When you develop the intelligence to see what you definitely need, the frivolous feelings of wanting what you may not need but think you need could be stripped out by a cynical attitude.

Q. How do you know what is frivolous?

R. Once you identify with the teachings, you know what would be the best thing to do and what would be frivolous. And as successive frivolous mentalities arise, you can cut them down.

Q. There seems to be a very strong desire to conform with the teachings. When you have a glimpse that you actually have it, you want it to be true so much that the desire itself becomes an obstacle, it becomes an expression of lack of faith. Could it be an expression of faith in the teachings not to push on all the time but instead be willing to experiment with the ego situation?

R. Even if you decide not to push, that is still making a forward journey. Changing your car tire when you have a puncture is also part of your journey. It's the same thing.

Q. Rinpoche, what is the difference between the way the people we are living with, the sangha, become mirrors to us and the way you represent a mirror to us?

R. I don't see any difference. They seem to be the same thing. In the case of your own friends, if something reflects back on you, you may not believe that it is a real mirror. When you work with the teacher, however, you feel that must be more profound. But in actual fact, they seem to be the same thing. It is a question of how much you are open to it.

Q. Somehow, when you are dealing with your friends, the question always arises of which trips are yours and which are theirs—and the real situation seems to be somewhere in between. When you are dealing with the spiritual friend, you have the confidence to say that it's your own trip. You don't have to try to figure out his trips. (laughter)

R. I think that's a matter of opinion actually. I mean it's like the difference between going to a surgeon who is your relative or to one who has nothing to do with you. The surgeon who is your relative might have a personal concern about you; he might make a mistake. So instead you go to somebody who is impersonal.

Q. But in dealing with your friends it seems inevitable that their trips will be mixed with the reflection.

R. Well, it's a question of what part is your version of them bouncing back on you and what part is really their true nature.

Q. Rinpoche, what do you mean by "their true nature?"

R. Well, their true nature is something different from your version of them. Your version of them is reflected back to you. The true nature of the other person may be expressed in an act of neurosis or frivolousness or whatever.

Q. So their true nature is where they're at at the time—which you can't possibly understand?

R. Quite possibly you can't understand, but then again, you might be able to do so.

Q. I was wondering, is someone's true nature his buddha-nature? Or is his true nature the way he manifests himself, his style? Is it something that is beyond his hostilities and aggressions, or is his true nature just his trips? Or is it all of those things?

R. I think someone's true nature is his neurosis as well as his insight. It's his basic being. In other words, if you don't lay your preconceptions on him, you could see the neurosis as well as the insight coming from him—which is very hard to do.

Q. I feel that I need awareness in order to keep the vows. But there's always a haunting feeling that I'm not keeping the vows because I can see that I'm not aware, I don't have the awareness that is necessary. Are you saying that I should have faith that this awareness will come?

R. The idea is that you don't have to develop awareness particularly. As long as you see that you are not aware, that in itself is awareness.

Q. But that isn't helping me work with the bodhisattva situation--?

R. Well, sure. If you realize that you aren't aware, that's the whole point.

Q. But then there isn't any discrimination; I'm not aware enough to deal with situation.

R. Well, it doesn't matter. You see, you don't have to be aware all the time, so that you feel that you are always a solid, balanced person. But the idea here is to catch yourself being unaware and create a gap. That doesn't have to feel good necessarily; it may be quite horrific.

Nevertheless, that gap in itself is very helpful because you begin to see that you are not aware of it.

Q. How does that help?

R. Well, it breaks the chain reaction of speed.

Q. Does it let you become more aware after that?

R. That is awareness.

Q. Rinpoche, you say that as you go along with the practices, you feel the need, you see the need before you—for instance, the need to focus yourself through meditation. But the way the images of needs appear to me in my mind, there seems to be a very fuzzy line between conceptual needs and actual ones. Sometimes it seems very hard to me. Things are coming out of my mind, and whether they are thoughts or gaps—everything seems to be coming from the same source.

R. Once you begin to analyze the nature of need, then you are making the teachings impersonal. You don't have intellectual hunger when you want to eat food—you have real hunger. Actually, physically, you need that food. So there is no room for analyzing. The whole thing has to be very straightforward and very direct. In some sense it has to be very abrupt.

Q. Rinpoche, is the gap recognizing the gap, or not recognizing it? I mean, how much awareness is there in recognizing it? Or are you even aware when it is taking place?

R. Well, you have some awareness when it is taking place. It is like when you fall down suddenly, you have some sense that you are falling. But then there is another kind of awareness which comes much later that confirms the gap.

Q. Where does hunger for the dharma come from? Does it come from something that happened in previous lives?

R. It is a very real thing. You feel that you are inadequate and you need further strength at that given moment, so you pick up on it. It's a very natural thing. You feel that something is missing and you want to fill that gap.

Q. Rinpoche, could you talk a bit more about complete identification with the teachings?

R. Well, identification with the teachings means that you no longer regard the teachings as belonging to the teacher alone, but also as part of you. That is precisely what is meant by saying the teaching is true. If it is true, basically, it should apply to you. The person who is watching the fire gets burned as well as the person who is making the fire. So there is no belonging as far as the teaching is concerned. The teaching is not just information, but it is something that exists in a living situation. So it transcends doctrine in a sense. This has nothing to do with the technical aspect of dharma: it's just reality.

Q. Could the same thing be said of the teacher, that he is not necessarily localized?

R. Yes. "Spiritual friend" means a friend for all, rather than a friend for one particular situation or one particular person.

Q. You said something about trusting your body—(inaudible)

R. If there is a natural organic situation happening, and you don't relate with it, then your ground is lost and you have no further way of getting into clarity. So body in this case is a sense of experience, real experience.

Q. You said we should pretend that we can practice this way. But in trying to practice something like patience, generosity or meditation, what happens is that you see your lack. You see that you're really not patient, you're really not generous, and so forth. So you have a feeling of always being less than the teaching rather than feeling you are up to it.

R. As long as you try to make everything solid and sure, I don't think you can get anywhere. You begin to realize that your deception is also another deception. So you have to trust your first deception and be a fool. You start by being a fool, which is giving away your security.

Q. Rinpoche, one of the obstacles to the paramita of morality mentioned in the bodhisattva vow is "not committing evil acts for the sake of compassion." Another is "rejecting immoral people." Those seem to be extraordinary reversals of ordinary emotions and morality. I wonder if you could say something about that?

R. The “evil” refers to evil from the hinayana point of view; that’s the traditional idea of evil. In this case, when somebody is highly involved with food and he has stashes of food stuck in his room, it is your duty to steal it. That’s an evil act, yeah—according to the hinayana precept against stealing.

Q. And this is mahayana?

R. The whole point is that in mahayana you are supposed to do that. (Laughter.)

Q. You said that we can’t just have blind faith in the teachings, but we actually have to identify with them. That makes me feel I should enforce some discipline on myself. But somehow that always becomes heavy-handed and moralistic. Then you also said that we can’t start out by being perfect, so in situations where, for instance, we get angry, we should just be aware of it. Does that mean that we should just be aware of what’s going to happen, have faith that it will all work out okay, and not worry about letting the anger out of the box?

R. Well, if you have an impulse of wanting to kill somebody and you have faith that you are going to kill the person and that finally it’s going to be okay—somehow that doesn’t work. Actually, the very act of killing somebody is a cowardly thing to do. If you have faith in your anger, you don’t have to kill anybody. That anger is self-contained already, so going as far as murdering somebody doesn’t apply. Faith in this case means having faith in your basic being, rather than in the impulse.

Q. Rinpoche, in dealing with very subtle situations, frequently the impulse seems to take the form of spontaneous action. In those borderline situations where it is difficult to identify whether you would be acting on impulse or acting spontaneously, how do you go about detecting the difference?

R. I think it depends on whether the action means a lot to you or is just pure occupation. I mean that’s part of the bodhisattva’s perspective: certain actions are harmful, and certain actions are communication. That seems to be the basic point. When you are trying to create a situation that is destructive to someone, then that action, rather than being an expression of compassion, becomes pure insensitivity. Communication is connected with love, compassion. It says in the bodhisattva texts that passion is preferable to aggression, because passion accepts situations and aggression rejects situations.

Q. Is judging people or judging people’s actions a dangerous self-defeating process?

R. It seems that way—unless there is some warmth in the judgement, unless you want to relate with the people and help them.

Q. But as soon as there isn’t warmth—

R. Yeah, then it becomes very cold and you are just sharpening your sword against them.

Q. It seems the problem of not expressing your emotions might be due to this cutting off communication.

R. Well, the whole thing is a question of whether or not you communicate with yourself. Seventy-five percent of the world is you. Outside of that, the rest of the world is only twenty-five percent. So if you don’t cut the communication with yourself to begin with, if you are completely communicating with “you,” then there is no problem and you can express your emotions naturally.

Q. Isn’t that the hinayana approach to dealing with yourself?

R. Precisely, yes.

Q. Rinpoche, once you made a distinction between actions that rebound on you and “free” actions. What do you mean by actions rebounding on you?

R. I suppose it’s a question of how heavy-handed the action is. When things are heavy-handed fundamentally, they create consequences. But if things are just simple and direct, there are no consequences.

Q. Rinpoche, could you give examples?

R. Smoking a cigarette as opposed to killing somebody.

Q. Can’t both smoking a cigarette and killing somebody either be a simple direct act or have karmic consequence?

R. Well, maybe if you planted a bomb in the cigarette. (Laughter.) I mean, they involve entirely different approaches. Killing somebody needs a lot of emotional build-up. Smoking a cigarette needs much less—unless you have been told that smoking is a terrible, sinful, destructive thing to do. Then it would become the same as murdering somebody anyhow, because of your attitude.

Q. In a situation where you recognize that heavy-handed attitude, should you try to loosen up the attitude and make it a simple act--?

R. Well, it depends on how you approach it. Hitler’s attitude toward murdering the Jews may have been simple—just like smoking another cigarette. But that depends on how crazy you are.

Q. Is it true that a sane act, if it’s done directly, would create fewer consequences, whereas if you did exactly the same thing but were calculating it with your intellect, your emotions and your ignorance, that then you would create more karma for yourself?

R. I think it depends on both your attitude and what type of action you are doing—which in any case already contains all those attitudes. Whatever you do already has its own degree of heaviness. You can’t just say that everything depends on your attitude; action also has something to do with it. Breaking a bottle is different from murdering somebody. At the same time, different attitudes could go along with those actions. So they are reciprocal.

Q. But doesn’t the attitude that you take toward an act depend upon the situation? In particular, I was thinking of the Samurai warriors. Their killing somebody seemed to be a very simple and direct thing.

R. Well, I wouldn’t say the Samurai warriors were acting with an enlightened attitude, but their style was one of fearlessness, which was good. In the case of Buddha killing the bandit to save five hundred people’s lives, it is another matter. Five hundred people are more important than one person. So, it is a matter of degree, of how great the consequences are.

Q. How could the Buddha be sure that that one person would kill the five hundred people? He hadn’t killed them yet. The Buddha might have been able to get him not to kill them instead of—

R. Seemingly the bandit had a record. We do not know.

We have to end our seminar at this point. I’m hoping that you will be able to practice and think about what we have discussed, and that you will work on it. It is extremely important to realize the fundamentals of mahayana buddhism. We only just managed to get through that material in this short seminar, but still, I feel it is very potent and very important. So I hope everybody will be able to make use of the suggestions that came up in the seminar and practice accordingly. Thank you very much for taking part in this.