

VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

THE LONELY JOURNEY: DEVOTION IN THE KAGYÜ LINEAGE

NAROPA INSTITUTE PRESIDENT'S COURSE

JULY 19-AUGUST 18, 1977

NAROPA INSTITUTE

BOULDER, COLORADO

These teachings were given by the Vajra Regent

Ösel Tendzin in Boulder, Colorado, over five weeks in the summer of 1977.

*The nine talks in this course will be announced in the Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin Library Bulletin and posted on this site as they become available.*

Vidyadhara the Venerable Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, empowered Ösel Tendzin as his Vajra Regent, dharma heir, and lineage holder on August 22, 1976. A few months later, around the time of the Tibetan New Year in February of 1977, the Vidyadhara entered into a year-long retreat, leaving the teaching responsibilities and administration of his entire organization in the hands of the Vajra Regent. These responsibilities included Naropa Institute's annual president's course taught each summer by Trungpa Rinpoche. The Lonely Journey was the first such course taught entirely by the Vajra Regent.

In The Lonely Journey, the Vajra Regent presents the experience of devotion as studied and practiced in the Kagyü lineage, and how the student-teacher relationship evolves as the student progresses along the stages of the Buddhist path.

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*TALK ONE: LONELINESS IS THE STARTING POINT*

*In this, the first of nine talks in this course, the Vajra Regent introduces the lonely journey of devotion by explaining that we must start with the state of mind that exists now, rather than a mind of wishful thinking. That basic state of mind is marked by the experience of separation, loneliness, and pain. Only through the recognition and acceptance of that as the starting place can we develop devotion. The Vajra Regent also emphasizes that devotion can't be accomplished in a five-week academic class. His objective is to create a spark, one that is supported by the practice of meditation. This is the only way that the student can have a real experience of devotion rather than a purely theoretical one.*

I would like to welcome all of you who are tasting the sweet-sour juices of Naropa Institute. We are happy to have your cynical minds here. It's delightful. Some people think they know something; some people think they know a little bit; some people think they don't know anything at all. We are all stuck together in this big soup of Naropa Institute this summer, which is hot and dry and has occasional rain which doesn't help. In the next five weeks we're going to talk about devotion, which is the essence and the heart's blood of the Kagyü teachings, the lineage of which I am a holder, and which has existed since the time of the Buddha.

If we're going to be together for the next five weeks, we should get some things straight from the beginning. I'm not particularly content with a lecture series approach and, hopefully, neither are you. I'm not particularly concerned about giving you the right information so that you could record facts in your notebook and go away from this session understanding devotion

from your notebook. I couldn't care less about that. There is some sense that we should have a personal experience of what we're talking about.

This subject, devotion, has a lot of corners, a lot of plops and fizzes, tremendous expectations, and also a tremendous sense of warmth. Nevertheless, we have to begin at the beginning. It is very important to understand where we are right now, who we are, and what we are talking about. Our objective and goal is not to churn out devotion and produce sweet, loving, kind, devoted people. That is not our aim or objective in teaching this course or engaging in a discussion of devotion in the Kagyü lineage. If we try to mold devoted people, then we fall into the trap of theism, which is not our aim or objective. So in brief, as it has been said, it is up to you. Devotion as a path cannot be accomplished in a five-week period, but possibly we can make some spark together, create some situation together where intelligence, which is true devotion, begins to awaken.

To do that, we should look at our basic state, which is a very simple one: who are we and what are we doing? Human beings have a very simple intention: we would like to fulfill our needs. Those needs have been interpreted and expanded into a whole universe, a whole world of complications and a tremendous puzzle-like, sophisticated, complicated style of existence. But where we live, where we are, is need. We have some sense of need. It is difficult to try to explode or uncover that sense of need in just a flash. If we try to do that, we come up completely empty handed.

What is our basic need; what do we need? We don't know exactly what we need, but we feel as though we need *something*. Before we even think, "need," we need something. We would like to accomplish something. This is what we're stuck in, a big Naropa Institute soup of need: "So-called I am *here*, and everything else is *there*. I'm not particularly content to be *here* because *there* is potentially so beautiful. If I could only get hold of *there*, if I could just grab some of it and hold it, then I would feel good." This is where we are. This is called the human world. That's how we live. We live always with a sense of having to get something else, having to hold it and make it part of ourselves.

We would like to succeed in the ordinary world, and even be a champion of the ordinary world, a leader among human beings. We would like to reach the top of the mountain. Perhaps we think, "I really don't want to do that; well, maybe just a little bit." On the other hand we might think, "Who cares about that? Only fools would try to climb this mountain. There's no point in that."

Whether you reject or accept a sense of ambition doesn't matter. The point is to understand that our state of mind is involved with feeling separate, feeling different. There's *me*, and there's all the rest. Always, without exception, this is how we live: me—or this—and that. We'd like to bring them together. If only we could bring them together, we'd feel better. We can't even begin to talk about devotion without understanding that basic sense of separation. We don't feel connected, and therefore we have an inclination, a thought that devotion might be the sense of

bringing those two things together. Being devoted to that might bring that over here, so therefore we don't have to be separated from that any more.

We have a tremendous sense of success and failure in our life. We base our entire life on success and failure. When we have a success, it leads to further visions of success: if we get just a small success, maybe we could get a bigger one. It's the same with failure: if we drop a little bit below, maybe we could drop further. We have to understand devotion as a sense of pain. A sense of pain is the only real reference point we have in our lives. There is no other reference point. Everything else is building castles in the air, building, building, building, success after success, failure after failure, a tremendous heap which rests on nothing.

But in our journey together at Naropa Institute we can't simply talk about that; neither can I produce huge pain for you to experience. Rather, we should recognize where we are right now, all of us, in our experience of trying to figure out what devotion is all about. No one is up, no one is down, no one is more, and no one is less.

That's the beginning of devotion: we're missing something, but we don't know what it is. It would be nice to say that it was something: family, children, wife, friends, job, dedication to whatever experience we have, whether it's material, physical, psychological, or so-called spiritual. We would like to say, "I am devoted to this." But that's not true. We're lying to ourselves all the time. We're stuck, trying to find out what's on the other side.

This is a long journey to take together in five weeks, an incredibly long journey. Strictly speaking, we don't have any particular guidelines. It would be nice if we had a text on devotion and how to be devoted, but we have no such thing. That's why this journey is an intensely personal one.

It's possible that together we could spark some sense of what we mean by devotion. In doing so, we have to begin with the basic fact: we're quite alone together, all of us. Even if we're sitting next to someone or listening to someone, still, we are by ourselves, one hundred percent. We have a fundamental problem right there, which is, simply speaking, that we don't like it. We don't want to be alone at all. We would very much like to couple: on either side, front, back, north, south, east, west—wherever. Just bring it together, everything is okay, we're together. We're not; we're not together. We're alone together.

While we are here we're going to look at our individual experience, look at what the situation is. We have our basic state of mind of who we are, what we look like, how we dress, what we think. We still feel alone, and we would like to link up with a bright star. Without a genuine experience of that, we have no reason to be here together, absolutely none. I'm not saying we have to make a big hoo-ha out of the whole thing and ask each other, "Did you get it? Did you get it?" We don't have to make pain into a fraternity or sorority experience. Devotion is not simply a gourmet feast we should enjoy so that we feel satisfied. If you feel satisfied and the person next to you doesn't, who cares? We can't just say, "Did you get it?" Someone is liable to slug you at that point—which might be good, depending on the situation. Hopefully, we won't

be doing that kind of thing. So here we are. Devotion and lonely journey. What are we going to make out of that?

If you have any questions, we could have a discussion.

STUDENT: I don't feel comfortable when you say that pain is our only reference point, because I feel a lot of joy in learning and sharing with other people, and I don't feel pain as much as a lot of people here describe.

VAJRA REGENT: Isn't that something! That's wonderful. Well, go ahead and spread joy to all those people. Be my guest. Try out the joy trip on these people. See what happens. See how far you get. Someone is going to say, "Shut up. Who wants to hear that?" Then what happens to joy? Poof! Out the bottom. If there's someone who doesn't think what you're saying is real, what are you going to do with that?

S: I don't think it's real about the pain.

VR: Yes; but the joy is real?

S: I'm not saying it's any more real than the pain, but I don't think pain is the only reference point.

VR: I think it's the only reference point that makes us wake up. Joy is pain. If you try to build up a sense of joy by saying, "Come on, everyone, join together with us. Why do you have to think that silly way about pain? Don't bother with that. Everything's okay. We're going to be here together." And someone pops up and says, "Drop dead." Then what? You say, "Oh, don't say drop dead. Everything's okay." We have to face the fact, you know. The fact is we're not all together, and we don't all feel that way, we feel separate.

S: But we're separate and together.

VR: How are we together?

S: We all share our hearts, our heartbeat and blood.

VR: What is it we share? What is it we really share?

S: Life, energy.

VR: We share that together?

S: [Emphatically] Yes!

VR: If you die, do you think the person next to you is going to die as well? What is it we share? What do we really share? Let's find out about that. What do we share? Real devotion. What do we share? Good point. Absolutely great point. What do we share?

STUDENT: I don't understand the relationship of devotion to feeling stuck and trying to find out what's out there. Devotion to what—or does devotion even come in?

VR: Exactly. That's where we are right now.

S: Then how can we talk about devotion?

VR: Exactly. If we don't figure that out, if we don't have some sense of what you just said, then we can't talk about devotion at all.

S: So this is the starting point. We can't really talk about devotion until this point.

VR: That's right. We have to be stuck right in the mud of who we are.

STUDENT: How does the sense of loneliness you talk about relate to open space?

VR: That's basically how it relates. When you're lonely, by yourself, then there are possibilities all over the place.

S: So it's kind of the same?

VR: As what?

S: Loneliness and open space.

VR: Yes. Very much the same. You're by yourself, one hundred percent by yourself, and there are four hundred humans here [Ed.: the number of students attending this class]. There are 84,000 dharmas [Ed.: a traditional reference meaning "an infinite number of phenomena"], so many kinds of experience you could have. It's very open. At the same time, some sense of being alone is necessary. Otherwise, we have the reference point of a tremendous, multifaceted, complicated human life. Because we refuse to be alone, we don't feel any openness. Therefore, there are no possibilities; there is only a pattern.

STUDENT: Could you talk about how devotion can be nontheistic?

VR: Next time. Let's just sit in the soup together, okay? Let's talk about that. That's how, simply speaking, to be nontheistic—by not trying to get out of it. Not trying to get out of our basic predicament of being lonely and wanting to have that something on the other side. Whether it's hamburger or enlightenment doesn't make much difference. It's something on the other side. We feel some sense of loss, and yet we feel tremendous passion. We want to get it, and at the same time we feel we lost it.

If you think it's possible to just lie down in the mud and feel comfortable, I say that it's not possible. It would be fine if we lived in a glass case, but we don't. Someone is going to ask you what you are doing in that mud, and then you're going to wonder.

If we're going to communicate with each other, which would be nice, then you need to sit down on the cushion by yourself, which is called the sitting practice of meditation. We have no alternative for how to approach devotion. We have no other suggestion at all, from this side of the fence. This is the only suggestion we have: Sit by yourself. Find out for yourself. Don't think of any kind of spoon feeding at all. That doesn't work. I don't have the answers, and you don't even have the questions. Maybe if you think of the questions, I'll think of the answers. Then we could have some sense of real pain, instead of a theoretical one, a real experience of who we are, what we're doing, and what this world—this so-called world—is all about.

So that's my first homework assignment. Do your work by yourself, right here in this particular room. No one cares, so don't worry. If you're sitting next to someone, they don't care if you're falling up or falling down. They might get some slight entertainment out of the whole thing, but then they start thinking about themselves again, and the whole thing becomes rotten.

Don't worry about that. No one is out to become a gold-star meditator here, because we don't have any medals or proclamations or anything like that. We simply have the possibility of being with each other very concretely, in a very real way. We have that possibility.

Thank you.

