

## Summaries of Venerable Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's NSS teachings

### First weekend: Hinayana teachings

#### Shamatha and the Eight Worldly Concerns (July 3)

This Nyingma Summer Seminar gives us a chance to clarify what makes our lives meaningful. We are here on this earth for a short time and want to make the best of it. We came into this world alone and when we leave it, we will only carry our deeds. From life to life, our karma is what defines us and our presence in the world. Karma is created by our body, our speech, and especially our mind. Therefore, it is essential to turn inward.

This mind is generally preoccupied with the eight worldly concerns. Four are what we hope to achieve through our karmic endeavors. These are physical comfort, material resources, praise, and a good reputation. The other four are their opposites. They are what we fear and thus try to prevent through our actions: physical discomfort, loss of resources, criticism, and a bad reputation. Having these concerns in a moderate way is not against Buddhism. We need food and shelter, we need enough wealth to have these, and we want to be in harmony with others. They only become a problem when our hopes and fears have no limit and we are enslaved by our drives. Our minds become so preoccupied that we lose all our precious time. This causes great mental stress, which increasingly turns into physical problems as we get older.

The antidote to this, especially in the Hinayana, is to develop self-awareness through the practice of shamatha. This enables us to see how much suffering our drives cause us. In our modern lives, we are often multitasking, which makes our minds chaotic. In such a state, it becomes impossible to have liberty and the pursuit of internal happiness. Shamatha shows us how fragmented we are, how our actions fail to meet our intentions, how we don't take care of our own welfare. Self-awareness alone is not a cure, but by enabling us to see our own pain, it helps us have some distance from our mental habits. This process naturally leads to renunciation of our neurosis. With this renunciation it becomes easier to let go. Realizing what's going on in our own minds is the beginning of our spiritual path and the beginning of our freedom from samsara. This path is labor-intensive and not everyone's cup of tea. But unlike samsara, which is also labor-intensive, there is a payback. We are on a journey to liberation and have much to look forward to in the future.

#### Remedying the Five Foul States and Clinging to an Intrinsic Self (July 4)

The Buddhadharma has two main qualities. It resolves our emotional neuroses, and it brings out the qualities of our universal buddha nature. The Tibetan word for emotional neuroses is *nyönmong*, which has the sense of "foul states of mind." These are attachment, aggression, jealousy, pride, and deep mental fog. Aggression and jealousy are the most obviously foul states; no one says, "I feel so good in my jealousy." Pride, or arrogance, may contain a deceptively good feeling, but because it is based on comparing oneself to others, it is pervaded by insecurity and makes one lose openness to others. Attachment is also deceptive when it's

mixed in with love, or *tsewa*, which is the basis of all our good qualities. But when we extract the *tsewa*, all that remains of attachment is bondage and anxiety.

The basis for the first four foul states is deep mental fog, or *timuk*. The hallmark of *timuk* is the failure of our actions to meet our intentions. *Timuk*, in turn, is based on clinging to a self. There are two kinds of self we cling to: the random-labeling self and the co-emergent self. The random-labeling self includes our name, our race, our profession—all the elements that give us a sense of identity in our own mind and in the eyes of others. The co-emergent self goes deeper and spans all our lifetimes. We cling to this by imputing an intrinsic self onto the five skandhas.

We can weaken our clinging to the random-labeling self simply by having a sense of humor and not taking ourselves so seriously, but for the co-emergent self, we need the methods of the Buddhadharmā, starting with the practice of self-awareness. We all have self-awareness; if we weren't aware of our own minds, we wouldn't even know what we were thinking. But to overcome our clinging to the co-emergent self, our self-awareness needs the environment of shamatha meditation to become more clear. Then we can connect the dots by seeing how our five foul states come from cherishing and protecting the self, and we can work to remedy all five by letting go of that self.

In order for a self to be intrinsic, it must have the characteristics of being singular, unchanging, and existing from its own side. When we investigate our form and consciousness and don't find anything with these properties, we see that the snake we feared was actually a rope. Beginning to see this is known as the view. Then we gradually get accustomed to this view through meditation, which is like repeatedly flattening a rolled-up piece of paper until it stays naturally flat. This meditation goes with the conduct of living in harmony with our world and with other beings.

Overcoming our ignorant clinging to the two kinds of self leads to liberation from samsara. Ignorance is the root of the twelve nidanas, which keep us spinning in samsara. Ignorance leads to the domino effect of mental formations, consciousness, name and form, ayatanas, touch, feeling, craving, taking, becoming, birth, and finally old age and death. If we attain liberation in this way, we fulfill the point of this human life.

### Refuge (July 5)

The whole Tibetan Vajrayana dharma is the progressive practice of the three yanās. The refuge vow and practice, introduced in the Hinayana, is necessary in order to receive the bodhisattva vow in the Mahayana as well as any initiations into the Vajrayana.

We take refuge in the Buddha, dharma, and sangha, which are known as the Three Jewels because they are rare, precious, and incredibly meaningful. The Buddha is our guide, the dharma is our path, and the sangha is our companions on this path. But taking refuge isn't something we only do in the beginning; every practice we undertake is a refuge because it is part of our path.

We need to get to know all Three Jewels personally. In the Hinayana, the Buddha is the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, who first turned the wheel of dharma by teaching the Four Noble Truths. But the Mahayana and Vajrayana have a more expansive view. There the Buddha has three aspects: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya. Dharmakaya is the universal nature, free of all elaboration. It is all-pervasive, unchanging, and undifferentiated among enlightened beings. In this way, dharmakaya is the ultimate refuge because it is perfectly reliable.

This dharmakaya is pregnant with all possibilities, including the pure appearances of the sambhogakaya. The sambhogakaya world benefits bodhisattvas on the bhumis; by seeing this perfect world, their own stains become visible and they know how to purify them. Beings like ourselves don't have access to the sambhogakaya, even though that pure world is an inherent part of our own enlightened nature. Westerners believe in the scientific view that an objective world exists outside of our subjective mind, but the worlds of all sentient beings are created by karma, which is based on mind. For example, the beings of the six realms see water in different ways—as somewhere to live, something to drink, and so on.

Beings who are steeped in ignorance only have contact with the nirmanakaya, which often comes in the form of teachers such as the Buddha Shakyamuni and the enlightened beings of our time. The nirmanakaya is the only aspect of enlightenment that comes and goes based on the needs and merit of beings. It is like a reflection of the moon; the moon is always in the sky, but reflections only appear when there is water.

The dharma, the second object of refuge, can be broken down into the five paths: accumulation, application, seeing, meditation, and no more learning. To go through these paths, practitioners of the Hinayana and Mahayana practice the 37 factors of enlightenment: the four applications of mindfulness, the four restraints, the four elements of miraculous power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven limbs, and the eightfold path.

On the path of accumulation, the four applications of mindfulness are mindfulness of body, of feelings, of mind, and of dharma. Mindfulness of body involves placing the body in a posture conducive to an alert mind. With mindfulness of feeling, we observe how our physical and mental feelings are transitory and insubstantial. With mindfulness of mind, we look at what binds us to samsara, the thought process we are constantly engaged in. When we see what's going on in our mind and how we create our own suffering, we will naturally be curious about the remedy and appreciate what the dharma can do for us. From there, we can alleviate our foul states with practices such as the four immeasurables. Finally, mindfulness of dharma involves seeing how everything comes about through cause and effect and therefore nothing exists on its own.

The third jewel, the sangha, includes all who are on the path of dharma, from bodhisattvas on the bhumis to ordinary beings like ourselves.

At the end of the third talk, we all took refuge together, following the text of the traditional refuge vow ceremony. Finally, Rinpoche encouraged us all to attend online teachings as if we're in the presence of the Three Jewels, as opposed to listening while eating or multitasking.

## **Second weekend: Mahayana teachings**

### The Union of the Two Truths (July 10)

Discipline, meditation, and wisdom are known as the three trainings. Of these, wisdom is the most important for our attaining enlightenment. Nagarjuna taught that all the Buddhist teachings from the past, present, and future are in accord with the two truths: the relative and the absolute. By studying the relative truth, we will come to understand the absolute truth and attain nirvana. In speaking about the relative, we can use the skandhas, the ayatanas, and the dhatus to categorize the phenomenal world. But everything in the phenomenal world is *kundzop*, which means façade. It is how things appear to be (*nangetsul*) rather than how things truly are (*netsul*).

In our study of the dharma, as in other subjects, new knowledge helps us penetrate the façade and come to a more accurate perception of reality. For example, the world appears to be flat, but scientific investigation has shown that this is mere appearance. But even with this knowledge, we still don't see the roundness of the earth with our eyes; we only know that this is true in our minds. Similarly, we don't see the absolute truth visually, but our understanding affects our *dzinpa* and *shenpa*—how we grasp at the world and develop attachment. Our ignorance causes us to perceive self and phenomena as having intrinsic existence. Hearing wisdom helps us begin to dismantle this misapprehension. Then, to integrate the truth into our mindstream, we have to contemplate it and practice analytical and placement meditation (*chegom* and *jokgom*).

When the teachings talk about “examining” reality, this is in the context of questioning intrinsic existence. Proponents of the Middle Way (Madhyamaka) teachings such as Nagarjuna did not refute ordinary peoples' notions of the truth; instead they focused on the absolute truth. Nagarjuna's reasoning shows how all phenomena are unborn and unceasing, and therefore empty of intrinsic existence. This emptiness allows all possibilities for dependent origination to create the phenomenal world. At the same time, the fact that they are dependently originated means that phenomena don't exist from their own side. Thus emptiness is equivalent to dependent origination.

Anyone who has passed high school algebra is capable of studying the Madhyamaka teachings. The main thing it takes is curiosity, a deep wanting to know, which is an important trait of the bodhisattva. For a while, this study may feel like hitting your head against a wall, but eventually the wall cracks and becomes like a rainbow, and your head remains intact.

Everything that seems to exist is an experience of mind; outside of mind, there is no universe. It may seem obscene to say that all phenomena come out of mind, but to assume that there is a

world outside is an immature way of thinking. We have all been heavily influenced by the emphasis on science in modern education and most of us believe in the Big Bang theory. But is it any less obscene to think that the entire universe sprang from something smaller than an atom?

The point is not to engage in endless debate but to get to the nature of things. For this, we need to examine the skandhas. The form skandha is in the realm of matter and the other four skandhas—feelings, conceptions, mental formations, and consciousness—are in the realm of consciousness. Everything in the realm of matter is made of parts. These parts can be broken down further and further to the subatomic level until they become space. There is no such thing as an indivisible building block, as Vasubandhu demonstrated with his logic. Consciousness occurs in the flow of time. Time can also be broken down into shorter and shorter segments; again we find there is no such thing as an indivisible moment of time. Through analyses such as these, we are able to refute all notions of existence.

Having refuted existence, we must then not fall into the opposite extreme of grasping to nonexistence, as if emptiness is the same as a void. If things do not exist in the first place, how could they become nonexistent? Thus “existence” and “nonexistence” depend upon one another. Using logic such as this, we can refute the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither and come to rest in *trötral*, freedom from elaboration. The conceptual mind no longer has anything to grasp, so it dissolves and overcomes its own shadow of dualistic operation. It is important to keep going with this process until the nondual dawns in our experience. At that point, we will be free to fully enjoy the great theater of dependent origination.

#### Love Guided by Wisdom (July 12)

Unless we are supreme beings who are unusually equipped to understand the emptiness teachings, it is necessary to begin by training in relative bodhicitta. The epitome of relative bodhicitta is good will toward others, which comes from a warm, tender heart. To develop this warm heart, we have the practice of the four immeasurables, which lead to aspiration bodhicitta.

In this talk, Rinpoche spoke mainly of cultivating loving-kindness, which is wishing for others to be elevated into a state of joy. The ultimate wish of loving-kindness is for beings to attain enlightenment, but this wish can be merely conceptual unless it is grounded in more ordinary wishes for beings to have the conditions of relative happiness. We can wish them to have everything they want or need: food, clothing, health, companionship, fame—whatever will bring them any level of joy. From that basis, our wish for others’ enlightenment will be more likely to come from our heart rather than just our head. A mother will think of all aspects of her child’s happiness—small and great, short-term and long-term. When we train as bodhisattvas, we should try to have this kind of comprehensiveness in our warm wishes to others.

Kind thoughts and emotions are qualities of our buddha nature. They are like rays that naturally come from the sun of our innately good heart. This is who we truly are. Even though we may be consumed in attachment to the self and neuroses based on deep mental fog, those impediments are alien to our true nature. Such impediments inevitably arise because of our deep-seated belief in self and phenomena to be real, but we can choose not to identify with them. We will be better off if we identify instead with our empty, selfless nature, which is none other than the dharmakaya.

When we practice the four immeasurables, we are cultivating positive thoughts that are the source of positive emotions, as fire is the source of smoke. But as we practice, self-centered thoughts and emotions will arise involuntarily, without our being aware of them at first. When we do become conscious of these unhelpful states of mind, we can let go of them without losing our perspective and taking them too seriously, as if they're who we are. For example, a memory may come up that triggers a latent grudge. When we become aware of the grudge, we should ask ourselves if there is any advantage to holding onto it. If we find that there isn't, we can forgive the person and include them in our practice, wishing that both of us go beyond our karmic link of suffering and eventually develop a wholesome relationship. After doing this, some pain may still remain, but we can look at that pain as something not necessarily bad. As Marpa said, pain has value: it softens our mind, it induces renunciation, and it makes us more compassionate.

To lead to aspiration bodhicitta, loving-kindness and compassion must be guided by the universal relative wisdom that sees all sentient beings as equal. Just like ourselves, all beings long for happiness and freedom from suffering. This wisdom is like the bodhisattvas' North Star; it allows us to navigate toward bodhicitta and away from our habitual loyalty to ego. Without the guidance of this wisdom, the basis for our love becomes our own attachment to self. In that case, we may feel deep love for certain beings, such as our dear pets, but then treat others, such as mosquitoes, with indifference or aggression.

Speaking about the four immeasurables and aspiration bodhicitta requires a lot of words, but as we become more proficient, the sincere wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others can come in a flash. It is like the process of learning to drive a car. At first, there are so many things to remember that we may feel overwhelmed, but eventually we are able just to get in the car and drive it.

Along with aspiration bodhicitta, we must also practice application bodhicitta, which is the practice of the six paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. The paramitas contain everything a bodhisattva needs to progress to enlightenment. Each one can be divided into three categories. For example, generosity includes material giving, giving wisdom and knowledge, and giving protection to those who are endangered. For this and many other pieces of information, we can consult with the Omniscient Google.

At the end of the talk, Rinpoche led us in a short practice of the bodhisattva vow.

### **Third weekend: Vajrayana teachings**

#### The Vajrayana Path: Bridging Ground and Fruition with the Two Phases and Devotion (July 17)

Bodhicitta is the supreme intention to attain enlightenment to liberate all beings from the sufferings of samsara. Beings in samsara are like bees in a jar covered by a lid; they can go up and down to higher and lower realms, but they can never escape. The lid is our ignorance, which sees phenomena as being born, decaying, and ceasing.

In his third turning of the wheel of dharma, which is a bridge from the Mahayana to the Vajrayana, the Buddha taught that the only difference between enlightenment and samsara is whether we realize the unborn nature of phenomena. This is how we remove the lid. From this point of view, ignorance seems to be the gravest thing to fear, but if we look closely, we will find neither ignorance nor the afflictive emotions it produces. Simply facing our ignorance and emotions on our cushion gives us a chance to glimpse the enlightened nature directly.

The dharmakaya nature and our thoughts, emotions, and experiences are like the ocean and its waves. If we are situated in the nature, neither “positive” nor “negative” states of mind can bind us as they rise and fall. From this perspective, one can’t find even a mustard seed of samsara; all is the unceasing unfolding of the three kayas from the nature.

This unfolding of the three kayas is a continuous pattern that occurs across lifetimes, in our daily cycle of being awake and asleep, and in every moment. For example, the dissolution at the time of death is like the dharmakaya, the appearances of the bardo are like the sambhogakaya, and the more solid forms of the next life are like the nirmanakaya.

To connect with our nature as enlightened and all our experiences as expressions of enlightened mind requires tremendous self-confidence. It is like being an heir to a monarchy who is fully confident that the throne is one’s birthright. Without such confidence in our innate nature, our Vajrayana practice will not go well.

The Mahayana teaches that our emotions are dependently originated from causes and conditions such as objects, organs, and consciousness coming together. This is also the case in the Vajrayana teachings, but in addition there are other factors that are ultimately responsible, analogous to the genes that determine the human body. The “genes” of the five afflictive emotions are the five jnanas. The jnanas only become afflictive emotions when they are misperceived due to ignorance. For example, mirror-like wisdom becomes anger when we fail to realize its true nature. In the same way, the enlightened five dhyani buddhas become the samsaric five skandhas due to ignorance. There are many such correspondences in the Vajrayana teachings.

In the Vajrayana, the ground and the fruition are identical. The world is already enlightened and the individual is the lord of the mandala. The only purpose of the path—the bridge between ground and fruition—is to purify the ignorance that prevents our mind from seeing things as

they truly are. It is like having a golden statue that has been buried in mud: with a little washing and polishing the statue becomes glorious and perfect.

In the Mahayana, one attains enlightenment in three countless eons by meditating on the view of Prajnaparamita and practicing the other paramitas in post-meditation. There is no mention of empowerment until the end of the bodhisattva path. In the Vajrayana, empowerment is the doorway to the path. This is how the blessings begin to flow down to us from Samantabhadra through the lineage masters, including our guru. The guru also gives transmissions and instructions, which we have to put into practice. This practice is the main way we keep our samaya.

To practice the paramitas requires various conditions, but the wisdom and skillful means of the Vajrayana enable us to engage in powerful practices without many conditions. In the generation phase (*utpattikrama*), we take our seat as lord of the mandala and accumulate merit by manifesting enlightened activities in our sacred world. In the accomplishment phase (*sampannakrama*), we accumulate wisdom by resting in the nature. If we are able to practice these two phases in union, we can experience the union of dharmakaya and rupakaya on the spot. In this way, what may take kalpas with other practices can happen in a single good day of Vajrayana practice.

Various sidetracks can hinder our ability to practice the Vajrayana, including low self-esteem and conventional or inferior views. In many human activities, there are two categories of people: those who have aspirations and those who can really do it. In a field such as basketball, there is an unbridgeable gap between the two; if you don't have the ability, you can never be in the NBA. But in the Vajrayana, this gap can be bridged by devotion, or *mögu*. It may seem like the gap between the gurus and ourselves is too wide to bridge, but in our nature we are no different from our teachers. To increase our devotion, it is helpful to remember our guru's kindness, but not in a way that makes us feel inferior or permanently indebted. Instead, we should see the teacher as a reference point for the lineage and all those who benefit beings.

The practices of our Nyingtik lineage can bring about three types of fruition. The swiftest is to attain enlightenment in this life or during the time of dissolution. The next possibility is in the *chönyi* bardo (bardo of dharmata) or the *sipa* bardo (bardo of becoming). Then there is a chance to be born in the celestial realm of whatever deity we have practiced, such as Guru Rinpoche's Sangdo Palri. There we will progress to enlightenment with the speed of the sun and the moon. Even if we miss these three opportunities, we may then take a human birth in a favorable situation to continue on the Vajrayana path. As Garab Dorje said, anyone who connects to the Great Perfection will attain enlightenment within three lifetimes, so we can rest at ease. A la la!

### A Summary of the Three Yanas (July 19)

In this final talk, Rinpoche gave a summary of the three yantras by recapping his earlier teachings and adding further points.



## *Hinayana*

Patrul Rinpoche said that if you examine your state of mind again and again, you will surely go in the right direction on your path. This teaching includes all the pith instructions of the dharma. Such self-examination, however, is not possible in a distracted state. First, we need to find a quiet place and calm the mind through the practice of shamatha. If we keep improving our shamatha, we will eventually reach the state of *dö sem tsechik*, the highest of the nine ways of resting the mind, from where we can most effectively apply our mind.

While practicing shamatha, we are likely to find that our mind is in some kind of turmoil, engulfed in one of the afflictive emotions. Anger is usually obvious, but the others may be harder to detect. For example, attachment often comes in the form of subtle expectations that prevent us from having harmonious relations with others. Jealousy may arise as a momentary inability to be happy for others. Arrogance may come as a lack of openness to things that could enhance our lives, including the dharma. The force of these emotions—and the self-cherishing and self-protection underlying them—prevents us from having autonomy. It is almost as if they operate on their own while we helplessly cheer them on. When we see how much pain we go through in this process, that is the beginning of our personal revolution. From this state of genuine renunciation, it becomes a great joy to take refuge in the Three Jewels and embark on the practices of dharma.

## *Mahayana*

A student asked a Sufi master, “What is heaven?” The master said, “The love in your heart.” The student asked, “What is hell?” “Lack of that.” This brief dialogue contains the entire dharma in a nutshell. There are four categories of love, or *tsewa*. The first is love for oneself. This is not emphasized much in the dharma, but in the modern world, when many people suffer from self-aggression, it is important to state the importance of having *tsewa* toward oneself. The second category is an expanded version of this: love for people and animals who are close to us—a clean, uncomplicated feeling of good will. The third category makes our lives richer and meaningful; it goes beyond just this present life. This is love for something greater, such as God or the Three Jewels. Finally, the greatest love of all is the love we cultivate with bodhicitta. This is a love for all sentient beings, based on knowing that we are all identical in longing for and deserving happiness and freedom from suffering. This is the highest category of *tsewa* because we couldn’t please the buddhas and bodhisattvas more than by loving and caring for others.

## *Vajrayana*

We may think we live in our sensual perceptions, but in reality we live mostly in the world of our mind. The sixth consciousness is what binds us to samsara. We can free ourselves from this bondage by developing pure perception. If we study the Vajrayana and learn to look deeply into what the world and beings truly are, we will become convinced that they are enlightened. This

is borne out by the reasoning of tantra and by our own direct experience, such as seeing the perfection of a flower in summer.

In the modern world, the media exerts a strong influence to make us feel the world is coming to an end. By highlighting one unpleasant experience after another, it brings about an atmosphere of existential crisis. It is true that beings are suffering tremendously, and the news can inspire our compassion and motivate us to practice. But anxiety will not help us address suffering. Instead, we can counteract this mindset of doom by engaging in practices based on pure perception. This will help us see that the nature is indeed wholesome. We will become like the person who recovers from jaundice and sees that the snow mountain that appeared yellow has always been white.

The highest practices of the Vajrayana are Mahamudra and Maha-ati. The teacher points out the view of enlightened mind to the student, whose devotion makes him or her open to receiving the blessings of the lineage. The student then meditates on this nonconceptual view, allowing whatever arises to be self-liberated. Eventually the true nature outshines the delusional appearance and the world becomes the experience of the three kayas.