

Illusion's Game
The Life and Teaching of Naropa
by
Chogyam Trungpa

(Chapters I & II of Part One)

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We are going to discuss the life and teachings of Naropa fully and completely, but not fully and completely in the way you would like. We are going to discuss the outlines of Naropa's life and his relationship with his guru Tilopa, and the twelve acts of repentance he had to go through. We will also discuss his Mahamudra experience. Mahamudra means "great symbol"; it is connected with seeing the phenomena of the world as they are. We will close our discussion with the six teachings of Naropa.

I find it necessary to express my negativities about presenting such potent - two hundred percent potent - teachings to the people of the continent of North America, or to the West altogether. Nobody here seems to be ready for this material at all. People are relating with the starting point of practice, and as far as we know, nobody in America has a complete understanding of even the hinayana level of Buddhism. People have hardly any understanding at all. They have a completely schizophrenic attitude: they conceive of a divine, enlightened personality that is opposed to their confused version of themselves. As a result, people regard themselves as abandoned people, completely bad people. Or else they might have some hope, but that again is based on some kind of spiritual pride that does not leave any leeway for confusion at all. So we're hopeless. I'm afraid we're hopeless.

Isn't that a terrible, grim picture? Extremely grim. We are hopeless, absolutely confused. We are so confused we do not even know why we are here listening to this. We wonder why. We are extremely confused, bewildered. What can we do about that? Let alone talking about Naropa?

Naropa achieved something. He found his way in the end. Once he became a disciple of Tilopa, he was okay. But before he became a disciple of Tilopa, he was confused, as much as we are.

Spiritual practice is stepping out of the duality of me-ness and my-ness as opposed to otherness, of who is me and who is not me. But in addition to this we have the further confusion of gurus laying their trips on us. Or, as they are called in America, guh-ROOS. That particular species of human beings we call guh-ROOS are mysterious. They save you. They tell you they save you entirely, but on the other hand they tell you they still have to work on themselves. We are confused. They are broke. It's a hopeless situation.

If we want to write essays about that for our Ph.D., we won't be able to, because we are so confused. Even if we want to become professional gurus, we won't be able to make head or tail of it. Of course a lot of people decide to "make a journey to the East," to live with the natives: study with them, eat with them, and shit with them, whether they use toilet tissue or not. They are serious, obviously, and faithful in playing Burmese games, Japanese games, and so on. They get right into it - sit with the Orientals, eat with them, shit with them. We are getting back a lot of anthropological messages about these "primitive"

societies. It seems that though they are primitive, their spiritual understanding is much higher than ours. In any case, these are the trips we have going on.

I would like to call your attention to the following passage from the Life of Naropa:

Once when *'Jig-med grags-pa (Abhayakirti)* [Naropa], with his back to the sun, was studying the books on grammar, epistemology, spiritual precepts, and logic, a terrifying shadow fell on them. Looking round he saw behind him an old woman with thirty seven ugly features: her eyes were red and deep-hollowed; her hair was fox-coloured and dishevelled; her forehead large and protruding; her face had many wrinkles and was shrivelled up; her ears were long and lumpy; her nose was twisted and inflamed; she had a yellow beard streaked with white; her mouth was distorted and gaping; her teeth were turned in and decayed; her tongue made chewing movements and moistened her lips; she made sucking noises and licked her lips; she whistled when she yawned; she was weeping and tears ran down her cheeks; she was shivering and panting for breath; her complexion was darkish blue; her skin was rough and thick; her body bent and askew; her neck curved; she was hump-backed; and, being lame, she supported herself on a stick. She said to Naropa: "What are you looking into?"

"I study the books on grammar, epistemology, spiritual precepts, and logic," he replied.

"Do you understand them?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand the words or the sense?"

"The words."

The old woman was delighted, rocked with laughter, and began to dance, waving her stick in the air. Thinking that she might feel still happier, Naropa added: "I also understand the sense." But then the woman began to weep and tremble and she threw her stick down.

"How is it that you were happy when I said that I understood the words, but became miserable when I added that I also understood the sense?"

"I felt happy because you, a great scholar, did not lie and frankly admitted that you only understood the words. But I felt sad when you told a lie by stating that you understood the sense, which you do not."

"Who, then, understands the sense?"

"My brother."

"Introduce me to him, wherever he may be."

"Go yourself, pay your respects to him, and beg him that you may come to grasp the sense."

With these words, the old woman disappeared like a rainbow in the sky. [The Life and Teaching of Naropa, trans. Herbert V. Guenther (Boston & London:Shambala Publications, 1986), pp. 24-25]

Naropa was studying epistemology, logic, philosophy, and grammar. That's where we are at. Of course everybody is also extremely involved with art now. Everybody is trying to work out their artistic self-expression. They might hear the teachings of Naropa in connection with art; they might see it in terms of "the art of the Tibetan teachings." Then there is also logic, the question of how the teachings relate with each other, how not and how so. We are involved with logic as well. It could be said that everybody here is in the first stage of Naropa's experience, involved in philosophy and art, as well as epistemology. We are on the same level Naropa was experiencing before enlightenment. We want an answer; we want definitions. We want a fixed situation rather

than something fluid. We feel that concepts are very badly needed.

In this seminar you are not going to be able to relate with concepts. You're not going to get something out of studying logic, epistemology, grammar, and philosophy - which were a failure for Naropa as well. That is why he had to go through twelve stages of punishment, because of his concepts. We are going to go through the same journey that Naropa went through; we are going to take a tour of Naropa's agony. In some ways, it is going to be like Disneyland. You go through some tunnel, and you come out; you're delivered to somewhere else. You see exciting things and you come out on the other end. But in this case, it is related with psychological problems. It is going to be more deathening, more hellish or more heavenish. We start at Naropa's starting point of searching for goodness and trying to achieve divinity.

II: Genuine Madness and Pop Art

And he proceeded onwards in an Eastern direction.

These were the visions he had:

When he had come to a narrow footpath that wound between rocks and a river, he found a leper woman without hands and feet blocking his path.

"Do not block the way, step aside."

"I cannot move. Go around if you are not in a hurry, but if you are, jump over me."

Although he was full of compassion, he closed his nose in disgust and leaped over her. The leper woman rose in the air in a rainbow and said:

Listen Abhayakirti:

The Ultimate in which all become the same
Is free of habit-forming thought and
limitations.

How, if still fettered by them,
Can you hope to find the Guru?

At this the woman, the rocks, and the path all vanished and Naropa fell into a swoon on a sandy plateau. When he recovered consciousness he thought: "I did not recognize this to be the Guru, now I shall ask anyone I meet for instruction." Then he got up and went on his way praying.

On a narrow road he met a stinking bitch crawling with vermin. He closed his nose and jumped over the animal, which then appeared in the sky in a rainbow halo and said:

All living beings by nature are one's parents.
How will you find the Guru, if
Without developing compassion
On the Mahayana path
You seek in the wrong direction?
How will you find the guru to accept you
When you look down on others?

After these words the bitch and the rocks disappeared and Naropa again swooned on a sandy plateau.

When he came to, he resumed his prayers and his journey, and met a man carrying a load.

"Have you seen the venerable Tilopa?"

"I have not seen him. However, you will find behind this mountain a man playing tricks on his parents. Ask him."

When he had crossed the mountain, he found the man, who said:

"I have seen him, but before I tell you, help me to turn my parents' head."

But Abhayakirti thought: "Even if I should not find the venerable Tilopa, I cannot associate with a scoundrel, because I am a prince, a Bhikshu, and a scholar. If I seek the Guru I will do so in a respectable way according to the dharma."

Everything happened as before, the man receded into the centre of a rainbow halo and said:

How will you find the Guru, if
In this doctrine of Great Compassion
You do not crack the skull of egotism
With the mallet of non-Pure-Egoness and
nothingness?

The man disappeared like a rainbow and Naropa fell senseless to the ground. When he woke up there was nothing and he walked on praying as he went.

Beyond another mountain he found a man who was tearing the intestines out of a human corpse and cutting them up. Asked whether he had seen Tilopa, he answered:

"Yes, but before I show him to you, help me to cut up the intestines of this decayed corpse."

Since Naropa did not do so, the man moved away into the centre of a rainbow -coloured light and said:

How will you find the Guru, if
You cut not Samsara's ties
With the unoriginatedness of the Ultimate
In its realm on non-reference?

And the man disappeared like a rainbow.

When Naropa had recovered from his swoon and gone on his way praying, he found on the bank of a river a rascal who had opened the stomach of a live man and was washing it with warm water. When he asked him whether he had seen the venerable Tilopa, he replied:

"Yes, but before I show him, help me."

Again Naropa refused, and the man appearing in a centre of light in the sky said:

How will you find the Guru, if
With the water of profound instruction
You cleanse not Samsara, which by nature [is]
free
Yet represents the dirt of habit-forming
thoughts?

And the man disappeared in the sky.

After having woken from his swoon Naropa prayed and journeyed on until he came to the city of a great king, whom he asked whether he had seen Tilopa. The king replied:

"I have seen him, but marry my daughter before I show him to you."

Having taken her, he seemed to spend a long time. Then the king, not wishing to let him go, took back the girl and the dowry and left the room. Not recognizing this as a magic spell, but thinking that he would have to employ force with the aid the *bDe-mchog rtsa-rgyud, Abhhidhana-uttaratantra*, he heard a voice say:

Are you not deceived by a magic show?

How then will you find the Guru
If through desire and dislike you fall
Into the three forms of evil life?

And the whole kingdom disappeared.

When Naropa came to, he travelled in prayer until he met a
dark man with a pack of hounds, a bow and arrows.

"Have you seen Tilopa?"

"Yes."

"Show him to me."

"Take this bow and arrow and kill that deer."

When Naropa refused, the man said:

A hunter, I have drawn the arrow
Of the phantom body which from desires is
free
In the bow, of radiant light the essence:
I shall kill the fleeting deer of this and that,
On the mountain of the body believing in
an I.
Tomorrow I go fishing in the lake.

So saying, he disappeared.

When Naropa had recovered he continued prayerfully in search
of the Guru and came to the shore of a lake full of fish. Nearby
two old people were ploughing a field, killing and eating the
insects they found in the furrows.

"Have you seen Tilopa?"

"He stayed with us, but before I show him to you - hallo,
wife, come and get this Bhikshu something to eat."

The old woman took some fish and frogs from her net and cooked
them alive. When she invited Naropa to eat, he said: "Since I am
a Bhikshu I no longer have an evening meal, and besides that I do
not eat meat." Thinking, "I must have violated the doctrine of
the Buddha to be asked to dine by an old woman who cooks fish and
frogs alive," he sat there miserably. Then the old man came up
with an ox on his shoulders and asked his wife: "Have you
prepared some food for the Bhikshu?" She replied: "He seems to be
stupid; I cooked some food, but he said that he did not want to
eat."

Then the old man threw the pan into the fire while fish and
frogs flew up into the sky. He said:

Fettered by habit-forming thoughts, 'tis hard
to find the Guru.
How will you find the Guru if you eat not
This fish of habit-forming thoughts, but
hanker
After pleasures (which enhance the sense of
ego)?
Tomorrow I will kill my parents.

He then disappeared.

After his recovery Naropa came upon a man who had impaled his
father on a stake, put his mother into a dungeon, and was about
to kill them. They cried loudly: "Oh son, do not be so cruel."
Although Naropa was revolted at the sight, he asked the man
whether he had seen Tilopa, and was answered: "Help me to kill
the parents who have brought me misfortune and I will then show
you Tilopa."

But since Naropa felt compassion for the man's parents, he did
not make friends with this murderer. Then with the words:

You will find it hard to find the Guru
If you do not kill the three poisons that derive
From your parents, the dichotomy of this and
that.
Tomorrow I will go and beg.

the man disappeared.

When Naropa had recovered from his swoon and gone on in
prayer, he came to a hermitage. One of the inmates recognized him
as Abhayakirti and asked: "Why have you come? Is it to meet us?"

"I am merely a Ku-su-li-pa, there is no need for a reception."

The hermit, however, did not heed his words and received him
with due honours. Asked for the reason for his coming, Naropa
said: "I seek Tilopa. Have you seen him?"

"You will find that your search has come to an end. Inside is
a beggar who claims to be Tilopa."

Naropa found him within sitting by the fire and frying live
fish. When the hermits saw this, they began angrily to beat the
beggar, who asked: "Don't you like what I do?"

"How can we when evil is done in a hermitage?"

The beggar snapped his fingers, said "Lohivagaja," and the
fish returned to the lake. Naropa, realizing that this man must
be Tilopa, folded his hands and begged for instruction. The Guru
passed him a handful of lice, saying:

If you would kill the misery of habit-forming
thoughts
And ingrained tendencies on the endless path
To the ultimate nature of all beings,
First you must kill (these lice).

But when Naropa was unable to do so, the man disappeared with
the words:

You will find it hard to find the Guru
If you kill not the louse of habit-forming
thoughts,
Self-originated and self-destructive.
Tomorrow I will visit a freak show.

Dejectedly Naropa got up and continued his search. Coming to a
wide plain, he found many one-eyed people. a blind man with
sight, an earless one who could hear, a man without a tongue
speaking, a lame man running about, and a corpse gently fanning
itself. When Naropa asked them if they had seen Tilopa, they
declared:

"We haven't seen him or anyone else. If you really want to
find him, do as follows:

"Out of confidence, devotion, and certainty,
become
A worthy vessel, a disciple with the courage
of conviction.
Cling to the spirituality of a Teacher in the
spiritual fold,
Wield the razor of intuitive understanding as
the viewpoint,
Ride the horse of bliss and radiance as the
method of attention,
Free yourself from the bonds of this and that
as the way of conduct.
Then shines the sun of self-lustre which
understands

One-eyedness as the quality of many,
Blindness as seeing without seeing a thing,
Deafness as hearing without hearing a thing,
Muteness as speaking without saying
something,
Lameness as moving without being hurried,
Death's immobility as the breeze of the
Unoriginated (like air moved by a fan).

In this way the symbols of Mahamudra were pointed out, whereafter everything disappeared."

[Ibid., pp. 30-36]

In the teachings proclaimed by the Kagyu lineage, we find a lot of processes that have to be gone through and understandings that have to be developed. This is by no means easy. It is extremely difficult to understand that there is some basic confusion we have created, and that within that confusion there is also some kind of madness. Strangely enough, the madness is not confused. There is sanity in the confusion and the madness. Confusion in dealing with the situation of life a fixed thing seems to be a sane approach. So what seems to be insane is enlightenment.

Naropa's approach to his successive discoveries in his visions - or whatever they are, phantoms that he sees - is connected with his seeming sanity. Because Naropa was born a prince and was educated and became a professor at Nalanda University, he regards himself as a sensible person, an educated, sensible person, someone highly respected. But this sensible quality, this sanity of his, turns out to be a very clumsy way of relating with the teachings of Tilopa - the teachings of the Kagyu lineage. Because he was not enough of a freak, because he was not insane enough, he couldn't relate with them at all.

Insanity in this case is giving up logical arguments, giving up concept. Things as they are conceptualized are not things as they are. We have to try to see within the conceptualized situation, according to which fire is hot and the sky is blue. Maybe the sky is green; maybe fire is cold. There's that possibility, always.

When we hear someone say such a thing we become extremely perplexed and annoyed. We think: "Of course fire is hot; fire is not cold. Of course the sky is blue, not green. That's nonsense! I'm not going to have anything to do with that kind of nonsense. I'm going to stick to my sensible outlook. The sky is blue and fire is hot; that gives me a sense of security, satisfaction, and sanity. If fire is hot, I'm quite happy with it. If the sky is blue, I'm also happy with that. I don't want any interference with my regular line of thought."

On the other hand, the idea of insanity we are looking into here does not mean that you should drop your ordinary sanity and be swinging and hip, to use current conventional terms. I am not saying you should change your entire perspective around, that instead of being clean, you should be dirty because that's a more hip way to behave, or that you should adopt any of the rest of that kind of approach. That is not quite the point. People might think that Naropa's hang-up was that he was not hip enough to experience Tilopa's doctrine or teaching. That is not quite so. There is a problem in communicating this situation to late-twentieth-century-Americans. We have an enormous problem there.

One of the biggest problems we face is the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist works of art. Everything is regarded as fabulous, a fantastic display. "It is so fantastic! It matches what I saw in my acid trip! It's fabulous!" Looking at

it with this attitude, the style of Naropa and his hang-ups and the style of Tilopa and his teachings might be seen as pop art, with people just thinking, "It's a far-out thing." Tibetan wrathful deities in paintings and thangkas demonstrate a crazy-wisdom quality, which is pop art from the point of view of those who regard connecting with the teachings as a hip thing to do.

There are problems with that. Take the example of going into retreat in a cabin in the woods under severe conditions. That should not be regarded as an alternative form of luxury. The retreat cabin you meditate in has nothing to do with your reaction against your central-heated home or your penthouse. It has nothing to do with that at all. It just provides another life situation, and that's all. Meditating in retreat in a cabin in the remote countryside is not pop art. The same is true for visualizing all kinds of deities and mandalas as some American students have been instructed to do. The first impact on them seems to be: "At last I am able to relate with those beautiful, colorful, groovy things that are in the Tibetan thangkas. At last I have managed to get to relate with that. At last the dream comes true, and I am able to live real pop art. I'm not only thinking of them or painting them; by visualizing, I'm becoming part of them. It's an exciting, outlandish thing to do." It's a kind of pop art.

To come back to Naropa, this seems to be precisely Naropa's hang-up. He had so much fascination about Tilopa and receiving the tantric teachings from him that he also looked at it as the next groovy thing to do. And he walked and walked and walked and went on and on. But at each point he got hit because he regarded the whole thing as pop art according to the conception of that particular age. And it is possible that we ourselves might experience the same kind of situation as well, if we impulsively regard the whole thing as pop art - as colorful, inspiring, and, at the same time, artistic. As long as we regard it as something we might tune into at any time, whenever we like, thinking that as soon as we do, it will relieve us from all our pressures and tensions - as long as we regard it as another escape, another sidetrack - being hit like Naropa could happen to us too.

All the successive situations that Naropa went through in experiencing Tilopa's different qualities - the leper woman, the decaying dog, the criminal, and so on - involve a psychological expectation that is an extremely confused one. And we try to make pictures out of that psychological confusion. And the only kind of picture we can come up with is a beautiful, colorful, artistic kind of picture with a dreamy quality connected with possibly achieving a goal, an aim and object. In other words, our picture is connected with the idea of reaching heaven. That seems to be the problem - because such an idea has nothing to do with truth or reality as the Kagyu lineage speaks of it, nothing to do with the mahamudra experience. Such ideas are not real truth. Bliss is not the real truth. Meditative absorption is not the real truth. It seems the real truth is naked and direct, uncolored, unshaded, and not manufactured - the simple existence of a solitary rock - which seems to be extremely boring to experience. We might think, "If I'm not going to get any excitement or understanding out of experiencing such a truth, what the hell am I getting into this trip for?"

And that seems to be our problem. When we try to get into something, we expect a lot - entertainment, precision, an answer, reassurance, clarity. We expect all kinds of things. By expecting clarity, we are confusing the whole issue; we are producing confusion. By expecting reassurance, by expecting to be reassured that the trip we are getting into is right, we are creating more paranoia. Paranoia and reassurance speak the same language;

they're on the same level; they're always interdependent. By looking for precise understanding, we are arousing fear of confusion, we are making more confusion constantly. When we think of bliss, we are making a reference point out of this blissful state, therefore we are arousing fear of pain; we are creating further pain under the pretense of trying to create bliss. These are the things that Naropa experienced in his search for Tilopa. And that is also what we are experiencing. That is what generally happens. We try to grasp every situation of confusion as fast as possible; we grasp it, dwell on it, make it into a mother, suck as much milk as possible out of it, dwell further on it, bounce on it.

In a sense it is beautiful that we can relate to Naropa's confusion as our confusion. It is extremely beautiful that we can relate with him. We can also relate with his understanding. We ourselves could become like Naropa, the father of the Kagyu lineage. This whole room we are in together is filled with potential Naropas, because the whole room is filled with the potentiality of Naropa's confusion. It is quite beautiful.

It seems that in relation to the whole thing we are talking about, Naropa's attainment of enlightenment is not that important. It is Naropa's confusion that is important for us as ordinary people. Connecting with that provides a basis for progress, for a step toward understanding. So let us relate with his story that way. All the hang-ups that Naropa experienced, all his imaginations - his visual mind, his auditory mind as he experienced them - are part of our makeup as well. And there are possibilities of stepping out of that confusion.

STUDENT: I am confused by some of the things Naropa was asked to do. Seemingly there shouldn't be any contradiction between a guru's teaching and the Buddha's teaching. And yet in the visions there seem to be a lot of them. For example, asking him to kill lice seems to be a direct contradiction. On the one hand, his "sane," sensible mind is saying, "Don't do this"; on the other, it is saying, "Do this." It seems either way the poor guy turns, he gets cut down. What would have happened if he had killed the lice? He still would have been in violation, so to speak.

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Probably at that moment there was no such thing as lice to be killed. Physically there may have been no lice at all.

S: Still, you're killing, whether it's only a projection or not. If you kill somebody in a dream, isn't that the same as actually carrying out the action?

TR: It's quite different. You're dealing with your own projections in a dream. If you dreamed that you became a millionaire, you wouldn't actually become a millionaire.

S: It still sounds suicidal. Even if the lice aren't there, something exists.

TR: Yes, something exists, which is your projections, your dogma, your resistance, which has to be killed. Of course there is something there; not only something, but *the* thing is there.

S: If it's killed, you're still left a killer, aren't you?

TR: Attaining enlightenment could be described as killing ego.

S: It sounds suicidal and hence not complete.

TR: It is complete. When you attain enlightenment, the killer of ego is so efficient and precise that ego cannot arise again at all, not even a memory of it. It does a very fine job. When we kill somebody in the literal sense, we cannot kill them completely. We can't kill their name, we can't kill their relatives - something is left. But in killing ego in connection with the attainment of enlightenment, we do a complete job - the name and the concept are killed as well.

S: Sometimes you talk about meditation in terms of making friends with yourself. Is this what you call making friends with yourself?

TR: What self?

S: It just doesn't seem very friendly.

TR: It is the act of a friend, an act of compassion. Ego is murdered out of compassion, out of love. Usually murder takes place out of hate. It is because the murder of the ego is done out of compassion that, quite surprisingly, it is complete. The murder of ego is a complete murder, in contrast to the other kind.

S: Putting it out of its misery.

TR: Not quite. Respecting the misery.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, it sounds as though you're saying we have to go beyond, transcend ego, before we even have the right to get into tantra.

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Go beyond? I think we have to, yes. It seems that in the current situation in America, we are in the stage of being haunted by the lady with the thirty-seven ugly marks as Naropa was. We haven't developed to the next stages of Naropa's search for Tilopa at all yet. We have just stayed at the beginning. At the moment we seem to be just discovering the difference between the words and the sense. The discovery of the word seems to be the sense, but that is not quite the case. Discovering the words was what Naropa was doing reading that particular book with his back to the sun. Reading a book on logic. We seem to be at that level. So we have a long way to go.

STUDENT: Is each one of these situations that Naropa goes through a step in developing out of his confusion?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Each situation has a different symbolism related with that, yes.

STUDENT: Who is arranging all these visions?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Nobody. It just seems to happen that way.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, could you say more about the madness of insanity you were talking about?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: It is madness beyond the conceptualized point of view of ego. For example, if you are in an outrageous state of hatred and trying to relate with somebody as an object of that hatred, if that person doesn't communicate back to you in terms of hate, you might think he is a mad person. You think he is mad

because he doesn't fight you back. As far as you are concerned, that person is mad, because he has lost his perspective of aggression and passion as it should be from the point of view ...

S: From the point of view of samsara?

TR: Yes. From the point of view of samsara, Buddha is mad. There's a story in the Indian scriptures that in a particular country, a soothsayer predicted to the king that there would be seven days of rain containing a substance that would make people mad. Whoever drank the water would go mad. So his whole kingdom was going to go mad. Hearing this prediction, the king collected gallons and gallons of water for his private use to keep himself from going mad. Then the rain fell and everyone else went mad. Then they all began accusing the king of being mad. Finally he gave in and decided to drink the water of madness in order to fit in with the rest of the kingdom. He couldn't be bothered keeping himself "insane."

STUDENT: In the different visions that Naropa has, he doesn't want to do the things he's asked to do, presumably because he thinks they're immoral. So are we to conclude from this that morality and the moral law are purely something that operates in the ego realm, and that an enlightened person in the position of Tilopa follows no moral law?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Tilopa does follow the moral law in its absolute perfection.

S: What does that mean?

TR: The conventional moral law purely has to do with relating with your conscience rather than dealing with situations. Dealing with situations, with what is right and what is wrong in situations, is Tilopa's fashion. If you relate with a situation in terms of your conscience or your perceptions, it means you don't even have any idea of understanding the situation. This seems to be what happens in general in life. You have to try to understand situations as precisely as possible, but there are situations that you regard as bad to understand. For example, if you had to investigate a murder case, you might want to dissociate yourself from the case altogether, thinking, "I don't want to be involved with murder at all." Then you have no way at all of understanding how and why one person murdered the other. You could let yourself become involved with that murder case and try to understand the rightness and wrongness of what was done as scientifically as possible. You could look into the situation in terms of cause and effect and gain some understanding of it. But on the other hand, if you think, "Becoming involved with murder will just get me in contact with bad vibrations, so I'll have nothing to do with that," then you seal yourself off completely.

That is exactly the same thing that seems to be happening in present-day society. Particularly the young generation doesn't want to have anything to do with society - let alone understand it - because it's something ugly, something terrible. This creates tremendous confusion and conflict. Whereas if people were to get into society and try to understand what is wrong, there might be some intelligence coming out of that. Complete rejection without discrimination seems to be the problem.

STUDENT: So should we register to vote?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Why not? Add your energies to the country's.

STUDENT: Don't you think there have been some things we've all learned from that rejection you were just talking about?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Yes and no - both. A lot of people have rejected Christianity and gone to Hinduism or Buddhism. They feel that they no longer have any associations with Christianity at all. Then later - from the point of view of aliens - they begin to realize that Christianity speaks some kind of profound truth. They only see that from the point of view of aliens, having gone away. They begin to appreciate the culture they were brought up in. Finally they become the best Christians, people with much more understanding of Christianity than ordinary Christians.

You can't reject your history. You can't say that your hair is black if it is blond. You have to accept your history. Those wanting to imitate Oriental culture might go so far as to become 100 percent Hindu or 100 percent Japanese, even to the point of undergoing plastic surgery. But somehow denying your existence - your body, your makeup, your psychological approach - does not help. In fact, it brings more problems. You have to be what you are. You have to relate to your country, its politics, its culture. That is extremely important, since you cannot become someone else. And it is such a blessing.

If we could become someone else, or halfway someone else, that would provide us with a tremendous number of sidetracks and possibilities for escape. We should be thankful that we have a body, a culture, a race, and a country that is honestly ours, and we should relate with those. We can't reject all that. That represents our relationship to the earth as a whole, our national karma, and all the rest of it. That seems to be the starting point for attaining enlightenment, becoming a buddha, an American buddha.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, Naropa's experiences seem to be all symbols. Can't we go too far in taking everything as a symbol? How do we prevent ourselves from going too far in that sense?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Naropa in a sense failed in this way because he didn't have the chance of relating with Tilopa immediately. For that very reason, he got too much involved in symbolism. The same could apply to us as well. It's not so much a matter of too much symbolism as of too much fascination with the context. For example, you could be completely fooled by a salesman if you're in a shop. The salesman might say, "This is such beautiful material. This is such a functional item. It's of good quality, yet cheap. It's so beautiful; you'll be getting your money's worth." At that point, you can't deny that what the salesman is telling you is the truth. He's absolutely telling the truth. The thing he's trying to sell you does have those good qualities. But if you ended up buying it on the basis of fascination, you might be disappointed afterward, because somehow afterward you're not relating with it on the same level of fascination anymore. You might find at that point that your fascination is rejected by the experience you had in your first glimpse before the salesman began to fascinate you. The whole thing is based on fascination.

S: What I was asking about was if there was a point where one has gone too far in taking experiences as symbolic, a point where the whole thing's a projection.

TR: Yes, that is related with fascination, not being able to relate with yourself. One has to relate to one's whole being rather than just purely dealing with accuracy and beautiful

display.

STUDENT: In the Buddhist tradition, after the death of the ego, is there any self left? Does self exist?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: That's a very old question. You see, in order to have the continuity of something, you have to have somebody constantly watching this continuity happening. If you have ego continuing, you also have to have the observer observing that ego is continuing. This is because the whole thing is based on a mirage. If there's no watcher, there's no mirage. If there's a watcher to acknowledge that the mirage exists, there will be a mirage. After enlightenment, there's no watcher anymore; therefore the watcher's object does not exist anymore.

S: Does the being exist after that?

TR: The being is self-consciousness, making sure you are there. And you don't watch yourself being there anymore. It's not a question of whether being exists or does not exist. If you see being as not existing, then you have to watch that, make sure that being does not exist anymore, which is continuing the being anyhow.

S: So in other words, there is a death or an identity after ego death, and the death of ego is the death of confusion about it?

TR: Well, the watcher dissolves so we cannot say yes or no either. It's beyond remark.

STUDENT: Regarding relating with our culture, Alan Watts says that one thing that has given our culture a great neurosis is seeing things in terms of the conflict between good and evil rather than just seeing them as they are. This makes me want to ask you about the Buddhist view of what the devil is or the black magician. A lot of our cultural history that is still going on has to do with black magic.

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Defining good and evil or the devil and black magic is very much related to our topic of sanity and insanity, and the whole subject of meditation is related with that as well. The result of any situation that is connected with self-enrichment, or an attempt at self-perpetuation, either in an ego-centered way or a very innocent and kind way - the result of anything aimed at enriching the ego - is destruction, complete confusion, perpetual confusion. There is no killing of ego here. From a black magician's point of view, you don't kill somebody's ego, you kill somebody's non-ego.

S: How can you do that?

TR: You just do it out of conviction, belief. In other words you can't destroy it completely, but you put a smear of ink over it, and you don't look again; you just hope for the best - that you killed it. The whole thing is connected with spiritual materialism, which I talk so much about. Spiritual materialism means enriching the ego. Anything related with spiritual materialism is a step toward the black magician, if I may say so. It could be a step toward the black magician or the white magician actually, but in any case toward the magician, toward gaining power. If you want to help your friend, you just do it. If you want to destroy your enemy, you just do it. In that way, you have the potential of the black magician, even if you are

regarded as a kind person who is at the same time a powerful person.

The whole question is how much the relationship with ego becomes a central theme in spiritual practice. When it does, you get good and bad, what is and what is not, which is called duality in Buddhist terminology. The whole thing of who you are is purely related with the watcher. You can't measure anything without a starting point. And you can't count unless you can start from zero. So zero is you, ego. You start from there and you build your number series, you build your measurement system, you build your relationships. Once you do that, you get an overwhelming sense of good and kind or bad and destructive. You build all kinds of things based on that basic reference point. It seems that the whole thing is based on how much you are involved with ego. That seems to be the basis for defining goodness or wickedness.

STUDENT: What are the methods in your way for killing the ego? What methods would you use in our society?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: It has nothing to do with society at all. It is purely a matter of dealing with one's psychological state of being. Sociological styles don't make any difference in this regard. Sociological approaches or styles are just a photograph. The direct way of dealing with ourselves here is getting into the nitty gritty of our whole existence and dealing with excruciating pain and excruciating pleasure as directly as possible. That way we begin to realize that pain and pleasure exist in an expansive, joyful way. So we don't have to nurse anything.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you spoke of compassion as being bad medicine for ego. Yet Naropa violates our definition of compassion in a number of ways.

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: There are two different types of compassion. There is actual compassion, direct compassion, absolute compassion. Then there is the other kind of compassion that Mr. Gurdjieff calls idiot compassion, which is compassion with neurosis, a slimy way of trying to fulfill your desire secretly. This is your aim, but you give the appearance of being generous and impersonal.

S: What is absolute compassion?

TR: Absolute compassion is seeing the situation as it is, directly and thoroughly. If you have to be tough, you just do it. In other words, idiot compassion contains a sort of opium - constantly trying to be good and kind - and absolute compassion is more literal, more discriminating, and more definite. You are willing to hurt somebody, even though you do not want to hurt that person; but in order to wake that person up, you might have to hurt him or her, you might have to inflict pain.

That is precisely why, in the Buddhist tradition, we don't start with the teaching of compassion, the mahayana, but we start with teaching of the lesser vehicle, the hinayana. In the hinayana you try to get yourself together. Then you start applying your compassion after that, having gotten yourself together, having built the foundation. You can't just work on the level of absolute compassion right from the beginning. You have to develop toward it.

STUDENT: I think you said earlier that one of the obstacles to developing in this way is the need for reassurance. How does one

get away from the need for reassurance?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Acknowledge needing reassurance, acknowledge it as an effigy that looks in only one direction and does not look around. An effigy with one face, possibly only one eye. Doesn't see around, doesn't see the whole situation. Do you see what I mean?

S: The effigy only looks one way. Is this the person who needs reassurance?

TR: Yes, because that reassurance has to be attached to that one situation. Whenever you need reassurance, that means you have a fixed idea of what ought to be. And because of that you fix your vision on one situation, one particular thing. And those situations that are not being observed because of the point of view of needing reassurance, that we are not looking at, are a source of paranoia. We wish we could cover the whole ground, but since we can't to that physiologically, we have to try to stick to that one thing as much as we can. So the need for reassurance has only one eye.

S: And the way to get beyond that one-eyed vision?

TR: Develop more eyes, rather than just a unidirectional radar system. You don't have to fix your eye on one thing. You can have panoramic vision, vision all around at once.

STUDENT: Something like a fish-eye lens,

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Something like that, but even that has a camera behind it.

[Transcriber's note: The preceding is a digital transcription of Chapters I and II of Part One of *Illusion's Game - The Life and Teaching of Naropa* (Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1994), pp. 3-31. It was prepared for the Tiger Team Buddhist Information Network by Oliver Seeler, who takes responsibility for any errors and who dedicates any benefit arising from this transcription to the welfare of all sentient beings.]