

10_22_25 Talk*

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Speaker 1 [00:00:01] What I want to talk about is some of the mechanics of how the Mahayana functions. And again, another caveat, there's many, many. The Mahayanas vast. There are so many schools, different traditions. So I'm sure that there are some that would differ in detail and degree from what I'll lay out, but I think there's something about a core of. The Mahayana project that is resonant with what I'll be saying tonight. And the same with anything I say about the Vajrayana. So what I will start with is something about, I mentioned during the Tonglen about Manjushri's mind. And if you've seen the paintings, the tankas of Manjusri, where he's, or their head is surrounded by a thousand arms, and each hand at the end of the arm is holding a different implement.

[00:01:13] And the story goes that Manjushri achieved some realization and then went out into the universe and to multiple universes and got down and got busy and was bringing people onto the path and helping them and leading people to enlightenment. And then at some point he came back to the Buddha and he said, hey, big B, look what I've done. And the Buddha said, well, look, what still to do. He looked and he saw that it goes on forever. There's no end to it. And this Bodhisattva commitment to all beings was so vast and is so vast, and his compassion and his desire to be of benefit and the impact of this vision of the eternity of this was so immense that his... Symbolically exploded. It blew his mind, you could say. And all of those limbs are the expression of his desire to be of benefit, and all of the tools in the hands are different skillful means, different upayas, different ways in order to work with people.

[00:02:27] So it's not like a silver bullet or a one-trick pony kind of thing. It's about the tuning into finding many, many ways to be of benefit. That are appropriate to the situation. How do we do this? How does it happen? So there's a fundamental dynamic with three elements in the Mahayana, compassion, wisdom, and skillful means. And you might have heard these expressed as karuna, prajna, and upaya. Compassion is that quality of letting the world touch you, of letting your heart awaken and empathy arise. And as your sense of self starts to dissolve, you come more in contact, the world connects with you as you see that this artificial boundary of self isn't quite as solid as it was. The world starts to come in more closely and more poignantly. And you begin to feel more deeply. And you want to be of assistance. Prajna is what arises as wisdom of understanding the situation.

[00:03:57] So one of the core elements, the core realizations, is the mutability, the... Lack of solidity of our construct of ourself. As our practice develops and we begin to understand that these things that we consider elements of ourself are just conditions, temporary arisings of phenomena. We start to see other people and that they are the same, experiencing the same thing. And then through that perception, We see that the more we attach to this the more suffering there is and the same for other people. So I see questions popping up. I just wanna say that, and I will try to get to them, but I wanna lay out this core mechanic first. So then you have the compassion, which is that desire to be of benefit. And then you the wisdom, which sees the cause of the suffering. Yupaya is the skillful means, the ways in which you're able to actually be of benefit. Compassion without wisdom can become kind of a maudlin. It can be dark and depressing, it can be overwhelming. Wisdom without compassion is cold. It has no passion to it, no outreach.

[00:05:48] And then either of those without skillful means can be very stumbly. Can involve a lot of projection, a lot of I'm fixing it the way I want to fix it. You have to listen to me to

how I want you to change so that you will no longer suffer. So the three of them work very closely together. Now I'll give you an extremely concrete example from my life. I'm a middle child and as a middle child everything needs to be exact. Particularly if it's something that I like. So if there's a piece of cake, I need to know I'm getting exactly the same amount as anyone else's, particularly if it's my brother and my sister. And so my world around these things was as I was growing up, extremely close. I would be looking at this thing. We had rules, whoever cuts doesn't choose, you know, all that kind of thing. So it's very tight, somewhat claustrophobic, focused on me getting my piece of cake and not having to think someone got more than me.

[00:07:01] After years of practice, like probably a decade in, there was finally this moment of realization of, well, what if I flipped that? What if I said, I want everybody else to get a bigger piece of That is an interesting experiment. And so I did, I would specifically look at people and try to gauge like how much cake do you want, you know? And the experience was really fascinating. What I found was, in that my cake thing, the world's tight, and you're looking at the way to get what you want. When you relax that, and you think of, well, how can I support others' joy? Their space opens up. A field of relationship develops. You come in contact with other people in a loving, caring way. And in that space, there's actually room for wisdom to arise. Wisdom of seeing that getting what you want is not really getting what want. And it's certainly not getting what you need from a Dharmic perspective.

[00:08:15] And so then the Upaya start to arise of You know, how can I tune into what this person wants and what will actually help them? So it was a profound shift in my life and it literally was around cake. The moment that I still had this vivid memory of sitting with a friend, there's a piece of cake there and I was specifically trying to take smaller bites and make sure that he was getting more. It was probably one of the greatest spiritual epiphanies of my life, actually. And kind of the first time I really felt launched into the Mahayana. So these core dynamics in the Mahayan, it's very earthy. It's very simple and straightforward on some level that unlocks these profound depths of possibility.

[00:09:12] OK, so I'll just pause there. I'm seeing a lot of comments and questions. I'll see if there's one that feels like it would help here. I feel like hiding because you just described my lack of skillful means in the conflict I visualized in practice I was doing. I'll help you in the way I want to help you, oh Lord. Yep, that's one of those. And it's, you know, easy to shift. You just open up to the space to allow the wisdom to arise. Take a breath. And the difference between compassion and empathy. I think compassion is a radiant phenomena where you reach out and your heart opens and you feel connection. Empathy, I think, is letting... I don't know that there's like a strict difference. I think they're both very similar. I think maybe there's a slight directional difference to it. Empathy plus action equals compassion. I think that's great. So, compassion, wisdom, skillful means working together. Wisdom and compassion together give rise to what's called bodhicitta. And bodhicittà is the awakened heart. It's a heart that is infused with love, that there is an emotional component with it, and there's also wisdom. So relative bodhichitta is considered that emotional quality, that warmth. That care, perhaps the empathy, absolute bodhichitta is perceiving clearly. Which implies that clear perception of the nature of reality includes a quality of love, that there is a naturally arising quality of care and love, that that is a part of our basic nature.

[00:11:44] So absolute bodhicitta, that quality of seeing clearly what is, rides on love. In the Mahayana, that whole combination of compassion, love, heart, connection, all of that is an essential aspect in the arising of wisdom, of clarity. Okay, so I'll just pause there, see if any

questions are coming up about that. So there's one more piece, and I think we'll just stay with the Mahayana tonight, because I'm recognizing this is already a fair bit of words and information. The application of these principles, what does one do with this? There's exactly the question that arose there. In addition to meditation, how do we hone these skills? So if you've ever seen Tonka's pictures of like wrathful looking big eyes and eye in the forehead and flames and swords and all that stuff, these protectors that are in some Mahayana traditions and in that. Tibetan Buddhist traditions, they can be really confusing. Like what's with all the, you know, anger? So it's not anger per se. The intensity, one way to look at the intensity of these protectors, because these are protectors is they represent that part of your mind, the part of your being that has glimpsed and experienced your capacity to wake up. And it's the intensity of that part of you calling out, wanting to further strengthen, further develop your ability to wakeup. So those pictures are about expressing the intensity of that desire to wake-up. That's the protector energy you could say that exists that we can all tap into. That is this. Powerful desire to be of help and to hold to our realization. So how do we do that?

[00:14:20] So a protector, you could say that they support a practitioner in their ability to hold to their realization. It's a very important construct there. They don't hold practitioners to their realization. Bodhisattva or a protector or any of us who are trying to apply the Mahayana teachings, we don't try to hold people to their realization. We don't to control to have power over. If anything we want power under to uplift, we want to be able to support people in holding to their realizations. We're creating context, containers to support. We're not dictating. So how does that happen? Well, there's a lot of different ways of talking about it. One way is the four karmas. And four karma is an interesting study and there are books on it. I recommend if it's of interest that you look into that.

[00:15:34] The four karas are pacifying, enriching, magnetizing. Destroying. Pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and destroying. And this can happen within yourself, within a group, with another person. Over time, there's many dimensions that are possibly as applicable to this. So I'll just lay out kind of the core logic of it. And then, you know, again, this is an invitation for you if this is of interest to go more deeply with it on your own. If there's a situation that's highly energized and connection, communion, empathy, communication is difficult, pacifying is not trying to grab it and suppress it and hold it down. Pacifying is providing a large, safe space for that energy to move around. So it's like as if you've got a horse. That is upset about something. You don't try to snag it and control it. You give it a wide pasture with a clear fence that it can just run around and let that energy out. So that's the energetic feeling of that first karma of pacifying. Pacifying, enriching. So enriching is a quality of affection into the situation, putting care, putting love into the situation. And it can be a very gentle thing. It's some way of letting that situation. If it's a horse, you put some apples, throw some apples into the pasture, dump some feed on one side. You know, if it's the person, you can look with love in your eyes, you can. Take a step back and do, say something or provide silence that indicates that you care about that person.

[00:17:47] So you're enriching the quality, which at heart is about affection. Magnetizing is drawing out the details of the situation without right, without wrong, without saying that's confused, that's wise. You're just wanting the situation to have. Enough confidence in itself to allow things to manifest, so that there can be perception, so that they can be the arising of skillful means, both in yourself and in whatever that situation is. So magnetizing is drawing out the details, all of them, without bias, without judgment. And usually without judgment is kind of the key to these things. That you're a non-judgmental loving space that cares and listens and wants to know what's going on. Destruction is probably one of the

most misunderstood because it's got the word destruction in it. And basically what it is, is you're again supporting the situation and letting go of confusion and holding to the wisdom. So there's this notion of co-emergent wisdom, that wisdom and confusion are the same energy and they arise together. And what you're wanting to have is the confusion is seen through and it dissolves or it falls away and then the wisdom is able to be there present. So confusion and wisdom arise like the two sides of a hand.

[00:19:25] And then with love, with care, with curiosity, with gentleness, with kindness, with appreciation, with some skillful interaction, you support the person in letting go of the confused part so that they can exist vibrantly alive in the wisdom aspect of whatever was there.

[00:19:51] Okay, so those are the four karmas. Those are an application. The teachings around the core aspects of the mechanics, the dynamics of the Mahayana in how compassion, wisdom and skillful means work together and then come together as an expression of a practitioner, someone committed to the well-being of all beings, a bodhisattva, how they can actually engage in the world with situations. I think I'll stop there. I think that's enough of a meal for us. And I'd invite questions, comments. I love that this chubby middle child got no pie, had to watch brothers. Damn, my sister, my heart goes out to ya. So, let's just take it from the top here.

[00:20:52] So if anybody has questions, please put your hand up. And I'd ask Bill or George to recognize you and unmute you. In the meanwhile, I'll just read this one from Fran here. Two brothers who didn't help with their mother's long illness now went to raid the remains of the mother's assets, which she left to the one daughter who took care of her. And now these siblings are all suing each other. Aside from saying out of it, I'm the aunt who would like them. To resolve their difficulties and not lose their relationship with each other, any ideas. So I have an inherent mistrust of someone such as myself trying to advise in such a life situation that has clearly such complexity and depth of emotion and feeling to it. That said, I would say trust what feels wholesome for yourself, you know, as a line in. There are people who can advise and are really well suited to advise on this kind of question. And I just don't know enough of the details, but with finding good advice from people who really know how to advise on this kinda thing, take it in and move from your heart. If there's no hands raised, I'll just go to the next question.

[00:22:22] I think I may often confuse a thorough understanding of what is happening with wisdom. Wisdom is probably more like the recognition that the act of trying to thoroughly understand nonsense itself should be released. I think I agree. Wisdom is the clarity of seeing non-duality. That's wisdom. Wisdom it's about seeing through the illusion of ego. And so that becomes big, right? All of the mechanisms that support our identity and they can be so seductive and so subtle. And the very best of you will always be having those arise, you know? When I'm doing my kindest work as a coach or as a mentor or a consultant, Often this little part of me is up looking at me going, oh, nice one, you know, some kind of like little pat, pat, pat, you now, and that's just, that happens, you know, it's just not that big a deal. It's like, oh yeah, that again. Hi, you're okay. You need that. It's okay, Michael. It's Okay. Now let's go back and just talk to these people. So, you kind of letting yourself be human. Accepting that, that's that Maitri, that self-care, the kindness to yourself, and that unleashes and unlocks your ability to have the wisdom, which is seeing the artificial nature of the constructive ego and seeing how you can help other people perceive that and unlock their capacity as well. Oh, we have a handout. Awesome.

Speaker 2 [00:24:17] Hi, I just thank you for these teachings, Michael. I, I, it's just crazy, but I can't understand why I didn't receive them sooner. Because back in the nineties, I went to probably one of the best East West psychology schools, which is CIIS in San Francisco. And, and John Wellwood was my teacher. And it seems like he could have taught me this because it seems like the essence of. Psychology. This is what a psychologist, a really good psychologist, could do and would do. And I also had a very, very good Tibetan teacher and used to talk to me about skillful means. You must use skillful, I mean, maybe assumed I already read about it and knew what he was talking about. But I knew, I just had a kind of intuitive sense, but I didn't know what they were or how to achieve them. And I still struggle with that. I still, I made it so, what a wonderful coincidence. If you call it that, or synchronicity, whatever, that what came up for me during the meditation it was exactly what you were talking about later. And that that is something that has been happening for me on my path in terms of Bodhichitta seems to have come very quickly and naturally to me, but scofal means have been elusive. And even though I was a psychologist and.

Speaker 1 [00:26:14] Well, good luck with that.

Speaker 2 [00:26:16] Well, thank you. I mean, I'm no longer a psychologist, but I, I still have people in this group, probably those who know me have heard me talk about one particularly difficult friend, and she was the one I worked with in this and that was my problem. I was trying to help her the way I wanted to help Wonderful, wonderful. Thank you. Whatever you call it, a synchronous and eco-incidence. I feel like there's something behind this anyway. I mean, in terms of you being here and my getting that from you now.

Speaker 1 [00:26:58] Any other questions? Oh, something here. Two brothers who didn't help. Oh, that's that one. I'm so sorry for the loss. Okay, any other questions coming up for anybody? And if there's something higher up in the thread that I haven't seen, please just raise your hand and...

Speaker 3 [00:27:24] We see two hands up here. Let's start with Mark. Mark, can you unmute?

Speaker 4 [00:27:29] Yeah, I raised in the chat, the last part I just felt confused over how to transform the letting go into skillful resolution. Could you go over that again?

Speaker 1 [00:27:52] Um Okay, so one way to look at...

Speaker 4 [00:27:59] The destruction part, what you label destruction.

Speaker 1 [00:28:04] So the fourth karma of destruction. So let's say you're in a situation and you can see someone starting to gear up into an argument, and you see they're caught in that moment. You know, could be a relative, a friend, could be someone you've just met, but you see the dynamic arising of they're irritated with you. And you can see that within that, there's an anger that has caught them, that is stuck and it's building to something and it is causing them pain. Destruction in this case could simply be a smile and an apology. I'm sorry. And I really didn't mean or whatever that might be. Some active connection that helps them release the anger, release the confused part, which would be the attachment to righteous indignation or anger.

Speaker 4 [00:29:16] What if you're both feeling that at the same time? You're feeling indignant from your perspective and they're feeling indignant for theirs, which is typically what happens.

Speaker 1 [00:29:28] Yeah, so doubly so. That is the journey of the Bodhisattva, is when you recognize emotional phenomena arising, our tendency is aversion in many of these situations to looking at the root cause, to looking what's actually going on. What we want to develop as practitioners is the habit of looking towards, of turning towards these phenomena. So in yourself, if you're in a moment, that's why when we practice, the mind's gonna wander. That's human nature, that's gonna happen, probably forever in our practices. Sooner or later, a thought's gonna arise. The disciplined part is recognizing that moment and using it to come back to your practice. So it's the same with a fraught situation. If you're feeling activated and there's this anger coming up, as soon as you awaken to this and to your role as a bodhisattva, your commitment as a practitioner of the Dharma, soon as you awaken to that, turn towards that emotion and work with it. Turn towards that motion and hold it. You know, if you need to ask for a moment of the person, say, please, I just need a second to just. Look at myself. In looking at yourself, often you can start to find ways to see where in the body is it being held. What's the parameter of where it is? How can you start to diffuse that? Often contact with a strong emotion is the first step of starting to diffuse your attachment to it. Because what you can see and in these situations is the experience of anger can be vivid and clear. It can be clarifying if you're not attached. It can be extremely awakening. You look at the energy of the emotion as, so you, so the sequence of things, you become aware that there's a situation. You remember you're a practitioner. You bring your attention to the phenomena with the perspective and understanding that these are all causes and conditions that are not permanent and eternal. And then you look at it as a vivid experience. Rather than as a righteous indignation anger phenomena. Take the definition away. Look at the vividness and clarity of it. Then bring your own Maitri to bear. Bring your own care for yourself to bear, then from that caring perspective, you can begin to do a Tonglin practice. And even if there's still vestigial attachment to the anger, the act of the Tonglin, And just flashing Tonglen can help to subdue the attachment. So that's a lot of things that can happen pretty quickly. And you need to habituate and you need to train yourself to do that. And it takes time and there'll be stumbles, you know? But one way to look at the Dharma and the practice of Buddhism is we're learning to relax into the confidence of our perceptive capacity and of our hearts to actually be of benefit and to lead us into clarity. That relaxation into that confidence unlocks enormous potential. And it's experiential, and there are mistakes that you'll make, and you can apologize, and you do your best to rectify these situations. But then you start to gradually live as magnanimity, live your better self. Rambled on a bit there, did I address your question? Is there more that you're wanting to talk about?

Speaker 4 [00:33:56] It's just quite difficult for me, but I understood what you said, and I appreciate it. It is difficult. I have to work on it.

Speaker 1 [00:34:04] Yeah, it is difficult. And everybody has emotional patterns. In Vajrayana, they talk about the three kleshas, the core emotional, ego-driven, emotional responses of passion, aggression, and ignorance, where aggression is if something threatens your ego, you attack it to destroy it. Something you if you can't do that. Maybe you try to seduce it so that it comes in to support your ego. And if you can't do either of those, you try to pretend it doesn't exist and you ignore it. Most people have a home or propensity towards one of those. And it's going to be difficult. It's work, but it's joyful work.

Speaker 4 [00:34:50] My first step would be to back away, to just not respond.

Speaker 1 [00:34:54] Then do that.

Speaker 4 [00:34:55] But you know, give myself time.

Speaker 1 [00:34:59] Yep. And practice, you know, we all know practice is the royal road. If you include Tonglen in this, that'll be a helpful element in preparing yourself for those moments. Thank you.

Speaker 3 [00:35:12] Okay, so we have two hands up, our friend Rick Krueger, who will go first. And let's leave a few minutes for Mickey after you, Rick.

Speaker 5 [00:35:21] Yeah, sure. I'll try to make this as quick as possible. And but first, I want to thank Michael Gaynor so very much for your for your wisdom, really, tonight, most welcome and guided meditation. So yeah, my question has to do actually with meditation, I'm wondering if I could ask you a question about that. Yeah, so like meditation is really hard for me. And maybe it is. Maybe it is for most people. But I think that the more I practice meditation on a more regular basis, what I'm seeing is that what my mind and my emotions are doing a lot of the time when I become distracted. And I can safely say that I'm distracted more than I'm concentrated, more so than I am like on the object of meditation, be that the breath or something else. And this is my observation, I'm curious about whether this is even close to You know what meditation I think is about at least one of its goals is that what I see myself being distracted about or to is is what I think of as the ego. And I'm wondering if if that's even you know if that even close to reality like The things the things that I'm there they're terribly petty You know, I'm trying to get away from pain. I'm to figure out how I could get, you know, have more pleasure in my life, in the moment. You know what I mean? And these things are, they're rarely very important, but somehow they seem to be really compelling. And I'm wondering, yeah, so I'm just wondering, is that kind of, is that a kind of insight into like the way the ego sort of operates.

Speaker 1 [00:37:40] Absolutely. And it's great news. You know, if you're into cool boredom, hot boredom is like really strong stuff. You really have the sense of aversion. If it's just kind of putt, putt putt and my umbrella broke and I'd rather be in Bermuda and then it's kind of you come back to your breath and it's like, oh, this is kind of tedious, but it's not overwhelming. That cool boredom, that's a good thing. You know, you're settling into it. And the, you know the discipline of coming back gently. There's so many, so many ways in which we think I need to have a good meditation session. And I define a good mediation session as this. The more you can let go of that, the better off you'll be. There's no such thing as a bad meditation session. If you put your ass on a cushion and you sit there for 45 minutes, that is a great meditation session, just keep coming back and keep being kind to yourself. Such an opportunity for Maitri, for self-kindness, which as we talked about, is the heart, the birth of compassion to others. Your ability to be kind to yourself is the birth of your ability to kind to others. So any experience of dissatisfaction in your meditation or beating yourself up because it's not stable and clear and vivid and all these things, just a great opportunity to be kinda.

Speaker 5 [00:39:19] Thank you. Yeah, I very much appreciate that. We should probably let Mick speak. Thanks, Rick. OK.

Speaker 3 [00:39:24] Thank you, Rick. Now, Mickey, would you unmute yourself, please?

Speaker 6 [00:39:30] OK, I got a short one. Going back to the situation, you hear me? Yes, yes, yes. OK, go back to a situation where your emotions are arising, but you're the observer, the third party, not involved. Can you do anything? Or should you do something?

Speaker 1 [00:39:49] Um

Speaker 6 [00:39:52] Conversation in the group, you can see this emotion rising on two sides. Should you intervene or let it go?

Speaker 1 [00:40:04] You know, so these, I want to avoid an abstract answer. You are involved. If you're in a situation where you're listening to people, you're involved. The energy is present. You're part of that field. And so whatever you do is some quality of engaging with that field of connection. So that can be simply witnessing, you know, It can be sitting there and just... Being a kind presence. Maybe even you start to do tonglen, you know, or maybe you just practice listening and you relax and you allow your wisdom to arise when it arises with, you now, this gesture might be something that helps. So I wouldn't predispose to you need to, you should, you shouldn't recognize that you are. Give the situation space. In that space, put affection. Care for the people there. And then if wisdom gives rise to a skillful means, go with that. If it doesn't, just keep holding the space. Amazing practice.

Speaker 6 [00:41:23] It happens in a meditation group.

Speaker 1 [00:41:27] Better yet. Even better.

Speaker 6 [00:41:32] So follow your heart.

Speaker 1 [00:41:35] Yeah, absolutely.

Speaker 6 [00:41:37] Okay, good. Thank you.

Speaker 3 [00:41:37] Thank you, Mickey. We've come to the end of our time, Michael. It's been great. Thank you.

Speaker 1 [00:41:44] It's been a lot of fun, thank you all so much.