

**The Mandala Principle:
Chögyam Trungpa’s Teachings on Transforming Confusion into Wisdom
Taught by Judith L. Lief**

Talk One: The Wheel of Life and the Cycle of Confusion

JUDY: [Bows] Welcome again to this retreat, which is the number five “Profound Treasury” retreat here at Ferry Beach. I feel so warm and fuzzy to be here with all of you, and so appreciative and grateful to have this opportunity to practice and study the Dharma together.

I think there are many possible things one could do, and of the many possible things one could do, this is really a pretty good one. It’s a way to connect with the wisdom and the traditions of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who I’ll refer to as the Vidyadhara, and in particular to connect with the series of teachings based on the three main stages of the path: the hinayana, the mahayana, and the vajrayana—all called “vehicles,” or *yanas*. The amazing thing about these three yana teachings is they provide a way to work with our lives—many different strategies and many different levels—and they provide a map to be able to move forward on our journey. That’s why they’re called vehicles: they’re like ways to move along in our practice, our study, and our general life in awakening.

The description or the idea of stages of the path, or *lamrim* teachings, was pretty important, seemingly, to Trungpa Rinpoche, because he spent between two and three months every year teaching in the form of three-yana teachings—talking about different aspects of each of those vehicles—and that is what makes up the three volumes of *The Profound Treasury*. And the inspiration isn’t just nostalgia for those series of teachings, but recognizing their value and transformative potential is what I think inspired a lot of the founders of this retreat to try to present it to others and, as much as possible, give it away to people who can take it on and realize it in their lives and share it with people who might benefit from all that. So that’s a little bit by way of background.

Traditionally, when one starts to study and practice, the starting point is to reflect on why you’re here, your inspiration, and to rouse the mind of awakening and compassion. The tendency to grow and awaken in life is called *bodhichitta*. To rouse bodhichitta, think way beyond the walls of your body, the walls of this room, the walls of Maine, if there are walls in . . . we know a lot about walls lately . . . [Laughter] but break down the walls and kind of picture oneself within the context of all that is, which of course is a really central theme we’ll be exploring in terms of mandala.

So today, I wanted to just make some introductory remarks. These teachings are not designed as scholarly or intellectual, particularly; they’re designed for people who are practitioners and who want to

integrate the teachings into their being in some way, who are inspired to study wholeheartedly and complement that with practice and with a sense of community that is formed here.

Trungpa Rinpoche taught a lot about mandalas and the mandala principle from early on. He gave two major seminars at Karmê Chöling, and one was called “The Mandala of Unconditioned Energy.” And that was early 1972. And in 1974 he did the teachings called “The Mandala of the Five Buddha Families,” and of course he touched on the mandala principle very deeply within the context of *The Profound Treasury*. So some of those teachings are found in *The Profound Treasury*, some are found in this book called *Orderly Chaos*. But if you explore the vajrayana path in any degree, whether as a view that would affect how you do your path (whether you are drawn more to the hinayana/mahayana side of things) or whether you’re a vajrayana practitioner itself, the mandala principle is everywhere. It is so important to understand what you’re doing if you’re going to do vajrayana practice. And I appreciate the fact that Trungpa Rinpoche put such emphasis on understanding what are the building blocks of this teaching and how to progress over the three yantras. He gave another seminar called “The Mandala Principle and the Three Yantras”—which is not published material, but that’s another source—because he saw the mandala principle as bridging all three yantras, as well as being a vajrayana concept.

I was reflecting that every morning we chant—and we’re exploring that as a practice, etcetera . . . but one thing we chant is the Four Dharmas of Gampopa, and the line that says, “Grant your blessing so that confusion may dawn as wisdom” . . . that is what the mandala principle is all about. And we also do a chant with the line “Grant your blessing so that I may realize the inseparability of *samsara* and *nirvana*,” which is also very much linked to what we’ll be exploring as mandala principle. What we’re exploring, in other words, is some kind of transmutation, and looking into how to deal with the energies of life: the inner world, the outer world, and the vast cosmos, I suppose you could say.

So I thought I’d talk about “What *is* a mandala?” Or, as often I run into, *man-DEL-a*. (What is “mandela”?) [Laughter] But it’s many things. I want to talk a little bit just about the term and the basic definitions as we move forward. So, “mandala” is a catch-all term. It can mean a society or group or a circle—like you have a circle of friends or you have a society of this or that. In ordinary language, in Asia, if you have a club, that could be called a mandala: the soccer mandala or the, I don’t know, crochet mandala, or this or that. So it has a sense of a community organization. “Mandala” also is used, obviously, for the various arts of expressing teachings in the form of paintings or arrangements of objects or designs of various kinds. In general day-to-day life, probably when most people think “mandala,” they think of art—you know, a picture that comes from Tibet. And that is one thing that it is. Traditionally, mandalas are created by painting or by creating three-dimensional

structures. Or by sand, which is done both in the indigenous tradition here as well as in the Tibetan tradition. And in other ways. Personified, it expresses something.

Also, the mandala in the vajrayana is a practice that people do. A mandala represents the entire . . . more than world, *cosmos*. It represents everything. You know, people are always talking about cosmos, universe, world. It's hard to think about everything. Nothing is not within a mandala. There is no outside; it's everything. It represents everything. And in a preliminary practice in Tibetan Buddhism and other contexts, people offer the mandala, which means offering everything, not just so-called "your things," but everything. So a sense of generosity, opening, and offering . . . mandala is used in that sense as well.

And a mandala is dynamic. It is not a static thing. A mandala is like a wheel that rotates and turns and generates energy, and by that turning, delusions are transformed into wisdom. It's an interesting parallel, because samsara, or the world of confusion, is also described as something turning round and round. So it's kind of the mirror image of that typical description of samsara. The Tibetan term *kyilkhor*—K-Y-I-L-K-H-O-R—is a term for mandala that the Vidyadhara used often, and it simply means "center-fringe." Something has a center and a fringe—you know, like a circle has a center and a perimeter. Center, fringe. And we'll talk, over the course of our discussions, about various definitions of mandala that will kind of enrich and deepen one's understanding of what it's all about.

Another way that Trungpa Rinpoche referred to mandala, as in the title of his book, is as "orderly chaos." So that's an interesting thought, because, you know, there's "chaos," and there's "orderly." He said the mandala is orderly chaos, orderly chaos. It's almost like when they discovered fractals, which seemed to be chaotic natural patterns. When they actually looked into them, they saw there's some kind of order happening. So, orderly chaos.

Another thing in terms of exploring mandala is that it points to a vast system of interconnectedness. One can think of confusion or wisdom or have some vague notion of confusion versus wisdom, but in the teachings of the mandala principle, it breaks those things down: What do you mean by "neurosis," by "chaos"? What do you mean by "wisdom"? And what is the relationship between the two, and how does that relationship change? As we make acquaintance, does that relationship change how we view confusion, how we view wisdom? Because a lot of times we think we're trying to go from someplace to another place. And we are, in some ways, but there's no place to go, from mandala principle. We're already there. But we'll get into that more in a little bit.

I wanted to introduce a fair number of terms today, so hopefully you can be patient about that, but they will help as we move forward. But before we do that, I wanted to pause for a moment. Another

thing that mandala is about, very much so, is perception, how we perceive our world. You know, there's a phrase: "a fog of war." You could think of this as exploring "What is the fog of ego?" The fog of ego. What is being looked at? How do we view what we're doing, at the most basic level of our immediate experience?

So I would like you to spend a moment just noticing your experience. What is coming into your experience, and in what ways? Just explore that. You know, how do you know you're even here? What is the "here" anyway? Notice looking inward to whatever is going on within your mind, feelings, body, and notice outward—it's called the world of projections, the environment around you. You can look around. You don't have to be all solemn and tight. You can look around and explore with your mind or your other senses, some sense of feeling that you're somewhere, that you're aimed in a certain direction, and that various perceptions are coming into you. And for every single one of you it would be different. You're in a different location, if nothing else. We don't really think about it that much—the having a location, having a perspective.

And certain obvious things pop up. There are many, many colors. Look at all the colors, all the colors. There's perception of different kinds of energies, internal and external feelings of energy. There's perception of whatever mood or imagery is arising in our minds. There are sounds. There are things coming in through the sense perceptions. And for most of us, there's a lot of arising of commentary on all of that, instant commentary on all of it: our thoughts about things, our judgments about things, our ideas of what we'd like to have happening, and why doesn't she get on with the talk, and all that. [Laughter] A sense of perception of passage of time and expectations, a sense of wanting to go forward in some way, or wanting to make something happen or stop something from happening. Thoughts of how we think things should be.

How we perceive things is very much colored by our histories, our prejudices, our biases, our preconceptions. If you look within, you'll see a lot of them—if you're like me, anyway. You'll see a lot of them. Whatever is going on is like a reflection through water. It gets bent and changed according to how we construct our world. We each construct a certain world, so in some ways, we're each constructing a little mandala out of which we're the very important, central figure.

The starting point in all the teachings that I know of, where Trungpa Rinpoche talked about mandala principle . . . he said to understand anything about mandala, we have to understand our confusion. We have to start with our confusion. We have to really explore and inhabit our world fully the way it is, without trying to fix or change anything. We have to actually move into our world. Are we . . . I don't like the phrase "taking ownership," but something like that. Can you actually inhabit your life

wholeheartedly, fully and completely? Can you inhabit your world? Take ownership? If there is no samsara, no sense of the world of chaos, confusion, and suffering, then there's no nirvana, no peace. No struggle, no peace. No confusion, no awakening. These are kind of the themes of these teachings. And it starts right at the beginning with the key aspects, going right back to basic hinayana teachings of what really are these forces that fuel samsara, fuel the pain and chaos of ourselves and all those people around us, right?

There are two kind of threads that run through, again, all three yantras, all three stages of the path. One of them is called grasping, grasping. And I'll talk about that. And the other one is called fixation. And they're like a married couple, in a lot of ways. [Laughter] Grasping and fixation. And there's this quality of frivolity, frivolity. And it's interesting, the kind of play with contrast, because one of the defining characteristics of the world of confusion, of samsara, is taking things overly seriously, overly heavy-handedly. That's one extreme, and the other extreme is being frivolous and just frittering away and not really realizing the opportunity you have when you have it, and wasting time and kind of diddling around, I guess you'd say.

So I'd like to introduce some of the characters, the cast of characters, in building mandalas, but I want to also stress one further thing before starting, and that is at the same time all of this is happening—the idea of samsara, the idea of nirvana (confusion, awakening)—there's kind of a primordial ground that is always referenced in the way these teachings are approached. There's the idea of a primordial, naturally arising wisdom—a primordial, naturally arising wisdom—that has nothing to do with samsara or nirvana particularly. So all of the drama we're going to talk about in terms of samsaric mandala, nirvanic mandala, and mandala principle at different levels . . . we're kind of resting on an underlying assumption of effortless opening and compassionate wisdom-mind that's not produced and we can't make happen, and we also can't get rid of it. You could say the vajrayana teachings are very positive in that sense. At the same time, they're very uncompromising in looking at the way we mess with that and taint that original, pure arising. So it's important to have that perspective.

The phrase I liked about that is called “the hijacking of primordial intelligence by ego.” It's hijacked. Who is the hijacker? It is each of us, the hijacker. No one else can hijack our intelligence, only we can. So today I'm exploring a little bit on that side, and we have the handouts, which you can look at if you want, as we go along.

You might have noticed that outside the shrine room there is a picture, and it's called *The Wheel of Life*. If you go to Asia, outside every single shrine room you will see *The Wheel of Life*. Not in the

shrine room, *outside* the shrine room, as a reminder as you come into the shrine room. It's a picture of samsara, and it contains within it lots of teachings about how we, basically moment by moment, in an ongoing kind of way, create and re-create and re-create and re-create and re-create samsara, every day. If we don't keep at it, we don't know what will happen. What would we do without it? It has that "can't live without you" kind of quality. So those would not be hung inside; they're hung outside.

The mandala principle is very much about space and form, directions and boundaries, and energy patterns. So by noticing, which I hope you do from now on, that you're going past this *Wheel of Life* when you enter, it's marking a boundary and you're making a commitment when you enter into this room, and also you're expressing kind of an opening, a heart opening, as you enter the room. You're saying, "This is what it's about." That's samsara, that's suffering, that's confusion, that's chaos. And this room represents the opposite of that. It represents awakened mind. It represents compassionate heart. And so there's a sense of noticing contrasts. You know, we're going to be talking about samsara and nirvana as inseparable, but you cannot understand that unless you see how very, very, very different they are. Then you can see, at some point, how they're the same. So it is really different: the world of struggle and samsara, and the world of peace and opening, called *nirvana*.

So marking boundaries is a great practice—actually noticing when you enter and when you leave. And if you begin to have that kind of perception more ingrained, you will use that in other situations and not just coming into shrine rooms or a special place like this, but you'll notice the transitions in your life.

These mandala teachings are very much connected with the teachings on transitions in life, in the same way chants are marking transitions. When you start the morning chants, you're marking a transition—actually entering and proclaiming—and at dusk, you're marking a transition. Many traditional cultures are very tuned in to the energies of different times of the day, and they know what to say, what to do, what's appropriate in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening.

So in these teachings, there'll be words and there'll be concepts, but it's about tuning in, in a certain way, in a different way than we usually do, because there's so much to think about, so many projects to do, so many problems to solve and relationships to maintain and nurture, etcetera. But there's a whole other world happening, and that's the mandala principle: there's a whole world happening that we mostly miss. We don't tune in to the qualities of things. We don't notice what's really going on a lot of the time. We're preoccupied. Maybe that's one definition of samsara: preoccupied. We're preoccupied, and meanwhile our life goes by. That's one benefit of sitting, of course: we actually take a supposed break from being preoccupied, or see how preoccupied we really are and how scared

we are of not being preoccupied. That goes back to quality of space, which we'll be exploring. These are very fundamental, important things.

So if you look at your *Wheel of Life*, it's so interesting. It's actually called *The Wheel of Arising*—arising, coming into life. You might notice it's being held by a demonic-looking figure—in the mouth of that figure. That figure is Yama, and Yama represents death. So it's said that the world of habit, of samsaric habit, is a deadly cycle, basically. It's a deadly cycle. It's held within the jaws of death. You could say it's living in a kind of unfresh, unspontaneous, uncompassionate way. So again, Yama is holding the wheel of samsara, but he's somewhere too. He's within the vast space of self-arising wisdom, but you just can't see that. It's behind . . . [*Flips picture over, points to blank side of page*] There. [*Laughs*] And then there's that. [*Presents picture again*]

The first term that's important to know is *klesha*. Many of you already know that, so consider this a review. *Klesha* just means painful or conflicted emotional energies. And in the samsaric mandala, they're at the center. You could say they're kind of the hub, or the spring out of which these three energies flow. And this picture is kind of hard to read, but there are three animals in there. There's a pig, a snake, and a rooster. If you look closely, you can kind of see. And those represent three primary impulsive tendencies we have. The pig represents denial or ignorance, not in the sense of being uneducated or dumb, but in the sense of not being willing to look—a kind of covering-over energy, or a vague-ing out kind of energy. Ignorance: just not wanting to deal with anything unpleasant, so therefore just burying it all somehow—that kind of quality. It's one of our fundamental kleshas, or strategies. Sometimes we don't want to be bothered.

But the other energy, represented by a rooster, is grasping, or kind of wanting to pull things in and hold on to them. Grabby, kind of a grabby mind. And each of these has many different levels. For instance, this rooster energy—and hopefully we're not insulting these animals—but the rooster energy, the grabby energy, happens so quickly and so subtly. The sense perception comes in and it doesn't just come floating in, but we grab it. Something happens. We want to hold it. We want to pull in everything: people, popularity, money, power. Whatever it is, we want to hold it, draw it in. And before someone else gets it.

And the third of these central klesha energies is a snake, and that is the energy of rejection or hatred, the feeling of wanting to destroy, push away.

So in a very simple form, the center of this wheel is either pulling in, pushing away, or ignoring. Pulling in, pushing away, or ignoring.

I know for some of you it's going to be so old hat to hear this yet again, but I would suggest looking at your experience. Or even in the session of sitting meditation, for instance, these are always there. That's the notion: that they're always kind of lurking there, just looking for opportunities, like, Can I make something happen? Can I stop something from happening? Maybe I'll just zone out and just eventually someone will ring the gong, thank heavens, you know? [Laughter] Or I have a little experience and think, "Wow, I gotta remember that, hold on to that," you know? Or "I'm such a screw-up. I've failed. I've got to get rid of those." This is not supposed to be the way experience is happening. It's kind of an interesting mix. And it's something, again, that's a good practice.

A lot of this week there is emphasis on meditation in action and looking at perception, but one of those aspects is seeing these three energies—not just as something you learn on a chart, but exploring it as actual experience. One thing I really liked about the talk last night is that Trungpa Rinpoche kept talking about what are you actually feeling? You know, what is your inner experience of the various forms, whether the form is studying, practicing, or various jobs people have? What is the actual experience of that, and how does that affect you? How does that feel? That is all on the grasping side, and they're elaborated into further kleshas, which we can talk about more later.

On the fixation side, the partner side of that, is the sense of ego grasping, holding to a strong sense of an independent, separate self. And it works together almost geologically or something. You know, when you think of a vast, open field and you put a fence across it, like a snow field or something, and you're on one side of the fence, all of these patterns sort of spring up simultaneously. You've chosen a side, you've identified with it, and then you have this fence and you have to figure out whether you need to protect your side of the field; whether you want to expand it, get a little bit larger section of the field; or what you're going to do with it. When you set this dualistic pattern up, it fuels kind of a thoughtless struggle. It's hard not to always be struggling, one way or the other, with our experience.

Another good thing to be exploring here is noticing struggling—how much struggle we have with everything. A lot of times when great teachers talk about meditation practice, they say the main thing is relaxing. Easier said than done. You can't say, "Relax." That makes everyone totally uptight. But you can do the opposite. You can notice struggling. This is a world of struggle, of having something to defend or hold on to, and having lots of juice behind it through the power of the emotional patterning.

[Returning to picture] And then, in looking at this pattern, around the next ring going outward, you'll see it's divided into six slices, six slices around. You'll be able to see it more clearly if you look at the big picture outside. But that takes those energies in the center and puts them on steroids, in a way. So each of the main kleshas, or emotional energies, goes beyond just I'm angry today or I'm grabby

tomorrow or I'm angry this minute or grabby that minute. Depending on your pattern, your tendency, your particular personality and history, whatever, those simple emotional energies begin to color the entire world so that you kind of disown responsibility for the arising of these kleshas and you perceive yourself as just responding to what's outside. You're not dealing with your annoyance, but you have someone outside to blame for your annoyance. Or you're not dealing with your grasping, but it's the fault of those things that obviously need to be grasped.

So there's a projecting of small, emotional patterning into whole worlds. Some people, for instance, see the world as an angry world. Is it an angry world or not? I'm not going to answer. But another person next to them might see the world as just filled with greed, or a world that's passionate, a passion world.

So these are called realms, realms of experience, and they're presented in a lot of different ways in terms of imagery. And they are said to be the realms, the world or environments, we create, inhabit, and circle around within. We create worlds and we move in, which is, of course, going to be something we explore—that whole notion, in terms of mandala—further. But the worlds we are said to inhabit in terms of samsara . . . let's start with human. They're called realms, and the first is the human realm. The human realm is said to be marked by passion, the world of passion. It seems pretty obvious. A world of passion. A certain kind of passion. You should be passionate in a positive way, obviously, passion could be a good thing—but this is a poverty-mentality kind of passion, passion in terms of trying to fill up a gnawing sense of loneliness or emptiness or lostness. You're a little bit lost, and you think, "If I just find the right thing, bring it in, I'll feel a little less of that pain; I'll be less lonely, less lost, a little bit more solid or secure."

The second realm I'd like to talk about is the jealous god realm. I'm just going to the upper half of the six realms. They're called the higher realms. One is called the jealous god realm. The picture of the human realm is usually a person with a begging bowl, expressing that sense of incompleteness, wanting. A lot of passion is about trying to complete something that feels incomplete. And on the other side is something we call the jealous god realm, and that's portrayed by figures in armor, wearing armor and carrying weapons and stuff like that, and that realm is the expression of envy and competitiveness, the sense of always looking out for who's one step ahead of you and looking back for who's coming up on your heels, as though you're in a race, and you have to be kind of paranoid about—you know, are you going to make it? Are you going to succeed? Are you going to fail? You could say that's an obsession—that highly competitive, highly ambitious but never satisfied, never happy . . . You could never be happy, you could never be successful enough, because someone younger, stronger, better is

going to overtake you. That's just the way it is. So it's kind of another realm of suffering. They both have a sense of there's never enough, nobody can express enough love back to me, I can never be successful enough.

And then the top, the third realm of the upper realms, is the god realm. A lot of people say, "Oh, god realm, that sounds great. I want to move in there. The other ones, not so hot, maybe that one's better." [Laughter] But remember, these are all within samsara, so it's an interesting twist in Buddhism that the god realm is considered part of the wheel of confusion. That's kind of a shock, if you think about it, in terms of how people usually think. The god realm is marked by ignorance, a form of ignorance. Interesting, huh? We've had grasping, passion, envy, and this is a kind of ignorance, an ignoring of suffering around. So it creates its own kind of paranoia. In the god realm, you can be really happy and really very blessed with great circumstances. You're handsome, you're wealthy, popular, and all that kind of stuff, and as long as you don't think too much about anyone else around you, then you can pull it off for a while.

I think of it as a gated community. Within my community, everything is beautiful. The lawn is mowed, the flowers are blooming, the air conditioner is working. I just get kind of nervous about ever going out and leaving that, entering the so-called "real world." It's very cozy. And it's said to be the realm that has the least compassion, in a way. It's interesting, too, because there have been studies of how people respond to . . . like, you know, there's some kind of accident, or someone needs help on the side of the road, or this or that, and there seems to be a little bit less tendency to help from the wealthy than from the poor. Yeah. I notice it when I go to Whole Foods and people just like roar through there and run right over you to get their food. You go to, you know, a cheap-o store, and the people are nicer. That's just what I think. [Laughter]

So there are three more realms. These are called the lower realms, and they make a very complete world. One of them is called the realm of the hungry ghost. Hungry ghosts are traditional Asian imagery of beings with gigantic stomachs the size of mountains and throats the size of a needle—the image, obviously, of greed. You can never get enough. It's kind of the glutton imagery: feeding, but nothing can get in, really. In some ways, the human realm is just trying to gather friends and lovers and supporters, and here, you're just trying to get *stuff*. If you get enough things, enough food, enough rugs, enough couches, enough whatever, then things will be okay. But again, it becomes an endless cycle. You're never satisfied. That's basic in all of them: our struggle. And all of them are fueled by frivolity.

Another one, the animal realm, is usually depicted by animals. [Looking at picture] Yeah, there's one—you can see an animal down there. You get a prize if you find the animal! [Laughter] And the

animal realm . . . again, no offense to animals; it's just an image . . . the animal realm, like the god realm, is characterized by a kind of ignorance, a different kind of ignorance. The ignorance of the god realm is infused with a prideful quality—you know, “I've got it all, and the reason you don't is because you're all losers. Losers!” [Laughter] So there's that kind of ignorance. And in the animal realm, the ignorance has more of a stolid, uninterested quality. Very habitual and without much curiosity or sharpness of mind, is the image. Willing to kind of be blurry and vague and not really dig in too much. You get a superficial understanding and you sort of stop there. There's a certain kind of lazy quality, and a certain kind of a stolid quality, and once you figure out the way things are done, then that's the way things are done. And people could tell you a million things about why it should be done otherwise, and you wouldn't change it, because that's the way things are done. That's the way we've always done them. You know, that kind of quality.

And it's interesting, I've been reading this history of medicine, a critique of the medical system, and it says that the time between the discovery that you should wash your hands to avoid infection and when that became adopted as a practice was like forty years! And they have example after example of breakthroughs that would literally save lives in medicine, but this habitual “this is the way things are done, now don't look further” mind was so powerful that it was shocking. Someone would discover something, and years would go by before any changes were made. Well, sometimes we notice things about ourselves like that. [Laughter] Years go by and you think, “Oh, I could have done that. Now that I'm ninety years old, maybe I'll do it.”

And there's one last realm, which is the hell realm, and one would think that's not good, and it isn't. [Laughter] And that's the realm that is connected with anger and the tendency to destroy. It's sometimes described as a world of aggression, but really, the word, as I understand it, is much more than just being a little bit aggressive. It's a powerful aggression that would cause one to kill or to maim or to destroy. So that tendency in us creates this realm of hell, which is seeing the world as out to get us big-time, and a sense of real claustrophobia, fear, feeling like we're cornered by life.

So I hope you don't mind, I'm going slowly and systematically through all these that you've heard many times, but they never seem to not be relevant—to me, anyway. The other thing is that, you could say from the hinayana perspective, we're just seeing these different patterns in how they arise. It's really a combination. The klesha energy, the energy of the emotional obstructions . . . when that energy is joined with a fixation, with fixating on a self, this is what we create. We create these worlds. So on one hand, they're psychological experiences. And some may be more familiar to you than others, and depending on who you are, you rotate around in various ways. But you could also think of them from

the mahayana perspective, as different realms that require compassion, because we see that other people also create these realms, and we create them, literally. There are people in war zones, hell realms. There are people starving, in hungry ghost realms. There are lonely old people in the human realm, so isolated and alone. There are people so caught up in the rat race to get ahead, they can never stop, and they're trapped in this relentless demand to do one thing and the next thing and the next thing and get ahead. There are people like that.

Which ones did I leave out? Jealous god . . . did I leave out . . . oh, there are people who are just shut off by ignorance. And then there are people who are just so benighted, they're so privileged, they're so god realm-y, that they just don't have a clue what's really going on in the world, and they don't want to, and they invest a lot not to see what's going on. And that's not to blame people. That's to rouse compassion for people in the situations they're in, and to rouse compassion for the kind of worlds we create within us, right?

But to begin with, we've got to figure out these basic energies and how to deal with them, the energies of the self and the energies of emotions. In your reading—and you can read a lot of this, so I'm not going to talk about everything, obviously, but just so you know—the outer ring around the outside is really describing what's called *karma*, the activities that are generated within samsara. For samsara to work, it needs kleshas, it needs egomania, it needs actions, and we build the samsaric world, like little workers, in that way.

So only one last point, and then there'll be a little bit of time for discussion. I'll try to keep my other talks shorter, but I think this is important. Again, these patterns, these energies, all of these things, every single one, come up in different ways in the discussion of mandala. And all of these patterns are those which Trungpa Rinpoche talked to as experiencing fully the way they are—experiencing fully the way they are. Really inhabiting samsara in order to be able to transmute. You can't do it from a distance, you have to go right into it. That is what is said in terms of ground of the mandala.

So the only other complementary thing that is going to come up and which I'll just touch on, because I can't go into that much detail, is the arising of the kleshas, and also the arising of the sense of separate self. That kind of pairing would be a good thing to explore in your perception. Where does your sense of self arise, and how does that arise? Not as a puzzle, but just to notice when is it most obvious, your sense of "me." Traditionally, it's talked about very precisely—looking at perception. How do we perceive anything through the senses, including mental sense? We have physical sensations, we have sounds, we have sights, we have thoughts, we have all that, but that's not the self yet; that's just a bunch of sensations. But then something happens, becomes you, and that's described—all those

beautiful colors and patterns and sensations and feelings—as just like a big clamp. [*Clenches hands together*] Then it's *your* opinion, *your* thoughts, *your* sensations, *your* things, *your* body . . . you know? And “other” arises. It's you and other. And then the drama goes on. It doesn't just have three acts. It's like going to this drama that never ends, and you have to keep buying tickets. [*Laughter*] And it gets more and more expensive. Kind of like that.

So understanding that is important, and it comes up in some of the readings as well. It's called the arising of consciousness, and the conflicted consciousness—basically, grasping onto experience, making it as solid as we can, and then defending it. So this is, it's said, the world we need to inhabit. There's no other place we're going to build mandalas. You're building the sense of sacredness and awakened heart/mind, and it's going to be built right here within these fairly messy-sounding situations. And that's the basic starting point for today.

So there's time for a couple of questions.

STUDENT 1: Good morning, still. I would like to know more about how to work with these while we're practicing outside of the shrine room. Is it just a matter of noticing as they come up and labeling them, or what are your suggestions?

JUDY: I'm suggesting, at least between now and tomorrow's talk, a number of things: (1) if you get a chance, looking at the picture outside, *The Wheel of Life*; (2) paying attention entering and leaving spaces—entering here or leaving there; (3) and then noticing the kind of qualities and colors and sensations of things, with curiosity. And you might notice what draws your mind one place or another. You might notice the arising of response or opinion or judging. See if you can see those points where experience gets held, noticing any attempt to try to make experience go one way or the other.

I guess the main thing would be paying attention to the quality of struggle—where it's very subtle or more obvious. You know, we would have a struggle with a different person, but maybe a very subtle struggle, moment by moment, on the cushion. Notice the quality of struggle that imbues the experience of samsara throughout, to the extent that I don't think anyone ever really relaxes. We can talk about relaxing. We can sit around and have a glass of wine or something (not here!). But it's still a struggle. And what are we struggling with? Why? That's what we're looking into. We're looking at really basic things. Is it possible not to be like that? Or should we struggle to not be like that? [*Laughter*] And then we're stuck. So it's important to look at these things, because they affect everything.

Anyway, just be curious. No big deal.

STUDENT 1: Thank you.

JUDY: Yeah.

STUDENT 2: Can I speak here, because I have a little . . . oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know you were up there already. My first thought was that we inflict some of these things on ourselves with karma.

JUDY: With what?

STUDENT 2: Karma.

JUDY: Karma? What's that? What do you mean by that?

STUDENT 2: We inflict some of these realms and kleshas and . . .

JUDY: The question is whether we inflict these things by means of karma—and in the context of this wheel of life, karma just means activity. Like first you have a bad feeling about someone, and then you *activate* that feeling by telling them off. And then they have a response to that, and they're suddenly in a bad mood, and they talk to the next person, and yada yada yada, you know? It's a contagion of confusion. But I mean, when you look at the outer ring, it's saying similar things. It's talking about the arising of a sense of self from the perceptions of the world, and the coloring of the worlds through powerful emotions, which, for the most part, just toss us around like dust in the wind. Yeah.

In fact, I will say one more thing about that, one point. The Vidyadhara said that one great thing about sitting meditation is that it's taking a break from doing anything. You're not creating so much karma. All your struggles . . . you're holding them to yourself, and you're not bothering anyone else and causing these chain reactions.

STUDENT 3: I was curious about the role of memory in all of this. It's not mentioned much. I can imagine that in some ways, it would build the concepts that sort of skew or change your perception of things, but it's also something we have.

JUDY: That's true.

STUDENT 3: It seems to be a part of it, and I'm not sure where it fits in.

JUDY: It arises as a thought, and then we think, "Oh, I remember that, so I must be that person. I remember being a child, and I remember going on this adventure. I remember," you know, "this and that." And sometimes that may have happened, or it may not have happened. In memory, the same thing keeps changing over time. Someone tells you a story and then you think that happened to you, and you remember it as if you did it, but they did it. It's very tricky, memory. But the main thing is it arises as a thought, and it gives us the illusion that we can hold on to things that are no longer there. We think we can take, like, a big red wagon, [*mimes dumping things into a wagon*], then we can drag it along and it's still there. But there's no way. I mean, you're not the same as you were, even ten years ago, and we can think about what we were like, but we don't really know anymore, necessarily. Who knows what it was like when you were three years old? When you were there, you owned it. You were there. And now you're somewhere else. I'm assuming you're older than three.

STUDENT 3: Just by a couple years. Yeah.

JUDY: That's because I'm so insightful. [*Laughter*] You know, I think it would be really cool if when people ask questions, they repeat their name, because a lot of us are still learning names.

STUDENT 4: Hi. I'm Nate. I found it really interesting when you were talking about the three animals in the center of the wheel, because . . . So, I'm a storyteller, and I was thinking about how in folktales in all kinds of different cultures, you hear a lot about listening to the animals and respecting the animals, and how usually if people in the stories don't listen to the animals, they get into a lot of trouble. And so it just made me think about, in vajrayana, in the Buddhist path, is there a notion that the animal realm is like a literal, physical realm that it's unfortunate to be incarnated into because of the ignorance that it's associated with, or are they more purely images that describe a psychological experience? And is there actually also another side of it that describes the importance of respecting and listening to animals as well?

JUDY: It's both, at least in my understanding. On the one hand, they're images. Honestly, they're somewhat insulting images to roosters and pigs. Hopefully they're not here in the talk and they don't hear us. [*Laughter*] But the traditional understanding is that, guess what, humans are the best realm. Not best in the sense of superior to other realms—not in that sense at all—but in the sense of being the realm where, it's said, there's the most discontent, and that makes us able and drawn to Dharma, teachings of awakening. So there is a sense of literal realms—that's one side.

There is also a sense of psychological realms. And there is a sense of upper, higher, and lower, but again, these are all equal in the sense that they're all slices of the pie of the samsaric wheel. At the same time, many other texts in the Buddhist tradition are incredibly respectful of animals and of the natural world, and there are many beautiful paintings and poetry and descriptions of the value of being in the wild and natural world. Some of the great poets and adepts lived in the forest, under the trees, etcetera, like that. So there's a tremendous sense of that.

In fact, at one point . . . actually, I think it was in "The Mandala Principle in the Three Yanas" . . . Trungpa Rinpoche was talking about plants, about how we should think about plants and their feelings. So he went even beyond animals, because they were discussing vegetarianism and eating meat and whatnot, and he said, "Plants want to live too, so what about them?" Which is interesting, because now there's all this science about plants and their communication and that they've got brains at the end of their roots, and things like that.

So it's both. There's definitely a general, I would say, anthropomorphism bias. It's humans being humans. We think we're so special. I would say that's not the point of the teachings, though. Higher or lower, they're all equally parts in this scheme, and this is just the starting point. But it's about seeing those qualities. And animals really do suffer, and humans really do suffer—all these beings obviously suffer. That's the point. Yeah.

STUDENT 5: Kathy Jones here. Judy, my thought about all of what you're talking about seems that what gets locked out, somehow, is compassion. And it seems to me that what we struggle with is when we bring all of our stuff with us every time we go anywhere. And when we sit, we kind of gradually open and get more sensitive, more compassionate, to ourselves. Why does compassion get locked out with the human experience, of our experience? Like, it seems that it's all kind of originated at some kind of loss of some sense of compassion toward the experience, like that if we are caught up in anything, any of those experiences, the process of practice, for example, would be to go deeply into where we're at

and then try to be gentle with ourselves about it. How does compassion get locked out in our experience anyway, you know?

JUDY: How does it happen?

STUDENT 5: Yeah.

JUDY: That's a great question. I don't think it ever gets totally locked out, actually.

STUDENT 5: It gets lost.

JUDY: I think it gets blocked, for sure, and I think mostly because of our own preoccupation with our own selves and our own dramas. And then other beings kind of fade into the background more. I think there's kind of a raw quality, and we don't always bring ourselves to feel that because it's so tender, and the force of compassion is so strong. It'll be one of the themes going through this, but in some ways, the first step, symbolized by this iconography, is almost a kind of ruthlessness. First we have to get real and stop pretending we're all these wonderful, compassionate, egoless, saintly beings. You have to get real and say, "Okay, actually *look*," and be a little bit more ruthless. And that's a form of compassion too, because unless we take that look, we can't ever relax with ourselves, so naturally we're going to feed these patterns over and over again.

STUDENT 5: Thank you.

JUDY: Yeah. Okay, speaking of feeding . . . [*Laughter*] I think it's time for lunch. So I'd like to just . . . I guess we should have handouts. I'd like to dedicate the merit. I never like to do things that some people know and others don't, so let's just do it in an informal way. Just think about what you're doing. Bring yourself back to whatever inspired you to come here, bring yourself back to anything that you've learned or have a value of so far, and make some kind of aspiration to actually bring it out with you and help other people in as many ways as you can, to share what you've learned and, by your presence, make a difference in the world. We'll call that a dedication of merit everyone can do. [*Bows*]