

GRAVESIDE DISCOURSES

A series of lectures given by Namgyal Rinpoche at Pamukkale, Turkey in August 1975.

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The setting for this series of discourses, which the Rinpoche laughingly called his 'series of graveside chats' was absolutely superb. Pamukkale is the modern name for Hieropolis, an ancient Roman spa which grew up around the calcium rich hot springs of the area. These springs bubble out of the hillside at a constant temperature of 86 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the year. As the water flows over the rocky ground of the plateau it cools and evaporates, leaving a pure white deposit of calcium carbonate behind. The calcium builds up to form scalloped rows of semi-circular steps, each about two feet high; fairedy castles flowing with warm, healing waters.

Hieropolis was popular among the rich aristocracy of Rome, who would travel to this part of Asia Minor to visit the famous theatre at Ephesus and the large Temple of Aphrodisias before making their way inland along the much travelled river valley to Hieropolis. The early Christians were active in this area and St. Phillip chose Hieropolis as the place for his ministry, living and teaching there for many years. He built the very first church of Christianity at this site and is reputed to have been buried there, although his tomb has never properly been identified. The ruins of that first church, mentioned in the Book of Revelations, can still be seen; it was destroyed by an earthquake, and a second church built around it. More earthquakes followed and both the church and the city were levelled. This time a large Basilica was erected at the entrance to the Necropolis, but a series of major shocks in the 6th Century AD reduced this and the city to ruins, and the whole site was eventually abandoned.

Modern Pamukkale is really just a few large hotels set beside the ruins, each hotel having a series of hot pools. The one we stayed in was particularly beautiful, with white Roman columns submerged in the clear, warm water. The pool was surrounded by trees and greenery and was as deep as fifteen feet in some places, ideal sport for Paleochora-trained snorkel divers. Gliding around in the sun or moon-lit water, under toppled columns or into dark caves, was a most heavenly experience. There is not much left of the city, but the massive stone tombs of the necropolis, the amphitheatre and the teetering arches of the large Basilica remain to recall the riches of the past.

The empty tombs, opened and looted by earthquakes and robbers, are situated on an open plateau which overlooks a wide and fertile river valley. Low hills rise up behind, while opposite stand the high peaks of the Taurus Mountains, outlined against the deep blue sky. The group would meet here twice a day, in the early morning and again in the late afternoon to sit in the shade of a tomb and listen to the Rinpoche. This site is definitely a place of power, a place where the energies of the earth seem to surge together to push the arid plateau out into space. The sun and moon could be seen to be moving around us, especially as the discourses were given around the time of the full moon. Against this background, the Rinpoche spoke.

FIRST LECTURE

When you think of enlightenment many of you fall into the error of viewing it as something out there that you must attain, but in actual fact it is more a process of discovery. To begin right practice, start with awareness of yourself. What are you? A process of corruption, or of confusion? Or are you a being of question, of awareness? Become conscious of yourself; of your body, speech and mind. The first stage is to find out if the tree of your being has limbs and then to discover where they extend.

The spiritual life is an opening-up process. You start with self-awareness, centering the ego in your body, then gradually move to an awareness of environment, awareness of yourself walking through the space around you. Know this flow. If you practice correctly, this will open into jhanic absorption; the joy state will spread out from the centre of the mandala – yourself. In the first stage you are just watching everything ticking away, watch the rising and passing away of phenomena. Then this awareness is extended and you develop more abundant life – you will experience Stream Entry. But again, I would like to stress that you do not attain enlightenment.

Night is behind the eyes; the light is straight ahead. Focus yourself – look correctly ahead. Become aware of the process of looking. To see around you, you have to turn your head – but how does this happen? What is this process? Watch. The spine moves in a spiral motion. Really, awareness is spatial, not multi-dimensional. The senses work together for accuracy. If you blindfold someone in a room and walk around him, back and forth, occasionally ringing a bell, he would be unable to trace the direction of the sound. All of your senses work together to present a total view of the environment and you should become aware of the various parts of this process. Mindfully walk through these graves, using all your faculties. Sense the history of this place. Before there were Basilica and tombs here, the natural practice was simple, carried out in the open. Try to return to that state.

The organizations and building were established for security. But mind does not need protection – ego views need protection. Mantra is a way of transcending the protections you have established. Really, protection of the mind is no protection. The true path is merely to see what is. When you live by dharma, a natural healing takes place. But how can healing occur if there is no awareness of the body? Your body is a vehicle for enlightenment. There is no awakening within the senses or without the senses. Illness comes from an overly-compacted mind; it then moves to the finite coding of the body.

Body is a natural product of the mind, designed by the mind for very specific, high purposes. As your awareness increases, you will drop the view that the body is a second-class citizen. It is a vehicle for comprehension and for apprehension of the dialogues of the universe. The next level is speech – what is this dialogue? Our embodiment accomplishes such incredible miracles as one never sees until the light is brought into the darkness. To do this, practice awareness of body, speech and mind and then the unity of these three. There is no other way to enlightenment but through Samsara – if you were to see it as it really is.

When you touch, what kind of hands are you laying on the other person ? Is there clearer seeing through the hands than through the eyes ? All views are views. We are involved in the registration of phenomena. We should have awareness of the kingdom, the power and the glory. The glory is the ascent of the senses up the body (the pillar), the path to realization of the crown. The power is the understanding (the snake) and the kingdom (the crown) is order, reason – the intellect's awareness of purpose, the cognitive function, the plan. The kingdom is the Emperor on top of the column. Instead of dwelling in the kingdom most beings wander through a labyrinth of confusion.

The biggest question you can ask is why. How leads to the glory. If you want to find shelter, I'll give you a hint – security is a cracked egg. Half of it is over you and half of it is under you. There is a lotus above the sun, and a lotus below.