

What is the origin of the material in THE PROFOUND TREASURY OF THE OCEAN OF DHARMA?

The material in the Profound Treasury is derived from talks the Vidyadhara Trungpa Rinpoche gave at a series of annual retreats for his senior students. At these three-month programs, called Vajradhatu Seminars, students had the opportunity deepen both their dharmic understanding and their meditative practice. During the practice days, sitting meditation went from morning to evening, and during study periods in addition to the main course taught by the Vidyadhara, there were also courses taught by his students. The basic overarching structure of each seminary was the same: the journey through the three yanas, or three stages of the path. There were thirteen seminars in all, in which Trungpa Rinpoche gave more than 300 talks. The material in these talks forms the basis of the three Profound Treasury volumes.

What was it like to attend these seminars? What was the atmosphere?

Attending a seminary was like stepping into an alternate universe. The students staffing the program would basically take over an off-season remote hotel and transform it into a kind of dharma oasis. The daily schedule revolved mainly around practice and study and the tasks of supporting a meditative community of from 80 to over 400 participants. Being at seminary at times felt like being in a university or study hall, at times felt more inward and retreaty, and at times felt like a family reunion.

Each seminary had a kind of arc, with a beginning period that was simple and tight, to a middle period of heartfulness and warmth, to a final period of simultaneous celebration and threat. So we began with a focusing, paring down, and simplifying. This would lead naturally to greater relaxation and opening. And from that processed and tender atmosphere, something powerful and electrifying would emerge.

Do you have a favorite memory from the seminary days?

One of my favorite memories is when Trungpa Rinpoche invited Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche to visit seminary and to give a talk. Trungpa Rinpoche was very proud of the seminary form he had created, and the unique way in which it balanced periods of intensive study and intensive practice. It was a delight to see him beam as he described all this to Thrangu Rinpoche. He also showed Thrangu Rinpoche the many volumes of seminary transcripts, and went through them with him one by one. But it was an even greater delight to see their meeting evolve into a series of jokes. After each joke they would be bent over in laughter, tears running down their cheeks, and gasping for breath. Trungpa Rinpoche translated a few of them, which all had dharmic themes. For these two Tibetans these jokes were apparently hilarious—but from my perspective they made no sense at all, and that was hilarious, too! A big no-joke joke just hanging out in space.

Another series of memories are about the many practical jokes the Vidyadhara would play. Some of these were charming ribs at people who took the whole thing too seriously, such as hiding everyone's shoes. Other jokes, such as setting up meditation instructors with fake student disasters, had real bite, uncovering all sorts of delusions, attachments, and pretenses. The seminary schedule itself was a kind of joke at times. Trungpa Rinpoche was notorious for showing up hours late for his talks, which in some seminars led to day becoming night and night day. A great switcheroo.

Chogyam Trungpa was concerned with keeping the vajrayana material he taught in the seminars secret—one needed special transmission to participate in that section. Why was that, and why was it decided to include the vajrayana material in PROFOUND TREASURY?

Actually, one needed special permission to attend seminary at all, not just the vajrayana section. For many years, transcripts of seminary talks at any level were not available

without permission for anyone who had not attended at least one seminary. Trungpa Rinpoche particularly emphasized the need to keep his vajrayana teachings secret. He said that his decision at the 1973 seminary to open this material in depth for western lay practitioners was a step of great significance, to which he had given careful consideration.

But at the same time, Trungpa Rinpoche also said that through his seminary teachings, he was building a valuable dharmic resource for future practitioners and scholars of the buddhadharma. As early as 1975 he was already talking with his publisher Samuel Bercholz and his editors about compiling these teachings into a three-volume set for the benefit of future students. We definitely had our own trepidations about this, but after many years, it seemed timely to try to fulfill this command.

In publishing Trungpa Rinpoche's vajrayana teachings, it is our hope that some of the key safeguards for working properly with this teaching are respected. As Trungpa Rinpoche emphasized again and again, the key to working with this material is to deepen your mindfulness-awareness practice, to strengthen your compassion through exchanging yourself for others, and to work with a skillful and accomplished teacher who is worthy of your devotion and respect. He also stressed the need to just jump into the vajrayana without adequate preparation, but to first develop basic dharmic literacy and understand the way in which the three yanas—hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana—are one seamless journey.

How significant is this book in the context of Chögyam Trungpa's many other works?

This publication brings out an aspect of Trungpa Rinpoche's teaching that has not hitherto been available to the public. It presents a thorough overview of basic concepts of the Tibetan Buddhist path in combination with detailed guidelines for meditative training and contemplative practice. In a refreshing way, Trungpa Rinpoche joins traditional concepts, which could seem quite dry, with contemplative understanding,

creating a dynamite resource for practitioners of many levels. It gives readers a map of the Tibetan Buddhist path from beginning to end.