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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

Intensive Training Seminar: Patience: the Armor of Nonaggression
Karme-Choling

Talk Two of Three

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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN:

Good evening. Tonight we could begin by discussing the characteristics of patience and of the basic, the three characteristics of patience are first not harming others, which consists of not wanting harm to come to any being, and as second, not retaliating when harm is done to you, and third, not insisting that things should be your own way. Those are the three basic characteristics of patience that we will talk about tonight. I'm sorry, those three are just under number one.

The second one being not being fatigued by obstacles and hardships involved with practice, and accepting them as part of a path.

That's number two, and the third characteristic of patience is being willing to investigate the two-fold egolessness, which we talked about last night.

Why not cause harm to others? Well, first of all, because if we do, they suffer, and that's quite obvious.

Secondly, not retaliating when harm's done to you means that we should understand, we should have a clear understanding that sentient beings like ourselves, who have not had any particular contact with the dharma and therefore have not developed any patience, are not masters of their own actions. Basically, not in control of themselves, and are swayed by the various passions. Therefore, we should not harm them, even if they do evil or cause harm to us.

Third, in not causing harm to others is that we should analyze our own actions. Realizing that perhaps we ourselves might have caused the harm that is done to us. That is to say, if we have an understanding of cause and effect, we realize that at some point, perhaps in the past, we might have caused such harm to be heaped upon ourselves. So when we realize that, and we have a firm understanding of that, then we do not cause harm to others. That is in terms of past,

also in terms of present situation and future situations, to realize that our own actions could be the cause of other beings causing harm to us, therefore we should not retaliate.

Not being insistent on having our own way. Usually, what happens is we have very distinct ideas about other people's faults, and some we consider to be more workable than others, and many times we have a whole guidebook for ourselves on which faults of others we will appreciate and which we won't. But we should realize that there is no particular value in discriminating about the faults of others. Since, in any case, whether such faults may be considered by us to be of a great magnitude or a lesser one, still, by thinking in such manner, we are ourselves causing harm.

And finally, in terms of not causing harm to others, we should recognize that harmful persons are actually our benefactors. This is very central theme and central notion in the mahayana path, and also in reality, in the awakening of enlightened mind. We talked about the egolessness of others yesterday, egolessness of ourselves, egolessness of situations. When others cause harm to us, that is the opportunity for us to practice patience. So therefore, such a notion of harm, in this case, when we talk about harm, we're talking also about impatience—it's saying the same thing—that when others cause us impatience, it is actually a chance for us to practice properly the path to awakening. So in that sense, because we have the opportunity to do so, we should consider others our benefactors. And if we practice patience, that in itself gives rise to unsurpassable enlightenment.

Therefore, in short, we should not retaliate when harm is done to us, nor should we cause harm to others by such attitudes as we have described. We should not retaliate, we should analyze our own actions, and we should realize that all sentient beings are our benefactors.

The way to apply this particular teaching is what's called contemplating the five, these five dharmic thoughts. One is that harmful persons in former lives might have been our mothers or fathers, sisters, brothers, or whatnot, and because of that they benefited us. So it would not be proper to retaliate or to cause harm to them now.

Secondly, harmful people are only behaving in such a way because they have a confused notion about their own nature, thinking themselves to be some kind of absolute entity.

Thirdly, if we harm others ourselves then we disrupt their life stream, and since our lives are as sentient beings are transitory and since the time to practice dharma is short, we do them tremendous injustice by not allowing them the opportunity to achieve freedom from misery.

Fourth, in applying this sense of not causing harm is that realizing that beings who are ignorant of egolessness are altogether afflicted by the passions, that is to say the kleshas, passion, aggression and ignorance, therefore we should not do harm to them realizing that no one and no being, is exempt from this.

And five, lastly, contemplating that taking all beings as part of our own family, that is as our own husband, wife, mother or father, we would naturally work for their benefit. Working for their benefit means developing an enlightened attitude, that is, in this case, developing patience, and if we don't do that, but instead cause them harm by some sort of retaliation, we

obstruct their progress which in turn causes us to be obstructed on our path as well. So all that is under the first heading of not harming others.

The second characteristic of patience is not being fatigued. We talked about this yesterday, of being prepared for every event. In this case, the fatigue we are talking about is the fatigue which comes through the effort to achieve unsurpassable, great enlightenment. The fatigue which comes from the obstacles, I should say, to achieve enlightenment. And those obstacles are, first of all, developing livelihood, that is to say, a situation in which one can practice the dharma, not being fatigued by that.

Secondly, personal discomfort, that is to say, feeling hunger and thirst, hot and cold, pain and pleasure, and whatnot.

And lastly, not being fatigued by mental disturbance. These obstacles, if we accept them fully as part of the path, are the means to overcome and conquer the four maras we talked about yesterday.

And the notion of accepting obstacles as part of the path is the very essence of patience, in terms of our practice.

Generally speaking, we fall prey continually to any form of discomfort, whether it be bodily, situationally or mentally, and because of that discomfort we cease to practice. I'm sure everyone understands that. [Snaps fingers] When we succumb to any kind of a hardship or discomfort, what basically happens is that we lose our watchfulness, our mindfulness and awareness, and any thought of patience goes completely out the window, very quickly. So, the notion of accepting hardship and discomfort as part of the path is actually a way of conquering, and the kind of conquering we are talking about here is not that simple notion of defeating an enemy. That is to say, in ordinary, in the ordinary world of confusion, conquering means defeating one's enemy. But if we look at it clearly, we realize that one's enemy in the ordinary world is transitory in any case. So, that kind of conquering is no real conquering. But overcoming the stream of conflicting emotions, that is to say, the kleshas of passion, aggression, ignorance, jealousy and pride, hatred and all the rest, that is complete victory, superior victory. And that can come about by accepting discomfort as part of the path.

The third characteristic of patience is the willingness to investigate the two-fold egolessness. Two-fold egolessness is the egolessness of oneself and others, and egolessness of environment, the total phenomena. This willingness to investigate such egolessness is the ultimate quality of patience that we can develop. Generally speaking, we are timid in the beginning to investigate egolessness of ourselves. We are frightened, in the middle, investigating egolessness of others. And we are terrified, in the end, investigating egolessness altogether. In this case, the ultimate characteristic of patience is the willingness to open one's mind completely, that is to say, to have the patience to open one's mind completely to the very nature of reality. And when we talk about the very nature of reality, we are talking about the whole of reality, not simply aspects of reality. So to open one's mind to the very nature of reality as a whole takes tremendous patience, because the very fact of investigating or looking at the whole of reality means that we ourselves cannot move at all. Interesting thought. If we move,

then we only investigate part of reality, because as we move, reality moves as well. As we move, it's a sense of distortion, so ultimate patience involves perfecting completely one's samadhi, or meditative awareness. That is to say, investigating the whole of reality means that one's mind never moves from its own spot. So those are the characteristics and application of the practice of patience.

If you like, we could have a discussion at this point.

QUESTION: Sir, if I understood you correctly, you said that even by thinking about others' faults, whether of greater or lesser magnitude, we can cause them harm. How does this happen? Simply by thinking of it, does it causes them harm?

VAJRA REGENT: Well first of all, it disturbs one's own mind. Second of all, it leads to the action of judging others on, by the nature of their faults. That is to say, we will relate to individuals, others, by comparing which fault is at fault, so to speak. So we disturb the atmosphere as well, and we disturb others' minds by doing that.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Gentleman over there, with the beard and seemingly angry face [laughter].

QUESTION: I'd like to know how you can not be fatigued by mental disturbances.

VR: By accepting them as part of the path.

Q: But aren't they contradiction—I mean, the mental disturbances themselves are—

VR: Well, one has to understand that there is such a world of cause and effect. That we ourselves, since we're not fully realized at this point, have karmic propensities. So to be angry with oneself because of one's own karmic propensities only feeds further karmic propensity. So therefore, one should accept one's situation as it is. That is to say, if one is disturbed mentally, the worst possible thing we could do would be to become angry with ourselves, because that only feeds the fuel of further karmic action.

Q: Can you do that if you're having earthquakes?

VR: I did it myself actually, in Los Angeles in 1969, when it was—how much? Seven point two? Seven point five on the Richter scale. [Laughter] I was lying in bed at the time, my wife and I, and the earth started to shake, and everything went v-v-v-v-v, and suddenly I realized this is an earthquake, and she did as well. And we looked at each other and said, "This is an earthquake." [Laughter] And I thought to myself, "Well, what can you do now? Run? Hide? Jump?" I decided to stay exactly where I was.

Q: What's so funny? Even though, even though the earth was moving?

VR: Even though the earth was moving. Exactly. It's the same thing as saying that, well, if we understand egolessness of all phenomena, then we cease to run, to hide, to run, to hide, to escape. Where can we go? Run down Larchmont Avenue, and Larchmont Avenue then opens up, and you fall in. So—and I heard that some friends of ours ran screaming out of their house when the earth started to shake.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: It seems that there's a very fine point of judgment between what, on this basis, is actually harm to others, and what others see as harm to them. If you have a relationship with someone which is based on aggression, and you come to Karmê-Chöling and take the refuge vows, and then you do not perpetuate that aggressive relationship, it's possible the other person sees that you have harmed them, because you have removed that habitual communication between the two of you.

VR: On the other hand, if you recognize that that person is not particularly in control, then there's no reason to believe that the harm that they see is in itself of any substance. Therefore, you can relate further to that person.

Q: And by not reacting to what they see as harm, you leave them actually no place to go with that.

VR: Well, that's not exactly what I mean. I'm talking about really seeing that beings suffer because they have no understanding of egolessness. We're not talking here simply about, what do you call it, trying to put a puzzle together—that doesn't work. One has to have the experience oneself. Otherwise it becomes strategy, which is useless, that only causes harm to others because then we are, in some ways, being insistent on having our own way.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: In terms of not being fatigued by livelihood, I'm wondering how important of a basis is livelihood for pursuing study and practice? In other words, how far should one go in terms of establishing some kind of livelihood, even if it seems to be impinging on one's study and practice?

VR: Mm-hmm. Livelihood is meant to encourage or to provide a situation for one's study and practice.

Q: What if it seems to be conflicting with that?

VR: I'm from Missouri.

Q: Well, I guess, personally, I feel I'm involved in two things, which seem to be demanding all my time, and I can't come to any reasonable solution, it seems.

VR: When you practice, practice genuinely, no matter how short a time it is, make it a good one.

Q: I have another question. Should one necessarily pursue the livelihood that one seems to be most skilled at? Is that a necessity?

VR: One should pursue the livelihood which makes it possible to practice. It's not necessarily—you see, we all have this notion that we should do something that we like. That's not the

perfection of patience, particularly. Doing something what we, that we like, is being insistent on having our own way. It's not necessary.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Not necessary, this is true, absolute truth. It's not necessary to have what you like to have. In fact, quite the opposite sometimes, that perfection of patience and working with the patience is accepting what is not comfortable. Not searching it out particularly, to become martyr, say in the theistic sense, but when it arises, to actually accept it as such as part of your path. So, it doesn't matter about what you're skilled at or what you're not skilled at. It matters more whether or not you can be genuine in a moment, genuinely patient with things as they arise, rather than scheming how to be patient.

QUESTION: Concerning genuine, concerning genuine patience—sometimes personally I experience when you let the environment come to you, it becomes tantalizing, almost titillating, and this is where the question of genuine patience comes in, is when I grab for it. Do you understand what I'm saying?

VR: Yes. Yes. I understand you.

Q: Okay. So you're finding the environment come to you. It comes to you, and it looks very juicy. You grab for it, and then when you do, it slips like a slippery fish, then it goes away. And personally, when I've done this it—back and forth, back and forth, it comes to you, and it looks very good and very close, now I can grab for it, and it s-s-s-ooop, and it disappears.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: So, getting back to the question of genuine patience, when it looks really good, really close to you, really enjoyable—

VR: Then—

Q: And then you want to possess it.

VR: Then one should investigate the two-fold egolessness. That is exactly the precise moment to investigate it. To really look at the juiciness and see for oneself if there is any abiding substance at all. Simple to do when things don't look juicy. Simple to say, "Well, yes, there's no ego in this column, there's no ego in this banner, there's no ego in anybody else here," but when it actually comes down to the moment when our minds are captured by the maras, then third characteristic we have talked about is having the willingness to—having the willingness is so important—to have the willingness to look into the egoless quality of that. We don't want to do it. We want to take something to be solid. Please, this, maybe this juicy thing should be solid. No, developing patience means to actually look at the very thing that you are attracted to most as solid, and see clearly, does it have any substance?

Q: Is there any method—

VR: Go ahead.

Q: —or is it just done on the spot?

VR: Well, it is, there is method, definitely. It's done on the spot only when one has practiced the shamatha faithfully, that is, being able to abide in a continuous sense of peacefulness, and when one has developed awareness, vipashyana, from the point of view that we realize the boundary of our mindfulness and the mindfulness itself are transparent. When you develop those two practices fully, then it is done on the spot. That's what's called discriminating awareness, and we'll talk about that tomorrow.

Q: Thank you.

VR: That's a very good point. Thank you.

Q: Sir, you say something more about—you can't move?

VR: Mm-hmm. Well, that's the only way to see properly is by not moving.

Q: And if you move—

VR: Well, then you have distorted vision. Psychologically, physically, and environmentally. That's why we practice this discipline of meditation over and over and over again.

Q: So moving psychologically means shifting your attention.

VR: Yes. Yes, losing wakefulness.

Q: Thank you.

VR: So simple, so quick. That's the third aspect we talked about. Now you should understand that is, well, you should say, the most difficult. But at the same time, if we practice the relative aspect of patience, that is, not causing harm, accepting whatever difficulties arise on the path, then the third of actually investigating the two-fold egolessness will not be that difficult at all. It will not be that difficult.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, when you're in a situation that may seem to be quite unworkable, for example, you may be in a situation with someone where their livelihood, their life is very disturbed to a great degree. I've been in situations like this off and on in my life and I've been caught at a theistic kind of thing about it. Well anyway, because I'll work with a situation to me even at the time it seems to be almost unreasonable for me even to be there. But I'm putting myself out to such an extreme that it's actually hurting my life, quite a bit. And since I've started practicing dharma, these situations come up again and I've been able to see my own theistic tendencies in the situation. But at the same time I'm also, you know...

VR: Do we mean by theistic holding onto entities as real and solid?

Q: Well, saying, for example, the person that I'm working with in terms of, I feel almost obligated to work with this person...

VR: We're not talking about intervention of some deity or other, we're talking about taking this to be solid, the person you are with or whatever?

Q: Yes.

VR: All right.

Q: Now even in the midst of that, you know, in practicing dharma, again, I can see my own tendencies to, you know, be theistic in that kind of situation. All right. And I can begin to see—

VR: I think there's a better word. Theistic is not such a good word there. It's not such a good word. It's more like ego-centered, egocentric—yes.

Q: Okay. All right. Well, okay, while that is happening, I'm seeing, too, more of egolessness

VR: At the same time?

Q: At the same time. But at the same time, that almost throws me into more of a bind, because I don't know exactly how far I can go with that. Do you understand?

VR: Well, that is exactly why these teachings have been delineated so precisely. Basically, what I've been talking about tonight is strictly from the books, shall we say. Yes, and it is up to us to apply each and every one of those, and then we actually know how far to go and how far not to go.

Q: It's just a very difficult time, because it seems to change every day.

VR: There is no, there's no better time. Let me assure you, my friend, there is no better time. There's no time that's going to be better, no time that's going to be worse. It's all exactly the same. This is true. And you don't have to take it from me, particularly, just look and see. It's always like that. There is no better time. Go ahead.

Q: Well, again, like I've been in some situations where it seemed like the best thing to do is to, you know, [snaps fingers] escape a situation, just outrightly escape the situation because it's just too much to handle, and it seems like a good thing to do. It seems like a genuinely wise thing to do. And then other times I wonder if I'm just running away, and you know, thinking around the corner it's going to be great, even though I know it won't be, you know?

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: And I think they're both, I think they're both plausible actions. They're both correct actions in certain cases.

VR: I'm still from Missouri. We run because we fear that we're being attacked. We push away because we fear we're being polluted. Be careful about that.

Q: Okay. That's just really answering something because—

VR: Be careful.

Q: —that sounds like a pretty absolute thing.

VR: It definitely is.

Q: Yes. Okay.

VR: Be very careful about that.

Q: All right. That's all I wanted to know. Thank you.

VR: Sounds like the beginning of a book, "All I Ever Wanted to Know About..." [Laughter]
You have to practice and understand these teachings in their genuine sense; they are meant, all of them, are meant as a practical guideline, not theoretical.

Michael?

QUESTION: Within the last year I've heard and read a lot about contemplation, especially in terms of the mahayana path. And you presented five techniques of contemplation. In general, you write them down, and then we close the book and we leave the I.T.S., and they're kind of forgotten.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: But from the reading I've done and from what I've heard, that these contemplations are actual practices that are done continuously. But that wasn't talked about, about how actually one does that.

VR: Well, basically, if you don't remember what they are, it's very difficult to contemplate them. [Laughter]

Q: Exactly. So first, we should study and memorize them.

VR: I think so. Take them to heart.

Q: After that is done...

VR: Well, that is supported by mindfulness and awareness practice, **[TAPE ONE: END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B]** you see. That's the key. Contemplation without mindfulness and awareness practice becomes egocentric. All you do is dwell on your thought process, which doesn't really produce any kind of patience at all. But with mindfulness and awareness practice, which gives you an actual glimpse, an actual experience of egolessness, then when you contemplate, there's something behind it. It's not just, you know, memorizing words.

Q: Can I go on?

VR: Sure.

Q: But if you open up Atisha's works or Santideva's, there are numerous contemplations that one can do, and they all seem to be necessary on the mahayana path.

VR: Yes. Yes.

Q: To actually, to do them...

VR: Yes. But it's not particularly from the point of view of keeping score. That when you develop patience—and patience is the key to all of those contemplations, Atisha's works, Santideva's work—is having a mind which is willing to investigate the nature of the whole of reality. See? So that means, "What can this mind encompass?" The whole of reality. Usually we think that we can only encompass just merely four or five at a time, or maybe one, two little slogans or things that we can remember, try to work on. That's sort of animal realm, treadmill

approach. But with some consistency of mindfulness, it's quite easy to accommodate hundreds and hundreds of slogans. When they arise, one practices them on the spot. Same thing I was talking about earlier on. Teachers are like the seeds. Practice is like water, watering them. The sun is the whole of the dharma altogether. So it's not so much that we have to practice it one by one by one, all eight hundred–eighty-four thousand dharmas. But they do arise and we spontaneously recognize how to practice them, because we have good foundation of mindfulness and awareness practice.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: Sir, I'd like to know what aspect of patience could be employed when in order to cure the situation of when it just gets to be masochism, as far as welcoming the harmfulness of people, and so when you're kidding yourself

VR: Well, that seems to be totally ridiculous. That means that you have no notion of egolessness at all. From the point of view of masochism, that there isn't any point.

Q: Well, maybe not masochism, but when you think–

VR: Think you take on too much?

Q: Well, I'm not saying that I think I take on too much. I think I play a game sometimes where I think I'm helping someone *but*, or something like that.

VR: Ah, yes. Exactly, exactly, what I was saying earlier on to the gentleman in the front here, is that patience is not a strategy.

Q: Because I thought I heard "turn the other cheek" in there somewhere.

VR: Absolutely not. Because then your head will turn around 360 degrees anyway. You keep turn, turn, turn, turn; it's samsara spinning around. No. Patience is not a strategy. It's real expression of one's openness. The question that always is, is how far can we go? Obviously one should not destroy this body because this body is the means to enlightenment. Obviously one should not destroy others' bodies because that is the same. Obviously one should not destroy the environment that we live in because that can be also means to enlightenment. So, it's pretty straightforward that way.

Q: So, egolessness is, I mean is there a, well, aside from a strong daily practice, in other words, I mean I understand what you're saying, but I thought that there was maybe one point in the aspects of patience to apply to going too far, or–

VR: No, quite the opposite. You see, the whole notion of going too far is based on ego. It's quite the opposite, you see, everybody has that question in mind of how far can I go with this patience. It's a flip that we do. Truthfully?

Q: Truthfully what?

VR: How far can we go? Truthfully?

Q: Yes, truthfully, how far can we go?

VR: Well, it has been said that this, even this very body, can become the feast of sentient beings. We're not talking about cannibalism particularly.

Q: Well, I don't want to get too much into my own personal nightmare here, but I live in a big city, and I like to hang out in rough bars and stuff like that, you know, and my livelihood takes me to those places. I'm not a prostitute. But [laughter]–

VR: Well, that doesn't mean you have to take that to be some form of entertainment, even though you yourself are providing the entertainment. Do you see what I mean? It bounces back on you, and you take it to be real. If you play the music, let the music be egoless. I think we talked about this before.

Q: A little bit, yes.

VR: We should talk about it some more.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it is now, according to this particular watch, eleven minutes to one. I do not want to prolong any kind of hardship that you're going to have tomorrow or tonight, for that matter, not getting to sleep. But I will say this again as I said last night, this is very definitely Kagyü practice. Kagyü lineage means we do it, we don't speculate about it. I'm very, very pleased that we can even be talking about these things which are so difficult to understand, at the same time very, very accessible, almost like feeling the sweat between your fingers. We can experience these things. Practice and experience these things.

So please be true to our time together. Allow yourself this opportunity to practice with wide open space, including not causing harm and accepting whatever hardship, [sic] hardship comes along, discomfort, and actually looking at the nature of what we're doing altogether. Please do so. From the very beginning, in the morning, when we begin with the chants we ring the bell of awakened mind. Throughout the day, up and down, discomfort and comfort, pleasure and pain, we practice the discipline of awakened mind. At night we conclude with fruition of being here together. So, please continue. Guard your watchfulness, wakefulness this weekend, please. Easy to begin, but difficult to continue.

Please consider our plea for funds. It is obviously very important that we maintain this center. Take it seriously. Take it as part of your path as well, if we continue this place called the Karne-Choling, the dharma place of the practice lineage.

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