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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

Intensive Training Seminar: Patience: the Armor of Nonaggression

Karme-Choling

Talk Three of Three

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Checked by

VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN:

We come to the conclusion of our I.T.S. concerning patience, and in some ways there is not very much left to say. Basically, we could talk about the notion of discriminating awareness which is the supporting factor of the practice of patience. That is to say, discriminating awareness is that which enables us to distinguish the constituents of reality in their absolute nature. Therefore we have not become confused by appearances and therefore we are able to continue in our journey on the path to enlightenment by distinguishing right action from confused action. Discriminating awareness is in some ways born from patience, and at the same time it is the support of patience. This discriminating awareness or *prajna*, Sanskrit, is the notion of penetrating to the heart of a matter in every situation, that is to say, if it concerns situations concerning oneself or others or the world in general.

The reason why that such discriminating awareness is born from patience is because of what we have already discussed. When we have patience and when we have practiced patience from the point of view of not causing harm to others, accepting obstacles as part of the path and being willing to investigate the nature of reality, then we have the quality of being like an ocean. Patience is often compared to an ocean or a lake, that which is deep, wide, and expansive, and although there may be currents it never changes from what it is. So by practicing in the ways in which we have described we develop the kind of awareness which is not cluttered and at the same time is not awareness which needs to be generated, cranked up, ignited by some dependent cause.

And again once we have such patience, the awareness which goes along with that enables us to increase and purify the practice of patience. When patience is purified, that is to say it is complete and without subject to doubt or conflicting emotions, then we have the opportunity to experience what is called *shunyata*, that is to say, the nature of all beings and all of reality as

devoid of any substance, ongoing substance, and that particular experience becomes quite personal rather than any kind of philosophical concept or speculation. With the experience of shunyata we develop compassion and therefore all of our life is dedicated to sentient beings—awaking, sleeping, walking, eating, whatever. And when patience is supported by discriminating awareness and purified through shunyata and compassion, then the result being that the practitioner awakens to unsurpassable enlightenment. And beyond that, achieves effectiveness in his or her lifetime.

Effectiveness in this case is described as attaining the qualities of beauty, health, fame, long life and, in this case, attaining those qualities without even looking for them. So that is said to be the result. And the ultimate result being one achieves the position of what's called a chakravartin, or universal monarch, that is to say, master of the universe, conquering the four maras and conquering death at the same time. So that's basically the notion of fruition in terms of the practice of patience.

It is necessary, I believe, for all of you to consider again and again that these teachings are immediate and need to be applied constantly. There is, of course, the notion of highlight. That is to say, that you come into a seminar such as this and practicing intensively with each other actually creates such a powerful environment that we experience the teachings directly on the spot. And then again we go back to our day-to-day life, and perhaps we only experience these powerful results of the teachings in flashes. But again, please do not be angry with yourself if that occurs, but take whatever opportunity you can to increase your realization and your practice, even though it may just occur in flashes or in brief moments throughout your day. With discriminating awareness one can actually pinpoint those particular flashes, and by being able to pinpoint those particular flashes, we have the possibility of expanding our awareness so that those flashes start to become continuous in one's everyday life. So that is basically it for our seminar this time.

I think that's quite enough to work on, so if you have any questions we could finish up, so to speak.

Gentleman in the front.

QUESTION: Sir, in my own personal practice of patience, I relate to that as providing space in the sense of when a thought or impulse arises, instead of immediately reacting to it or acting upon it, I examine it or just, just provide space, don't do anything. Often it seems if I do that, that first impulse was somewhat frivolous. So I have some trouble understanding the principle of "first thought, best thought" because it seems like sometimes the first thought isn't the best thought.

VAJRA REGENT: I see. I see. Well, actually, that's not the first thought. Impulse is not the first thought. Impulse, when we talk about "first thought, best thought" we're talking about actually pre-thought. First thought is actually pre-thought level. Impulse is the result of causes. So, with, as you continue as you are doing, but then again, do something even further, and that is to look at the actual practice itself. That is to say, when you do not allow impulse to jump, express

itself, look at that very moment. That's a sense of applying prajna to the thing itself, rather than to the result or what preceded the cause. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Q: So look at...

VR: The very fact that you did not give vent to impulse, look at that.

Q: As it's occurring. So look at the process of providing space itself.

VR: Exactly. Precisely.

Q: And that will give me some understanding of the "first thought, best thought" principle?

VR: That's right. That's right. That's what we talk about, the shunyata.

Q: Mm. So I take it, it seems like that we're almost getting to the level of no thought here.

VR: In that particular, precise moment, yes. No thought doesn't mean blanking out particularly, but whatever wisdom that there is, arises from that particular experience.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: Sir, when anger arises, well, I often find that I get angry, nasty while I'm angry, and then, and I know that I should, that there should be no "I" attached to it, that there's some consciousness of that going on. And it seems as though the anger is kind of, becomes kind of a series of events, rather than one continuous thing. I can even see that. But at the same time, since it's usually in a situation of some sort, say somebody like the person that you feel angry at will come along and say something to you, and at that moment since there's not very much of a feeling of egolessness involved, it still feels pretty solid to, it seems like it would be putting on a bit of an act, a strategy somewhat, to kind of try to force oneself to be into a gentle tone or something.

VR: Absolutely not.

Q: No?

VR: Absolutely not. Quite the contrary.

Q: Ah huh.

VR: We're talking about discipline, not strategy.

Q: Okay.

VR: Not necessarily forcing oneself into a gentle tone, because that's silly.

Q: Yes.

VR: But we're talking about holding still, analyzing on the spot, what is the result of this? If I continue with this, what will be the result? And all the rest of the things we talked about. It takes some training. It takes some sense of integrating your shamatha-vipashyana experience into your everyday life.

Q: Well, the thing is that, you know, situations that come up, usually, you know, it's not like being in the shrine room, and a lot of times you have somebody there who seems to be requiring some kind of response from you. And when that's happening and you know that there's something questionable about, you know, your own experience of anger, and you know the way you feel you'd like to respond...

VR: Yes.

Q: How do you, you know...

VR: Well, it is a matter of actually studying the dharma and understanding these things.

Q: Yes.

VR: You know? I don't know how many categories we've talked about in the past few days or how much of that you remember, but you should make it your business to remember all of it, to study it, and then apply it. The usual question is the same question you asked, everybody asks, "What happens right in the moment, when you don't have time to think about patience?" [Laughter] Everybody says the same thing.

Q: Yes.

VR: Well, the simple antidote to that is take the time earlier on, before that moment arises.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: Yesterday I was taking a shower, and I banged my knee, and right away I got angry.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: But the thing is that I didn't know, so I tried to examine it right on the... sort of, well, it was close to on the spot as I could.

VR: Yes.

Q: And... [inaudible]

VR: What did you find?

Q: Well, that's the problem—I don't know. I looked at it, and I didn't know what I was angry at. Was I angry at the bar that I banged my knee on? Was I angry at myself? And I just, I couldn't pin it down.

VR: Well, there's also, I forgot to mention this one [laughter], and that is the contemplation of the impermanence of the body. And the fact that we get angry at our own bodies and other people's bodies, not seeing the transitoriness of these particular bodies, and the fact that because they hurt and are subject to suffering is no cause for us to be angry at it.

Q: Well, I'm not sure I was angry at my body.

VR: Well, you're angry because you felt pain.

Q: Right.

VR: Yes. And that pain was due to having a body.

Q: Ah.

VR: You see? [Laughter] No, this is actually quite true, that very often we are angry simply for the fact that we have a body, which is inconvenient because it suffers.

Q: Ah. Thank you.

VR: I should have mentioned that in the, actually, that was in the second talk, I should have mentioned that, and I forgot. Probably thinking it was either already understood or too archaic. But actually, it seems that the teachings say exactly what they mean, no matter how old they are, it still comes out the same. Yes, it's that contemplation on that. In fact, you could read Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, all of you, and read that, over and over again. There is a new translation. There's the old one by Matics, and there's a new one which was translated by some Tibetan, well, I think, Englishman who studied with Tibetan lama, and there's a whole section on contemplation of the body and its impermanence.¹ So study that. That's a very good one.

QUESTION: Sir, the scope of the paramita of patience seems to be so broad, judging from this seminar, that it's become a little harder to distinguish patience from the other paramitas, and you know, what they cover, since patience seems to include what you would think the other paramitas would take care of. So, I'm wondering, now I feel a little lost in terms of being able to distinguish one paramita from another.

VR: Well, if you study them carefully, they all have their different characteristics, but they all have as their basis shunyata and compassion. And also the six paramitas, the paramita of exertion, runs through all of those, effort. So, basically what we're talking about in terms of paramita practice, is seeing the whole picture of reality from the point of view of one aspect or another aspect—patience, generosity, discipline, effort, prajna, samadhi.

Q: So each one in a sense goes deeply enough to give you a very full picture of your mind and...

VR: Well, as it says in the texts, if after each paramita, in Gampopa's Jewel Ornament it says, "And if you practice this, the fulfillment is unsurpassable, perfect, great enlightenment."

Q: I had one other question, which is why patience is so much associated with anger as opposed to passion, ignorance, any of the other...

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: Why anger in particular is that?

¹ The Vajra Regent's first reference is to Marion L. Matics' *Entering the Path of Enlightenment: The Bodhicharyavatara of Santideva* (Collection of representative works: Indian series/Unesco ed.). George Allen & Unwin, 1972. His subsequent reference is to Stephen Batchelor's translation, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1979.

VR: Yes, because it's the opposite. Patience's the opposite of anger.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: You mentioned conflicting emotions and doubts; when I have to make a decision that I know will hurt someone I get really confused and, you know, where do I find the right action?

VR: Well, first one is to be able to discriminate whether or not the action that you are about to undertake is going to hurt someone or not. Right? You have to know that from the beginning.

Q: Well, when I see it is hurting someone...

VR: That means it's already happened.

Q: Yes. But what about, you know, giving up territory and putting others first? I mean...

VR: Yes.

Q: I get confused with that.

VR: Now you've got me confused. Say it again.

Q: I guess the pain of others really confuses me.

VR: The pain of others?

Q: Am I putting them first, or shall I just go ahead and take, you know, make my decision even if it's, if I know or if I see it's really hurting them?

VR: Ah. Well, the notion is to develop skillful means, where one's own benefit and others are taken together. You see, the truth of the matter is when you take others' benefit to be supremely important, then one's own benefit is also happening at the same time.

Q: Can you say a little more about that?

VR: It happens that way.

Q: When you take others' benefit as your own, then it takes care of your own at the same time?

VR: Yes. You see, you don't really have to concern yourself with your benefit if you're taking others, benefit of others, as your primary concern. That is why it says here that if you would develop patience, then without even looking for it, you attain long life, health, fame, and all the rest of it, without even trying to attain that for yourself. That just happens, because you have such patience, which means you develop compassion for other people, other beings.

Q: So, be patient in trying to finalize the decision?

VR: Finalize a decision. Yes. Certainly. I'm not understanding you. Finalize what decision? Any decision?

Q: Whatever one is hard to make because of the conflicting emotions and the doubt that it's the right thing to do.

VR: Oh, I see, that kind of decision, yes. Well, then, one has to examine one's own actions, one's own emotions, the cause and effect of the situation, taking into consideration that beings in themselves are not permanent entities, all the rest of the things we talked about, you see? The teachings are arranged in this way, to be practiced in this way. If you follow them exactly, the question you are asking will answer itself. It's not a matter of hocus-pocus, but it simply follows that way. The reason why we have trouble making a decision is because, from the very beginning, we are confused about the nature of things anyway.

Q: Yes.

VR: You know, it's not because making a decision is such a big deal. It's because we're confused that whether to do this or that becomes troublesome. "Cart before the horse."

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: When you talked about fruition you mentioned conquering death. Could you say what that means?

VR: Could I say what that means? Well, in the ordinary experience, everyday experience, it means holding completely still. In the vaster experience we're talking about the notion of conquering the chain reaction of cause and effect which causes continual rebirth in the six realms.

Q: Is that related to accepting, one accepts, but not really if you accept death, it's not the same as conquering and I guess...

VR: Well, accepting is part of it, yes. We talked about accepting the other day, accepting hardships that occur from due to the fact that we are born in this particular physical body and this, yes certainly.

Q: I was wondering if accepting, if that was the point that except it's not really doing away with, just as when you said conquering—

VR: Well, yes, they—

Q: —things is not taking, not conquering in the traditional way of conquering, it's something else.

VR: Right. Right. Accepting is what you call the relative practice. Conquering is the absolute practice. So you have to accept the realities of having a physical body to begin with. Practicing that, one eventually conquers, you see.

Q: Acceptance is the means to conquering?

VR: Yes. Well, it's one of the means. We talked about three different kinds of means. Do you remember? Yes.

QUESTION: In my personal experience it seems as if my sense of irritation is almost the same thing as my intelligence. I operate a fairly large business, and it's almost as if I'm running my

business on my sense of irritation. When a detail is irritating to me, I take care of it, if it's not, I don't. Not that I'm angry all the time, but it's just it seems as almost things come up in that way. Patience? It's almost as if in one sense irritation is almost the same thing as intelligence, it's close anyway.

VR: Again, it's very important to understand the cause and effect, that on the surface it may look like the same, since being irritated causes you to act, and therefore, your business keeps running successfully. Because of that, one could mistake irritation for being intelligence or the cause of whatever good is happening. On the other hand, you could look at it from the point of view of the fact that irritation motivates one to act, and keeps things, to keep things running is a tremendous sense of struggle.

Q: That's true.

VR: That's what's called samsara.

Q: In my personal experience, when I come back from doing a long retreat or something, I feel like I'm just sitting in the middle of this confusing environment, and I'm not seeming to know how to proceed until I sort of get into gear, and...

VR: And there it goes again.

Q: There it goes again.

VR: Well...You should study these teachings and try and practice them, that's all I can say.

Q: Thank you.

VR: Straight back there.

QUESTION: In decision making, you talk about taking your time and developing patience. It seems like in a lot of decisions that I make, the more time I take, the more confusing it becomes, and I start weighing both the number of factors on each side of the decision, and no matter what decision I make, my mind will immediately flip it after I make the decision and think, "Nope, that was the wrong choice." I just did it two hours ago, and I'm still angry about it, and I just wondered if there's, I know there's no such thing as taking too much time, but it seems like for me, procrastination and just dwelling on it, for the longer I do it, the more confusing it becomes.

VR: That doesn't seem like it has anything to do with patience, particularly.

Q: It doesn't. I guess that's more just the amount of time, not patience. It seems like I think of it as patience, but it really isn't.

VR: I don't think so, no. That's simply a matter of keeping up the story line.

Q: But the patience is not a function of time then?

VR: No, it's not a function of time. That's why we talk about overcoming the maras, including death. Death is a function of time.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: Sir, you talked about prajna as being able to pinpoint flashes of understanding. Is that basically "touch and go," where you see it? And then is there any sense of developing?

VR: Yes. Well, "touch and go" is the beginning stage, but then there's actually penetration into the actual moment itself.

Q: Deeper insight.

VR: Mm-hmm. Once you catch on, you see, once you catch on that discriminating awareness is simply the natural function of mind. Then you catch on, see.

Q: That becomes a different kind of habit.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

QUESTION: Sir, at one point you equated causing harm with causing impatience. For me it's difficult to distinguish sometimes when something that I do, or fail to do, doesn't suit some being's notion of what ought to happen, and they become frustrated and angry, and it's difficult for me to distinguish at that point whether I've caused them harm, or whether they have simply become impatient, that's on the one hand. On the other hand, there's the notion that beings who cause us harm are our benefactors, but when we cause harm to other beings, we are not their benefactors [laughter]. Could you clarify that a little bit?

VR: The first part is, in any event, whether it is the result of your action or because beings are not disciplined enough to be patient themselves, you still must take the blame yourself. The second part is harmful beings are our benefactors because we have entered onto the bodhisattva path. Therefore, we have dedicated ourselves to others. We are not their benefactors unless they themselves have entered onto the bodhisattva **[GAP IN RECORDING; some words missing]** one is not committed to perseverance and practice. Again, as we talked about in the very beginning, one moment could destroy whatever benefit has been accumulated.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: Can you just explain how patience is an armor? That's the [inaudible: title?] of the ideas I don't quite see.

VR: Patience is the armor of nonaggression.

Q: Yes.

VR: Yes.

Q: But, armor... well...

VR: It protects.

Q: It protects. But it's not something you try to hide behind.

VR: No, it's just protection.

Q: Okay.

VR: Yes. It's like protecting one's mind, protecting one's watchfulness, mindfulness and awareness through patience.

Q: Okay.

VR: Your suit of armor is also a statement of one's discipline, rather than a display of paranoia.

QUESTION: Two things that you've said seem both very reasonable, but I can't quite reconcile them. One is that we still take the blame upon ourselves, as you said to that gentleman down there, when people feel that they've been harmed by us, even though it's because of their confusion. And, on the other hand, I asked a question the other day about what you do when someone feels they've been harmed, but through their own confusion, and you said, well, try to realize that that is sort of an impermanence; it is their confusion and that is because of the impermanence.

VR: That's right.

Q: But...

VR: That's the reason why one takes the blame on oneself.

Q: Well, I guess I go back to the original question, which was that I get a sense of not knowing where to go or what to do, because I certainly don't know how to... if I take the blame for their confusion, they're feeling harmed, and yet, I see it's because of their confusion, not because I've actually harmed them, and I still take the blame, it seems that no matter what I do, I'm to blame. And when one is to blame, one tries to find, well, what can I do to remedy the situation.

VR: Exactly. Precisely.

Q: Well, I don't want to harm this person because I can't find a way to overcome their confusion.

VR: But you can find a way. By taking the blame you create a lot of spaciousness in your own mind, you see, because you're not thinking of any kind of strategy, any kind of retaliation, or anything at all at that point. You have just accepted the fact that such hardship has come to you. So that creates a sense of openness, and you automatically think, "How can I remedy this situation?"

Q: So in real, everyday terms when you say to someone, "Gee, I'm really sorry, I haven't quite been able to explain this," that's sort of taking the blame for the fact that they don't understand something.

VR: Quite so. It's because we haven't been able to explain it properly.

Q: Not because they haven't been able to understand it.

VR: Well, there's a certain part that people, sentient beings, do not understand because they have not come in contact with certain things, obviously, so they don't understand. But on the other hand, realizing that all beings possess the same intelligence as ourselves, they have the capacity to understand.

Q: And if we could explain it, they would understand.

VR: That's right. It is our, that's our responsibility.

Q: So that's part of our responsibility to continue practicing, so that we're able to do that.

VR: To develop skillful means to do so, yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

VR: You're welcome.

And thank you all very much. And I think we should close at this point. It has been extremely powerful for me, personally, to be able to present this material. And we are not simply talking about the type of practice which is easily accomplished. It is very difficult. On the other hand, presenting it—and I've tried to present it exactly the way it's been written and been passed down—is beneficial from the point of view that having heard it, we can take the attitude of working step by step on understanding all these things and practicing them properly. So, again, it's been very powerful and wonderful experience. I'm very pleased that you've had the good patience to sit a lot and practice meditation together, therefore strengthening your commitment to attain enlightenment and to help all beings. This is my sincere wish and also the wish of our lineage. So thank you all very much.