

Patience and Equanimity.

*Dharma roadside dialogue series
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Q: You were talking about an aware and relaxed mind. What about if you have a relaxed and distracted mind?

A: That's the point. It's finding the balance. And how do you find the balance? By being aware. To be aware that you are distracted is the first step of awareness, so if you are not aware you're distracted, that means you are not aware at all. So it's good, it's a good start. Then you need to sharpen your presence. You need to sharpen your attentiveness, you need to sharpen your mindfulness, and the practice of meditation is a very good exercise room for that, to bring this quality into daily life. When you're sitting and you don't have anything else to do then you can really notice that you're relaxed, but have a sort of false relaxed mind, because it lacks this quality of attentiveness and presence; that you need to apply a bit of effort in a way.

We've seen this in the teachings on meditation in the text *Clarifying the Natural State* as "a regrouping and relaxing." Tightening and loosening. When you're a little bit too tight you need to chill out, you know, relax a little bit...and then when you are too loose then you need to tighten up a little. So this is the training working with the mind and it happens when you are aware that you need to do this job, so congratulations, you are aware of it! That's already a good step, you're in a good direction.

Q: Well, I feel like post-meditation I have more awareness, but it's during meditation that I follow the distraction, maybe as a type of entertainment, oh well, something to work with.

A: Yeah yeah, you're totally right, you answered what I was just going to answer. Action is so entertaining that on the basis of this distraction you can also have an enhanced presence, whereas when you are sitting, and particularly when you are trying to "do" shamatha meditation, you see what I mean, like trying to be attentive to the breath, to the posture....boriiiiinnng! Very quickly you're bored. And then when you're bored you try to find entertainment here and there. Maybe if you change from this kind of representation of what meditation is, like calm-abiding, one-pointedness, counting the breath, and being calm and open, and so on, and you then emphasize more of the clarity aspect of it, the awareness, saying that there is something crisp and fresh, and every thought that arises you really look at it, so you start moving into more of a vipashyana attitude, an insight attitude rather than just calming. Calm is okay, if you're disturbed and so on, that's no big problem, really, unless your mind is totally running wild. But if your mind is here and there a little bit, and comes back, like no big deal, you know? Then emphasize the aspect of clarity, the aspect of presence and attentiveness, I would suggest in this case.

Q: When I'm in retreat and meditating a lot then this happens naturally, but the rest of the time when I sit down to practice for 20 minutes or so in the day, I struggle more with the distraction.

A: Well, then there is the inertia of inactivity. It sort of catches you up. Even if you have 20 minutes, it's 20 minutes after 12 hours of activity or of work. It's a lot to expect, to be able to switch from one to the other without any consequences? Of course, and so that's why I think it's more important than trying to have absolute stability without distraction, it's more important to adopt a more vipashyana style of meditation where you look at the distracting mind, what is this mind that perceives the distraction? What is the perceiving mind?

Q: There is a difference between equanimity and forbearance, yes? With the Dharma and the meditation things become a little bit lighter for me, because I'm not as fixed on things, but still, it's not equanimity. Can you explain a little more the difference between forbearance and equanimity?

A: Forbearance. It's like you bear with the situation, you try to keep a good face, and then try to be patient while you hope for things to change at some point. So, it is useful to have some sort of forbearance, otherwise we can be a bit wimpy, any little problem we have we start crying, we have no backbone. It's good to have a little bit of resistance, actually. Like, "I'm gonna take that, I'm gonna work with it." That's good, that's necessary, otherwise we give up immediately, as soon as there's a little push, we give up. It's good to have this forbearance because it gives us a platform to work with, because once we have this, we struggle and we wrestle with the problem. Then we can find solutions.

But equanimity, in the way I was trying to explain it, is that you don't have a preference for this or that. Of course, naturally we have a preference for light moments in our life; no one really has a preference for struggle and difficulty. But when it happens, you are not carried away by your disgust at the hard things or your attachment to the pleasant things. It happens....then you work with it; if it doesn't happen, that's good too. If it happens, you work with it, and if there is no problem, you enjoy the absence of problems, but you don't create an attachment.

So I will express the concept of equanimity in this sense because, of course, in different situations you can use it differently. I would say it's acceptance of the situation, not resignation, like "It happened, what can I do about it?" No no, but rather an acceptance. It is what it is, which brings you to the question, "What can I do with it? What kind of lemonade can I make with this lemon?" And in terms of meditation, if you are looking for recognition of the nature of mind, is "What is this mind that perceives pleasure? What is this mind that perceives suffering or difficulty?" And that's very important for chronic sickness, chronic pain. Like when you have a pain that is always there, and despite the progress of science there is really nothing that can free you from suffering, even if maybe it can cut the edge a little. And if you spend your time in pain, and on top of this you add your anger about being in pain, then you have a kind of double punishment. But when you have pain and you are able to really clearly say to yourself, "It's happening." Now the question is not whether it's going to disappear or not, of course we try, the doctors and everything we try, but it's not so much a question of whether it's going to disappear quickly or not, it's really "What am I

doing with this, what am I doing with this chronic pain?” And then in terms of meditation, the vipashyana response to this is, “What is this mind that feels pain?”

But this requires a lot of patience...in the sense of forbearance. You need courage, to be able to keep asking yourself this question and looking at this mind when your entire body and mind are crying for help and cessation of suffering, “I just want to be normal, I just want to have a normal day, I don’t want to have this migraine, I don’t want to have this back pain, I don’t want to be bedridden.” All of this...of course! This is the natural response. But when it’s chronic, I think that you have so little choice, in a way, that either you die, because you’re totally depressed and you hate this and there is sort of a moral suffering on top of the suffering, or you use it and you free yourself. And that’s where sometimes mind meditation can make a huge difference. It doesn’t solve your pain, but it solves your relation to the pain, and it helps you to realize what is the nature of this mind that feels pain.

Q: But why are we so stubborn, that we try to endure situations that are unhealthy, like a “bad” relationship....we stubbornly keep thinking that if we just endure it will change.

A: Well, it’s old habits. We want to achieve something so we give it all. We push and we push. You know, we are projecting, for example in a relationship, in a relationship you try to have a perfect relationship. But you’re sort of negating what is. Day in and day out, there are ups and downs. And you’re still attached to your ideal image of what could have been, should have been, and so on. And this attachment is desire. The desire for a fantasy. It’s disconnected from reality. And as long as you don’t want to see that; you are okay to give up on the pain that comes from this not-so-functioning relationship, you’re okay to give up on that, but you’re not okay to give up on the happy relationship idea, because then you have to give up on everything. Then maybe something can happen, which is an unconditional relationship, where you are free. You’re free because you are not trying to hold on. You know, “This person represents for me the condition of my happiness.” No. It happens, we have a good time, it’s fine, and it changes. And that’s fine too. And if I have a problem with that, I can look at my mind that has a problem with that and try to find out, “What is this mind that feels there is a problem?” Then this bad situation turns into a good opportunity for me to learn something. Great. But also I can realize that everything is impermanent.

I think we have been sold this idea of soulmates and eternity and forever, this very romantic idea. We’ve been trained from a young age, you know, the dolls, Ken and Barbie, they are perfect, they have their nice little pink car and so on...give Ken and Barbie a break. We’re just human, we are trying our best, and I think the best is to find a good partnership where we help each other, and maybe it’s with one person, maybe it’s with several persons...you have different friends, you have a partner that you are with most of the time, but you also have friends that are bringing you something else, and your partner has friends that bring something that you don’t bring. So I think it’s much more open in that sense, but we want to have a package where we have everything...I don’t know, we are fixed on this, this is really a mental representation. We have been sold and we

bought this image of the package deal, you know, where you have everything in one person, forever, with a standard continual quality. Really?

So we do our best. We are human, we try to love, we try to be understanding, we try to express ourselves, and sometimes we find nourishment here and sometimes we find nourishment there, and that's fine. And I think we are at a time that society has evolved where it is easier to do that. Think of the generation of your parents or your grandparents. You know, they have the first adventure, and then they are pregnant, and they have to be married and spend the rest of their life with this person, and it's unbearable. And now when I see the kids, not only do they change partners, but they change gender. Not happy being trapped in being a boy or a girl, non-binary. Okay! And then society, not everywhere of course, but okay, you're fluid. So there is a little bit of tolerance and freedom, things have changed. We shouldn't entrap ourselves in our own creation.

Also, in a relationship, if you have patience, you can also bear with this person when this person is maybe a little bit excessive...a work in progress. If you realize this person is just totally lazy and leaning on you and leaves you all the jobs to do you might say, "Okay, buddy, I'm out of here. But sometimes we are tough, but sometimes not so tough, so if we accept it, it's okay, as long as we are working together, we have a good deal which is I want to help you and I'm very grateful for the help you bring me, then we can go on for a long time. It's a good partnership, it's a good base.

Q: I want to ask about one thing you told me that the 16th Karmapa said, I will read it so I don't misquote it. "When you do things in the right direction, obstacles arise and have to be overcome. Obstacles are a sign of progress." My question is why is it so?

A: Obstacles are not obstacles if you use them to grow, they are an opportunity. Obstacles are obstacles if you bail out, if you are not willing to work with the situation...then they become obstacles. But they are not obstacles per se. When a boat moves in the ocean there is a wake behind. If you jump in your bathtub, the water splashes. To any action there is a reaction. And to positive action there is always some sort of negative backlash. When I think about this I think this is the expression of my reluctance. There is a part of me that resists. And that resistance in me becomes the obstacle. And if I overcome my resistance, then I have liberated in my mind this reluctance to transformation. So the deeper and stronger the effort, the more waves it creates. It's quite natural. It's almost a physical law. We shouldn't see it as, "Oh, I started to do a good job for humanity but the devil sent his army to block me" No, that's not how it is, there is no good and evil in that sense...outside of your mind. Good and evil are just archetypes in our mind, and they translate into perceived reality in our life.

So when you start changing, when you begin a process of change, there are so many things in you that refuse it, refuse this change; it has to express itself, its voice has to be heard. We have to listen, and we have to keep moving. It's a test.

Q: I am a little overwhelmed by all the information about meditation. What do you recommend for a basic daily practice? And should we keep our eyes open as I have heard?

A: The eyes. Every tradition has a different position on the eyes. I come from a world where generally speaking you were invited to keep your eyes half closed. So you keep a sort of eye half closed looking downward straight ahead, a very open vision of what is, but you're not staring at anything in particular. Your field of vision is open but you're not staring at anything. So that's one tradition. And I was strictly, strictly asked to never close my eyes, and so on. But then when I took part in other Buddhist tradition retreats, and in their tradition it was, never dare to open your eyes...because if you open your eyes you'll be distracted, you'll be carried away, and don't meditate outside because light will come through your eyelids and that will make imagery in your sight and then your mind, and then you'll be distracted, so dark room, eyes closed. And strictly, strictly encouraged to do that. And then you read some manuals about other types of meditation where you're really invited to look straight ahead very directly at what is in front of you, without staring at anything in particular, but just embrace whatever it is. Then you get the instructions where they say, "Lift up your gaze and embrace the sky like the sky is your mind and your eyes are embracing the sky," and so on. Are these contradictory things edicted by some crazy lunatics? I think where I come to at this point of my life is that the gaze is a very important gateway to the mind; as humans we are very visual. My dog would have questions about his nose;~} But we humans have questions about our eyes, and so what I've noticed is that when I close my eyes I can really regroup that much more and feel much more peaceful and less distracted, but the sense of stability borders on sleep, and I lose the clarity. When my eyes are half closed and my gaze is slightly downwards, then I get clarity and pacification at the same time. If I look straight ahead, on the basis of a stable mind, then I have a laser-like gaze/mind and I can look at all phenomena and then immediately look at the mind that perceives them. And then if I lift up my gaze and embrace the sky then all of the knots and all of the tensions about the do's and don'ts of meditation just relax, and then I can abide in the natural state.

So, the different positions of the gaze are actually inducing different states of mind. If you are easily distracted, to look up at the sky with an open gaze is certainly not very helpful. Looking even straight ahead, because out of the corner of your eyes you'll be catching this and that and then you'll be distracted. So I would recommend sort of a medium setting with the gaze slightly downward, straight ahead, eyes half closed, in a very open and soft yet not focused panoramic vision. Then if you find you are distracted then close your eyes for a while. And then if you feel that you are a little bit drowsy or fall into a bit of a sleepy state, then open your eyes for a while. Maybe open for a while and straight ahead, to refresh the mind. And then lower the gaze again. Use the gaze as you would use the flaps on the wing of a plane...to level the position of your plane. That would be my recommendation for that, for the eyes.

And considering the overwhelming plethora of techniques and meditations and philosophy and so on...yes, the supermarket of Dharma has a lot of products. You don't have to buy everything. When Wendelin and I go shopping, here in town at the local little supermarket, there are some aisles we

have never visited, because they have this “industrial” food, prepared stuff, and so on. We are pretty much on the outer aisle, where you have the organic vegetables on one side, and cheese and creamery on the other side. And we never go in the middle. So, some of the Dharma is not for you. You have to think that all of these are skillful methods. If you use all the skillful methods because you feel that you have to use all the skillful methods, you are just going to be overburdened by a lot of things that are actually not useful, and then, because you try to hold them you can not process them. So I would say, after long consideration, because I’ve been confronted with this question, you probably realize you’re not the only one with these sorts of questions. I realized that yes, the 84,000+ Dharma are all wonderful...but you don’t have to use them all. Okay?

So what is useful? What is useful has been summarized in *The Path to Awakening* of Shamar Rinpoche. So I would say, just buy this book, it’s like \$10 bucks, start with Chapter 1 and put it into practice. And try to get an actual experience of what it is. Cultivating calm abiding, but also working on understanding ultimate bodhicitta, seeing all phenomena like a dream, and so on and so forth. Follow this step by step guideline; the instructions regarding meditation are somewhat, a little bit condensed in this short book, but you can have a more detailed explanation in *Boundless Wisdom*. So on the same topics you can go into *Boundless Wisdom* by the same author and you find a broader or deeper explanation of how to cultivate attentiveness and so forth. So basically if you cultivate discernment, cultivate wisdom through practice of meditation and some basic studies and you apply this in your daily life in a benevolent and loving way, you’re good! So I would say mind-training is the tool. It works for everybody, it doesn’t really require you to be the sharpest knife in the drawer in terms of philosophy, and know all the details, no...it’s very hands on. What is beautiful about mind-training is, you know, you do it or you don’t do it. It’s not so rhetorical...it’s hands on. It’s practical. And it brings results, very, very important results, very important transformation, in one lifespan; you can have tremendous transformation with this. So that would be my recommendation.

Shamar Rinpoche basically left us with three books. The “cliff notes,” called *Boundless Awakening* is really the skeleton of what meditation is, a very thin book. And then after that, how to integrate the cultivation of love and compassion with the practice of meditation, both in meditation and practical life situations, in *The Path of Awakening*. This covers a large ground. And then you have *Boundless Wisdom* where he develops topics that are just very schematically approached in the first two books. I think with these three books you cover the ground of what we need in our life situation, with the time we have, efficiently. Strike at the heart. Rinpoche understood that he was writing these books for Westerners, and took an approach that would best benefit those within the culture. That’s why he devised this approach, which is really the backbone of the Bodhi Path Centers, which is mind-training; mind-training in the perspective of mahamudra, not just the mind-training of of Atisha, but also combined with the mahamudra of Maitripa and and Saraha in the first place. These two rivers blend together and are presented in a way that doesn’t really care so much for the packaging. You don't have to have rituals, you don’t have to wear specific robes and accouterments; you don’t have to do this, it’s not necessary. Come as you are and that will work fine, because we are talking about the nature of mind and love and compassion. This doesn’t have culture...it is in every culture but it

doesn't belong to one culture. So I think this is really the mastery of a great teacher to give us exactly what is the most efficient. Rinpoche was about efficiency.

Q: Regarding patience with friends and enemies, Gampopa said we should never point out others flaws, but you mentioned times when it may happen in a community that someone points out stinginess or something. How do we work with this, especially in community, family, etc.

A: It really depends on your relationship to this person. Sometimes the only thing you can do when you're talking with a friend, and I think that we always have to remember that conversation should only happen between two persons who are willing to listen to each other. Okay? If you are talking to someone who doesn't care about you or whatever you have to say, just don't waste your time, just let them be. But if you're talking to someone who cares about what you say, and without being too finger-pointing, you can talk about the experience you have when you saw something. Like saying, "What you said really hurt me," rather than pointing, like, "You're so aggressive in your speech, it was really violent." But when you say, "You really hurt me," or "I am concerned that this kind of speech can lead to trouble for you." You're talking about your heat and your compassion instead of talking from what could be understood as a judgemental point of view. The delivery is very important, the way you deliver your message. I think when you can say something it's good to say something. If you can. If it's going to be counterproductive, then....?

Q: Opening up and sharing when I feel a conflict is quite scary, it is very vulnerable and it can be quite delicate.

A: Yes, but that's part of training patience. Vulnerability is not a weakness, it is actually your strength. We think vulnerability is our weakness, but actually is our strength; it's our tenderness, our capacity to be in touch with ourselves, our capacity to really listen to someone with empathy, and of course we are exposed! But even if you have armor, protecting yourself all the time, there are still weaknesses in your armor. There is no 100% protection. A friend of mine is working in the IT industry and he is actually working on defending websites from being hacked. Then in a business discussion with some of his clients he said, "The best website is the website that has no address, that nobody can connect to, then it is perfected." But then it's not a website, it's just a folder in your unconnected laptop;~}

So if you want to communicate with the world, you have to be open to some extent, and that implies confrontation with your vulnerability. Trungpa Rinpoche in the mind-training book he wrote said, "Wear your heart on your sleeve." One piece of advice. His second advice is, "Drop your iron pants." This is my favorite. "Drop your iron pants;" stop protecting yourself all the time. Because there is nobody to protect, and if you protect yourself, your self becomes more and more existent. If you come to realize the identilessness of the self, like, who's going to wear the iron pants? So in terms of progress towards awakening we must embrace vulnerability and we have to drop the iron pants. And that's scary, of course, because we have built up defense around the self since

beginningless time. And you know what, when you have a fortress, that attracts all the invaders; everybody wants to see what's inside.

A very important figure in Chenrezig is the mahasiddha Thangtong Gyalpo. Thangtong Gyalpo means "the king of the empty valley." The king to the empty valley...that means there is no castle to be taken. Who is going to lay siege to an empty valley? But if you have a castle, I don't know a castle in Europe that was sieged. And when they were victorious they added another row of walls around it...it's endless. It's better to embrace your vulnerability. Vulnerability means you are in touch with your heart, and then when you talk you talk from your heart, and when you talk from your heart you talk to the heart of people. That means you pass their fortress and you talk from within, it's a Trojan Horse, from your heart to their heart. So it's your power, it's not your weakness. The tenderness of your heart combined with the insight and the discernment of your mind are formidable tools of liberation, they are extremely powerful.

Community is a tough place, that's why you run away...you want to have your own apartment so you can close the door and not see anybody. But then after that you're bored in your castle. So then you go online, and you chat, but you don't use your real name, so you can chat but nobody knows you, you create an avatar. That's all the tricks we play on ourselves. The real thing is to just meet people and be with them. And yeah, it hurts, community is a tough place sometimes. Believe me, I know, I spent thirty plus years in community. I know the good side, and the down side. Altogether, the more you're open, the more you're welcoming, the less you're afraid of who you are, the better it is. Because you're real, and there's nothing better than being real. Then you can work with it, if you're lying to yourself and the rest of the world and you're not real then you cannot work with what is. You're just busy checking your profile out on Facebook to see if you have more friends;~}

Q: I saw, when they did the new stupa at the Marfond retreat center, if it's not inappropriate, I am wondering how your experience of being with Gendun Rinchen was. Being there with him in the present, after being with him in his previous incarnation as Gendun Rinpoche.

A: It was a very happy circumstance because maybe a month before I left for Europe, sometime in June, Gendun Rinchen called me, and we had a very long conversation. He really wanted to find time that we can talk and see how I can help in whatever way I can. And he very clearly asked, like, "Hey, what are you doing on the 29th of August?" I said, "I'll be in Europe, and on the 29th of August I'll be in Perigord visiting my mom." So he said, "Can you come on the 29th of August to Marfond, which is just a half hour drive, for the consecration of the stupa?" I said, "Of course I can come." So I went there, and it was a very busy day, there were a lot of people; I saw him a little bit, he really wanted that everybody would participate...he asked me to take some of the Ringsels, the relics of Gendun Rinpoche, and then place them in a container that had the ashes of Gendun Rinpoche and so on, so he asked me several times to come and do something but he also asked others to come and do something, so he was kind of the MC of the ceremony and orchestrating all of that and so on. So it was very sweet and I met a lot of people that I hadn't seen in decades and all

of them are very old now! I am not, but they are all very old;~} It was kind of sweet and also kind of shocking to see how old everybody was. But we decided we should take an extra day to talk more privately so I came back a couple of days after that and we spent most of the afternoon actually from like 2pm till 9pm we talked. He took me for a long walk from Marfond to Pawo Rinpoche's center, it's just above the ridge and we talked about everything under the moon; about his projects, his vision and all sorts of things that don't need to be discussed here, but it was very, very, I think, informative for him as well...some historical facts and things that happened. And for me it was also informative about where he is presently, what he's trying to achieve and trying to figure out together how I could help because, you know, I'm here...my life is in the US, I'm definitely not coming back to Le Bost, like, no way, but I can come back now and then and if I can be of help I will be happy to do that.

It was a very good time, and I see that though he's very young he has a sense of responsibility for Marfond in the Dordogne, and for, of course, Kundreul Ling in Auvergne, and also for Mohra in Germany where he really wants to develop something around basic study, good practice, and also he has a project of an art school with a museum promoting sacred art, in particular, which was pretty much the intention of the previous Gendun Rinpoche....I found it very inspiring and very refreshing. And also to see all these young people who are coming now, and some not so young, but a lot of young people coming around him as part of the expression of his activity and that was very, very sweet and also amusing, because I've been there before and I'm not really in it now, so I can see how everything spins and how everybody is a little bit shaken by the speed at which he moves things around. It was very sweet and very inspiring, and also very deep. I hadn't had the chance before to see any of the Ringsels of Gendun Rinpoche or even more, touch them; when we're talking about liberating by contact just touching these Ringsels was like an explosion in my head, and I was just like, "Wow." I had to really sit with the information I received through the contact with this precious relic and so it was not just a sweet, friendly encounter with old friends and a very young and inspiring teacher, but also a very powerful empowerment. I think the stupa is a small one but it's going to be a very powerful stupa, so everyone will benefit from seeing it, touching it, and walking around it. I believe he wants to do the same thing in Mohra and then more stupas in Kundreul Ling. He has a to-do list which is "endless."

I don't have the words for it. It was very nice. More than nice. I don't want to be extravagant and say, wow, it was cathartic or whatever, but it was very inspiring, it was friendly, he cared about everybody and everybody had a place, whether they were a monastic or a layperson...you know, he doesn't see much difference between all of that; they are just different people on the way to enlightenment and helping each other, and so everyone had a function and a place and something to do in this creation of a stupa. That was actually very remarkable. Very remarkable.