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Trungpa's 'working basis' of meditation is our mind, practice being present with experience, rather than elaborate it, dichotomy between brain and mind, big perspective of unbounded view and little perspective of science

LMC [00:01:06] So Bill suggested to me that maybe a recap of this morning's introduction to the meditation might be useful. [murmurings] Why is that funny? [laughter] In thinking about that, I recall, some time ago, listening to a Chogyam Trungpa teaching. There is a piece of that teaching I remember, most of it I don't recall, but the piece was... you have to take into account that this was spoken probably in the early '70's... and so he was talking about how his students were always concerned about whether or not they were engaging in the right practice. Whether or not they had the right teacher, though most people that hung out with Trungpa spent quite a bit of time wondering whether they had the right teacher. [laughter] History has judged him quite well.

[00:03:03] But his response... to first saying how people are concerned and they want to engage in the higher practices or the more effective practices and never quite certain whether they were engaged in the *right* practices for them at that time. All of this effort going in to that process. Trying to figure out what to do... and what practice would be most beneficial. And his response, which was classic for the man, was, you're wasting your time. Because... all of the meditation practices are fundamentally the same. They all come down to... [what] he called the working basis. The working basis of meditation and relating to your practice is really the same as relating to anything else.

[00:04:22] So his comments were that the only basis that you've got is your own mind. And so you're looking for the better chöd drum to play or you're looking for the bell that rings the way you think is really inspirational. You're looking for the right place to have, we could say, the right place to have your meditation hall or your Dharma center or whatever. And all of that effort is missing the point. That with you all the time you have *this mind*. And when you're not clear about that mind, when you're not paying attention to the experiences which arise in that mind, which is the only place the experiences arise, then you are confused. And that confusion leads to all of the trouble that you have that you're trying to avoid by other means. And it actually is very simple. All comes down to... can you pay attention to the basis, to that mind and its contents.

[00:05:36] And as usual, he was so good at summarizing and stating what at the time that you hear it seems so obvious. And then hours or days later, you can't remember what it was. Because we're not paying attention anymore. So we drift out of the clarity, back into the confusion. And then we're trying to, sort of like the analogy that I remember Kalu Rinpoche once used was, like *a hog in a garbage pit*. Constantly forgetting, you know, where the thing was that they just saw a moment ago they could have eaten. But now it's moved past it and it's eating other things. [laughter] And not paying attention. And so we kind of do that with our meditation practice and with our Dharma practice. Continually looking for the better thing, the right thing, the thing that will *work*. And the approach is fundamentally self-defeating. When all that we needed was always there.

[00:06:50] So this morning I wanted to... the effort was to encourage us to... pay attention to our experience as it arises. That in and of itself is a great experience. It's a great meditation. And if

you try to do it, you'll have a lot of questions. Because it's too simple for us. We can't just relax and engage in that. Because we get caught by all the things that arise in the mind again. And that feels to us, even if we're paying attention to it, it feels to us like we're paying attention to our own failure in the meditation. So it becomes really self-defeating in that way. When actually we're right on the edge, right on the cusp of doing the most profound practice that we could engage in. So that's the non-recap. [laughter]

Student 1 [00:08:17] When we say we pay attention to our own failure, that's just a point of view, right? Every time we notice our own failure, we're succeeding.

LMC [00:08:32] Yes. The problem, though, is that we often don't stop with seeing it. We then elaborate. So the failure is the elaboration. It's not the seeing. The moment that we have the experience that we're actually watching ourselves fail... well that's the commentary on the experience. It's not being present with and noticing the experience itself. Noticing the experience of failing... without the commentary is not noticing the experience of failing. It's noticing an experience. But the *failure* piece is a commentary.

Student 1 [00:09:20] It's a judgement.

LMC [00:09:21] Yeah.

Student 2 [00:09:58] As there's no one else raising their hands, last Sunday morning, we discussed a lot about trauma and recovery from trauma. And I boldly said something to the effect of, well, you need psychology because, you know, and mental health treatment because Buddhism doesn't quite cut it, basically, in so many words. And after the Q&A was done and the speakers and microphones were off, there was a little side conversation between a bunch of people on the teacher's side there. And Bill and Zopa shared experiences that I then later on related to. We were talking about how the first and the second turning, and the third turning and that sort of thing, related to how Buddhists should deal with trauma and experiencing that. And I do believe that in the West, psychology is very helpful. But I forgot that there are these, sort of... I think in Christianity we call them moments of grace? But in Buddhism, I guess you might call them third turning experiences. Where there was a moment of realization where I didn't have to experience that fear or whatever trauma I was experiencing or whatever discomfort I was feeling that was overwhelming to me. And I want to just share that, yes, I've had a moment or two of those as well. Where I had this realization that I didn't have to experience that. And it sort of talked me out of it for a couple of days or a week. And I just didn't want to 'dis' that. I didn't want to completely dismiss that possibility. So that's all I want to do.

LMC [00:12:06] The possibility of what?

Student 2 [00:12:10] That there are times when, I think Bill and Zopa and perhaps yourself will be better able to explain it, because I really don't understand the third turning very well. Or I should say I haven't experienced a lot of it. But there are moments where, as if we were becoming Chenrezig when we're practicing that particular practice. Or as if we were becoming the Buddha, if we're practicing our own Lama, we can become the person that doesn't have to be perpetually afraid and doesn't have to be perpetually miserable as well. If that makes any sense.

LMC [00:12:55] Yeah, of course. ... I don't think this is, you know, strictly about a third turning thing. You could relate to the simple meditation of paying attention to your experience or

however you want to say it, being present with your experience. Which is not the same as... *having* the experience. As you will *have* the experience that you have. And if you resist it, that's another experience. And if you perpetuate it, that's another experience. If you want more of it, that's another experience. And I don't think that in itself is *particularly* exclusive to third turning. I think that we could, with some bravado, step into the places of, I'm not so sure that it has to do with Buddhism. [laughs] I mean, certainly the fact that we have experiences is not exclusively the purview of Buddhists. [laughter] Trauma the same. Joyful experiences. I mean, it's just not. What we *do* with those things... is another matter.

[00:14:48] And of course, because the first teachings of the Buddha were about suffering and its elimination. As he later said, the only things I teach are suffering and its end. But the suffering is not the purview of Buddhists or Buddhism. Everyone suffers. And everyone wants to be free of it. And to some degree, you could say everyone is free of it. And they have suffering. There's always waves on the ocean. It's not the purview of any particular ocean. Just happens.

[00:15:29] What the issue is here... and maybe this would make some sense to explore, is that we don't *just* pay attention. We don't just notice. We're not just *present* with the experience. We continually elaborate it, judge it, chew it... all the time. And what we notice is what we're making. We're making experiences which occur in the mind. But we're also solidifying those experiences like they're *real*. And in that space, we also have the dichotomy of, or the dualism of... *I... am* having this experience. And when I judge the experience, I'm having that judgment.

[00:16:25] But we don't think I'm having a judgment. So this is where it falls back into the confusion side. We think the judgment is the *truth*, and *that's* who I am. That's who I am. And that is, now we come to the purview of Buddhism... is it *really* who you are? Or... did you just make that up and elaborate it into something else? Like you were given a pound of clay and asked to make anything. And so you made the judgment, the elaboration. Took the raw experience, which has none of those things inherently connected to it... and then we just played with the dough and made something else. That's mostly what we do with our experience. I think everyone can see that they do that. We don't just let the experience arise. Settle our mind on it as if... we're looking at *this* thing. And that's the best meditation that one could do. In fact, you could make a case that pretty much all of the practices that we engage in are about coming to the place of being able to be present, *just* present with all the experiences that are continually arise.

[00:17:56] When we're in that place, then we have a sense of clarity. The clarity disappears when we manipulate and judge the experience, elaborate it... the clarity vanishes. As soon as we just pay attention, just look at, just be aware of, just be present with the experience, the sense of profound clarity which comes, whether it's uncomfortable or not, is not relevant.

Student 2 [00:18:33] I think to clarify... one of the things that we had discussed was that sometimes when we were children, we experienced trauma or as adults we experienced trauma when we can't process that intellectually or cognitively. And those memories do have a tendency to get solidified and triggered because they're sort of pretty horrible. And sometimes people experience that trauma going on and on and on. You know, the discomfort from it, and there seems like no escape. I think this technique that we're talking about here, this meditation, is just being aware of our daily lives might be helpful for some. However, sometimes for some folks that trauma is so debilitating and so ongoing that it's like they cannot get any perspective on it. Because once you are in that space where you're afraid for your life and it just keeps going and you not even aware that you're afraid for your life, it's very hard to get some perspective on

that. To get that more conscious part of the brain working. So that's where that discussion came up. And it'd be great if we could all get to a calm enough point where we can have that perspective on our experience.

LMC [00:20:10] Well, I think it's quite difficult to get to that place *without* the trauma even. Without the trauma... it's still really difficult to get to that place. But that place... no matter whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, is always there. And that's the point of the meditation. You can't escape, you will not escape the experience. So really, from a Buddhist perspective, we would say, even when you're dead... you will not escape the experience. So part of the problem can be, again, just speaking from a Buddhist perspective, that our *effort*... to alter, elaborate, reduce our experience... inevitably becomes another experience. It just... the experience changes! And if we're trying to elaborate it in a certain way, almost without exception, it'll actually change into experience that we were not hoping to have.

[00:21:24] That doesn't mean that it's like terrible or anything. It's just we tend to like... if we look and pay attention, we can see ourselves doing this continually. It's a *continuous* thing that we engage in. Night and day. Awake, asleep. And yes, the brain plays a role in all of that. But again, from a Buddhist perspective, it actually also is affected by the mind. If we can make a dichotomy between the brain and the mind, many people *can't* make that. That's okay, but the meditation will be more difficult. If you can hold the view that the brain is kind of one of the things that functions with the mind, that's a more helpful view from the meditation perspective.

[00:22:25] The experience occurs in the mind is a Buddhist perspective. The experience that occurs in the brain is a scientific perspective. And while they share a lot, they're not necessarily the same. In fact, they're not the same. One of them has an endpoint, which is based upon how far science has gone, I think you could say. In other words, the things that we talk about today and take for granted were not even available to speak about in some distant point in the past. So the dichotomy between the two is an essential piece to the meditation. We want to, in this case, just be present with. Just be present with. And that's difficult enough all by itself. And for someone who is experiencing extreme trauma of any kind or just any form of bewilderment and confusion that you can imagine... in the midst of that, they're going to find it probably impossible to do this. So this is not an issue of one size fits all. But it is an issue of what we do in our meditation. If we can do the meditation, being able to just be present with the experiences as they arise is a very helpful skill to develop. One could go one step further and say, you will not accomplish deep clarity without that skill.

[00:24:17] On the other hand, the larger perspective gives us something that a little perspective... I will call the little perspective, the science perspective, just to make sure that we offend somebody. [laughter] The big perspective of the unbounded view has the advantage that there is never a time when something becomes impossible. It's always possible. It always was. And it always will be. Whereas when we think about our brain, we're probably also thinking about this life. Like people often say, oh, I wish I encountered the Dharma sooner because now I'm too old, at 25, [laughter] to accomplish this or some other thing. And all of those things make complete, irrefutable sense within the boundaries of our lifespan. We feel like I don't have the time to do it. I wish I had done this. There's a sense of continuous, perpetual regret sometimes. When actually, from a Buddhist perspective, we would probably say something like, you know, you've probably *been* regretting for many lifetimes. That's how the habit continues like that.

[00:25:45] So the issue, first of all, is to you know, we can be hokey about it and say 'make friends' with the regret. I mean, some teachers say that, use that way, make friends with it. I

would prefer to just say, it's absolutely essential... to not take the chain of unpleasant reactions that we have and just perpetuate them. That's not helpful. Whatever it is. What is helpful is to see them first. *Without* seeing them, I don't even know how anything works. And you're just riding the waves and you don't know where the next one will come from or where it'll go.

[00:26:34] When we sit down to practice and we have any kind of sense that we might label in some way. When we label it we could start by recognizing that the *act* of labeling is an experience. Which does not necessarily have any relationship to the thing that we're labeling. So even *that* little clear insight we can say is just another experience. The judgments which we are bound to lay on ourselves and others are just more experiences. And it's a relief, I think, when we can get past the place of feeling like we *have* to do all of that. Which is also something that commonly happens, like I have to do it. That's who I am. Have you ever heard that? [chuckles] Have you ever experienced that? It's a moment which is pregnant with the possibility of laughing at ourselves. ... Is that okay?

Student 3 [00:28:18] I guess as you share that, what comes to me, is that my ability to see the issues that I'm raising for myself is limited. And to sort of get back to what [she] was talking about in terms of therapy or something, it seems to me that the ability to recognize what I'm doing can often be facilitated by some kind of exchange with someone else.

LMC [00:29:16] Can you say a little more about that?

Student 3 [00:29:26] Well, yeah, I think it's not unique with me, but I find that I'm frequently critical. But... I think that a lot of things that I do that I don't think of as critical. I mean, if I say you're a bald, nasty person, I can see that as critical. But I'm sure that there are other things that I do by tone of voice or in other ways that are critical that I don't recognize. But if I had an observer who could say, "do you see this as critical?" Oh! I would have an enlightened moment that I would have difficulty getting at personally.

LMC [00:30:20] Maybe. ... We'll all say that... good relationships with other people is one way of talking about exactly what you're saying. Like other people have insights into us that we can't see. But for the sake of the meditation, when you have a judgment... about yourself, about someone else... the question is, can we just watch that unfold, can we watch ourselves *in* that process? If we *do* that, that's meditation. Whether we're walking around, standing up, talking to somebody. Not likely we would hold that thread speaking to somebody, but possibly. ... That's it! I mean, the problem here is not... a cognitive one. It's not a conceptual one either. Though we may find that our cognitive process is helpful... as a kind of encouragement, kind of like a friend. Like my cognitive side says, you're *playing* with the experience. You're not just being present with it. That can bring me back to the meditation. But more likely, it's an encouragement to manipulate it more.

[00:32:23] Not necessarily, but that falling into the manipulation is not the meditation. Now, we stepped out of it into another realm. Which is fine on its own, but it's not the meditation. And when we sit down and meditate, we can most easily, I think it's fair to say... if we want to be *good* at this, then the meditation aspect of it is critical. We have to be willing, and sometimes it's an issue of *willing*. Let's say that, for example, somebody makes me really angry. And that experience, when I look at it, is mixed with a bunch of things. Right. But if the anger is hot enough, it feels like that's *all* there is, is the anger. Anything that's cognitive... includes things like, I'll get even. I'll do this next time. It's like all of these other elaborations come into it.

[00:33:37] That is all cut if we have the ability, the skill, to bring the awareness to that *experience*... as it unfolds. And that's it. Like we're watching... waves break on cliffs. That does not tend to make us angry. Even when they're really loud, we don't yell at it and say, pipe down, shut up, make less noise. We don't do that because the insight is... we're just having an experience of something. But normally our experience includes all of these desires and aversions and things that get mixed in.

[00:34:39] If we can slow down enough, which happens during our meditation, even mediocre... it still happens that things will slow down. And when they slow down, we have the opportunity to see all the experiences as they flow more slowly. And maybe it's just helpful to have some kind of an understanding that the meditation bears its *fruit* when we're quiet. Verbally quiet. Mentally quiet. And just seeing. Just seeing... things happen that do not occur in any other situation. And so because of that, because it's unusual to do this, we tend to have, for want of a better phrase, *wrong views* about it. Not *bad* wrong views like evil views or something, but wrong in the sense of... we move into the conceptual mode in the meditation. And because we're good at that, we tend to stay there. It's hard to get out. Because we all know so many things and we're all educated and so we can manipulate others. That's not the problem. We manipulate ourselves and we don't see ourselves doing it. It's so automatic.

[00:36:26] So the instruction this morning came from a place of... occasionally, I feel like we just have to remind ourselves that meditation is not an *event*. It's not something that occurs like a board game with ourselves somehow. We are in the middle of it night and day whether we decide to play... or not. And the truth is, is that deciding not to play is nearly impossible. Nearly impossible. What is far more possible is to watch the game unfold without playing.

[00:37:07] You know, I remember as a kid, I went my parents took us down to the zoo in San Diego. Which was, still is, a marvelous place as zoos go. And we went into an aviary in there. And it was filled with birds. And there was this gigantic net, which was as big as three houses and more, it was really huge. And you were right in there with the birds. And as a kid, I had no idea what bird was what. I knew blue, red, green. I knew those things. I knew whether I could see whether it darted quickly or flew around different. I didn't have words for it. And so I was just awestruck. That I could actually be in an environment where there was so many birds just flying around. And there was nothing, I can recall quite clearly, there was nothing that I could think to say to myself about it. It was just so awe inspiring. I'm sure my mouth was open and that probably a small bird could have flown in. [laughter]

[00:38:32] In a certain way, we could develop the ability to see the play of our own mind in that way. What an amazing thing. All of these things going... and actually I can play or not play. If you know that you can play or not play... you are *not* playing. In that moment, you are not playing. You're actually in the place of being present. It's in the moment when we forget and we *are* playing and we don't know that we made that shift. So I think that from a meditation perspective, what is helpful is to at least understand this.

[00:39:21] And when possible, when doing shamatha, to kind of take this view. My intention is to sit here, like I'm in that aviary. Then you might remind yourself, no, actually... that's not quite right. I am *in* that aviary. I *am* that aviary. And the stuff just continually, as we know, boils constantly. And our reactions rise up to every last one of them. Those like we can't just let anything be. That's just so unlikely. But it's important also to recognize that no, actually it's totally possible. To just let things be. Just see them. And out of that place... just to kind of like put the lid on this thing, having poured the cup and while it's still hot... it is from that place of

stillness that genuine compassion arises. It can't arise from anywhere else. From anywhere else, it's kind of sentimentality. "Oh, you poor thing." It's not the same. ...

Student 4 [00:41:34] I'll start by noticing that my heart is beating fast. And I think it's... I'm having a reaction. And I think it's because I care so much about the practice of psychology... as a form of love and skillful means. I don't think it's Buddhism. However, it's arisen in the West, from the Western experience of history and time, as the antidote of the West. Here comes this wonderful, beautiful gift of antidote from the East. And there is some overlap just because they're both intended to respond to the problem of suffering in the world. And people outside of Buddhism have all kinds of ideas about Buddhism. People outside of psychology have all kinds of ideas about psychology. And we can do, I think, a disservice to either one, you know, from outside. We can do a disservice to them and their shining potential integrity... as responses, compassionate responses, just.... And so there's all kinds of, you know, psychology. It's worthy of deep reflection, you know, because it is so much, you know... So many texts from Buddhism that are so beautiful. There are so many texts and psychology that also offer love and compassion that... holding both to me feels like the best thing to do in the West.

[00:44:02] And, you know, the mindfulness has already come into psychology and they've created, you know, things or ways of practice of psychology that include this. And sometimes it can miss the mark, of course. But the practice of psychology is a practice of love and relationship. You know, there's not a relationship of a friend. That's a different relationship that can be enormously beneficial for people who can go from there to more... ability or capacity to go from there. ... Is that okay? ... We'll dedicate the merit.

sangha [00:45:06] *dedicating the merit*