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to go deep with mind training practices need to see your own experience, is defending self always self-grasping? a useful response is embracing offensive action as a gift

LMC [00:01:48] So we have a little time to explore any topic, presumably in the Dharma, that you might have. Any questions? Any... concerns?

Zopa [00:14:50] I have a question. In the Mind Training Group on Thursday evenings, we're working with a text called 'The Wheel of Sharp Weapons.' And this text... is really *fierce*, I would say, against... the thought patterns of grasping at a self... at the illusory self. Like grasping it and holding on to it. Like a lot of the mind training work is like... you know... cut that, cut that, kind of cut the... set of thoughts that grasp at the self... that is... not there and then sets up aversion and attachment. And someone in the class is really struggling... nicely and openly with the text. He says it feels like it's... it's mean... you know, to say cut the self-grasping. He feels like it's cutting at his own self. So can you talk about how to help someone differentiate those two? The grasping at the self which is suffering... or, just the conventional self. Which is just your own good self that's going around the world doing things.

LMC [00:16:38] What's the difference between those two?

Zopa [00:16:40] Well, yeah. Yeah. Because he, cause the wheel of sharp weapons cuts at the self-grasping. And he thinks it's cutting *him*. His own... it's kind of beating himself up. And I've been trying to find ways to talk with him about the difference. And maybe it's because the word 'self' his self and self. ... I find this not so easy to...

LMC [00:17:18] You know, this person?

Zopa [00:17:19] Yeah, yeah. He comes all the time. ... He's been a student a long time at KCC.

LMC [00:17:33] So he has, he has the feeling of literally being... cut or compromised in some way... by virtue of... maybe it feels like a sense of denial of the self?

Zopa [00:17:48] Yeah, yeah, like denial of it or like being... harsh to it.

LMC [00:17:54] Oh yeah. Yeah. That's not so good. ... Well, I mean, it might be good, right? It depends upon the person. But... I think it's definitely true, that it's possible to use the methods... for mind training and other practices. It's definitely possible to use them in a way... where we, don't benefit. We actually... harm ourselves in certain ways. So if somebody... has that experience of that, then that's an important experience to... reckon with. Let's take a moment here.

[00:19:31] So I have to confess that... I had a very hard time many years ago... trying to engage in the practice of 'Wheel of Sharp Weapons'. It was just really, really difficult. It didn't feel particularly helpful. And it... raises, in my own mind, an issue... that I think is important. Of the many different approaches that we have to mind training... I tend to... gravitate towards those methods which *feel* like they're helpful. And, so we can start kind of easy... with it. This person practices?

Zopa [00:20:34] Yeah.

LMC [00:20:35] Okay. So we can start kind of easy with it... in experimenting with the mind training aphorisms, for example, or... even other practices... to see if we can... *catch* ourselves... identifying with something that feels... like this is myself. And so I catch myself identifying with that, solidifying that sense of self. But, it depends on some of the other things that we don't have on the table in front of us. But, if that person... finds themselves identifying and then finding that it... backfires on them somehow, then this won't work. But if you, if they find some simple instructions for starters, of just... gently... noticing... that they identify... with their bodies... with their name... with their education... whatever it is. In some way identifying with something, and then... sometimes that identification feels good. So then we get, we get kind of trapped. The fact that it feels good feels like we could identify more and it will get better. And... so *that* clearly doesn't work. But it's not a bad experience, experiment to run.

[00:22:17] If it's somebody that you can talk with and you're working with them, then they can have the experience of, you see actually the identification has very limited... ability to benefit you. And in order for... the benefit to be really *great*, you have to... recognize... the experience that you're having when you're engaged in the practice. That's my sense. When you're engaged in the mind training practices... I think this is true of any practice, in fact... it's imperative, in order to go very far... in order to go deeply into it... you have to be able to see what your experience is. And then to actually... you know, use it as the object of your meditation is *extremely* helpful.

[00:23:25] I say that because that's what I find to be helpful... if I'm having some kind of an issue. It could be, for example, somebody... says something to me which... causes me to feel... like I need to defend myself or I feel humiliated or there's some other thing. Then... the *trick* is... to put the awareness on that experience. Really, over and over... until the experience itself begins to soften and the awareness settles and then the experience and the awareness both kind of dissolve on their own. I have some experience that that's helpful. ... That's it.

Zopa [00:24:29] Yeah, I think... that could be very helpful, 'cause... as we're going through the text... his experience *looks* like... some kind of full out resistance and aversion to it. And then, I'm seeing from what you said... we're all going to too much analysis... instead of to... well, what's your experience of that resistance? And maybe just being able to sit. I'm assuming... instead of saying all the intellectual stuff, he might be saying, *I really don't like this text*. And I may be saying to him, just experience that.

LMC [00:25:27] That's a good starting point. I really don't like it.

Zopa [00:25:30] Yeah. Yeah. Okay. That's helpful. Yeah, good. That's helpful... with anything.

LMC [00:25:38] The nice thing about the mind training texts and the practices is that there's so many things that you can work with. There is so many tools... working with them, in almost any order at all, bears some fruit.

Student 6 [00:34:33] I am just wondering that the defending yourself, under certain circumstances, is considered as... self-grasping?

LMC [00:35:37] I think there's two pieces to it that maybe make it... a little richer. One is... it always seems to me like there is... a clear self-grasping in defending oneself. On the other hand... there *could* be... a time when... someone *appears* to be defending themselves, but

actually aren't. They are engaging in some kind of skillful method... for something. That's also possible. ... It's tricky! And it's the kind of thing that... we love to do. That is to say, you say something that... makes me feel bad. And then, I rationalize something in order to... reduce the sense of not feeling bad. But it's also a way of... self-aggrandizement. Like, I can rise above your little stinky comment. That sort of thing. And... so it's a dangerous move... to try and think that... that there is no self-grasping there. It's highly probable that there *is* self-grasping there.

[00:37:13] And I think... if you're *up* to it... I think a more *useful*... approach... is to embrace the gift of the insult, or whatever it is. That is to say, make *use* of the experience that it brings to you. So the actual insult or whatever it is that somebody does... is just kind of the beginning. It just starts the process, right? Then you say something and I find it offensive. It's in *that* moment... then something is beginning. And... in that beginning, there's always more than one way to go. I can go to the place of... nod my head, and it's like nobody really knows whether I even heard what you said or not. In other words, try to dodge. Try to ignore that whole thing.

[00:38:18] Or, I think the most useful is you *embrace* it... fully. Or I embrace it. You say something, I find it offensive. I look to see... so, why is that offensive? What makes that happen? Have I done something? Is there something that I've done, something that I'm thinking? Some habit that I have that... mixes with the comment? It may be that what you say... that there is no *intention* to be offensive. It isn't *always*! If I'm offended, it doesn't necessarily mean that you *intended* for that to happen. So it's not always easy... to parse those pieces out. But what's *always* helpful, I think is... to just fully embrace... the experience that comes by virtue of what was said.

Student 6 [00:39:19] So fully embracing the experience... that means like... you kind of pause and feel... that experience? I mean, you know, like sometimes maybe the... insult was really shocking. That, you know, like you kind of froze!

LMC [00:39:46] You have great eyes when you say that. [they both laugh] They're spinning in your head. [laughter] I have to be sure not to insult you, that's for sure.

Student 6 [00:40:05] Well it's good that I'm laughing, but anyway. So can you please explain... what to do? I mean, sorry... embrace. So... so what to do, exactly?

LMC [00:40:27] Yeah. Let's... take a shot at it. If we go back to the Dharma practice... one of the reasons why we engage in something like seven-point mind training... is because we *do* find ourselves... in trouble with other people, in trouble with ourselves, and we find it difficult to work with those situations. And so the seven-point mind training, for example, provides a number of *methods* by which to work with those things.

[00:41:11] And most of the things that the texts are referring to... are things that... we would rather avoid ordinarily. Ordinarily, I would rather you didn't insult me or make me feel insulted, even if you love me. I'd rather not have that. What the seven-point mind training does, and other mind training elements, is... they encourage us to... step right into it. In some way or another, the instruction varies, but... to not resist it. In other words, I feel bad by virtue of something that somebody said. My *first* impulse might be... to think badly of the person who said it. Wish them *harm*, even. So... we need to modify our impulse somehow, and that's what a lot of the mind training is about. Like, change the way that you work with these things.

LMC [00:42:21] And, if we work with those elements enough, we can get to the place... where it's kind of like... playing a skilled game, in a certain way. Where in the beginning, we have to go very slow or we drop the ball or we fall down or something, but in time it becomes kind of like a dance. Like, if you're a trained athlete, you can do things that you couldn't do before you were trained with your body. And then in the same way, we can't help ourself from... disliking the person who said something to us that makes us feel bad. But that's a *very* powerful thing. When somebody, by just opening their mouth and expelling some air... with a word can make us *feel* bad. We might be fascinated by that! How do I get to feel bad about something so small? And so the mind-training provides us with the methods to work with those things until we begin to get... at the other end of the scale... a place where... it *actually* is the challenge I've been looking for all day. ... Nobody has said anything particularly negative or done something that challenged me. And so... someone steps up and does it... then.... we may have a sense of like this, what I've been waiting all week for. ... Can you, can you imagine that? Is that possible... or is it totally in outer space?

Student 6 [00:44:17] I guess, if this does not *come* like every week or every other day... maybe, [laughs] you know, like... I'm just maybe exaggerating, but if it comes like a once in a while... maybe you know, in the meantime... you prepare. So that when it comes.... "Here we go!" or you know, that kind of feeling. When it comes... more than you can handle... sometimes, you go ... kkkkk [exasperated sound] ...like, you know. Yeah. Enough!

LMC [00:45:03] Yes. [an off-mic question can you prepare in advance?] Well you, you prepare by noticing where your own suffering arises from. So, when we engage in certain thought patterns and activities, we start to see the relationship between... those things that we do and then a sense of misery, a sense of unhappiness, a sense of confusion comes. And when we get used to someone... saying certain things or doing certain things, it's not so much a matter of getting *used* to it. What we really want is... the power of it. The *energy* behind it. So that we can use that energy. If I feel offended, there's a kind of energy in my body... in that moment. So what I would like to do is I would like to use that for something good. Like, for example, to see that my reaction, just to see the reaction... might be good. Seeing the reaction and having a sense that it... is helpful... to see it, we might then feel a sense of gratitude... to the person who just said that thing. That I wouldn't have had this opportunity if they hadn't said it. So you see where I'm going with it.

Student 6 [00:46:34] Yeah.

LMC [00:46:35] It's not magic... unfortunately. But it is... we study the texts. And one of the first things that we discover, first more conceptually, is that... often, our own suffering... we're causing it. We're responsible for it. We don't want to be responsible for it because we don't yet know what to do with it. So, I point to the person who I think is causing it... for me. But that's *only* like... helping right now. In the long run, that doesn't help. That person's gone or, you know, or I moved away because I didn't like them. Then my neighbor is worse than the one I moved away from and so on. And to see how it is... that we cause our own suffering, by virtue of... a myriad of things... helps us to get to the place where... when we *feel* miserable, we can, kind of quickly see where it's *actually* coming from.

[00:47:56] So you might say to me, for example, "You know, you don't look good in the clothes you're wearing." Just for example. And maybe I'm thinking to myself... I thought I looked pretty good! [laughing] And then I think, you know, I'm going to avoid this person. When they're around, I think I'll just leave. There's just too much... all and all. But most of us will say, really?

You do that because somebody said you don't look good? Who cares? But somebody cares. About it, everything, there's somebody who *cares* about it. Whether it's important to care or not. If you started thinking in these terms... let's make a *list* of the kinds of things that... feel to me... like somebody slapped my face, or punched me, somehow... or stuck a needle in me, somehow that really, really hurt. What are all the methods in my Dharma practice that I understand that I could use for that? And the truth is, if nobody does that, if nobody says you don't look good in those clothes or I don't like what you say or whatever it is, if *nobody* says that... how are you going to practice? How are you going to discover those things?

[00:49:27] *Unfortunately*, it's difficult to really see... the nature of our experience... if we always resisted and always find ways to avoid it. And there's, you know, we can fake it. I think that the teacher, Chögyam Trungpa, used to do this a lot. Like he could insult you... really deeply, but... if you knew him well enough, you'd also know that it was not an act of unkindness, it might be an act of love. But before we can see that it's an act of love, we have to learn to work with the situation that... is a little bit offensive.

[00:50:18] To tell a quick, entertaining story... of him at a retreat where a man stood up because Chögyam Trungpa was always late. Some people think I'm late. He comes *days* late! Days late, like regularly, days late. So we go on a retreat. A whole bunch of people. And we drive like two hundred miles to this place. And it's a three-day retreat. And he doesn't come until the third day. [laughs] And some people are just feeling bad. Other people are feeling like, yeah, this is what always happens. And other people are really angry. Really angry. In the morning we all get up, it's like six o'clock or maybe earlier... we all come together and there's one man stands up. Trungpa is sitting there. So one man stands up and he says, Rinpoche, he says, you know... you do not appreciate your students. You do not care about them. And he just has this long list of things... that he thinks should be different about the way that Trungpa's doing. Trungpa is sitting there... just kind of taking it. And, I don't recommend this approach, by the way... [laughter] there he is and taking it. He has a dorje in one hand, which he used to always hold and... just kind of... wind up the universe. And so the man finishes. And he's standing kind of in the back, the man who's talking. He finishes. Trungpa sits there for a little while, spinning the vajra a little bit. And then he says... "Most of us... when we were *quite* young, we learned..." this is an inspiration from you tonight... "... we learned... not to shit in the living room." [laughing] That's a direct quote. [more laughing] It was the kind of thing that when you heard it, you knew you'd never forget. And... I mean, in that moment, I felt really bad for this guy. Felt like ohhh, man, hope I never do that. Or I hope I never get *caught* doing it. And, you know... I am afraid to look at him directly... so I'm looking out of the corner of my eye at him. And what do I see? He's standing up, he bows... to Trungpa and sits down. And I'm thinking to myself, whoa, I just got something *really* big. I'm not sure what it is, but... it's just... yeah.

[00:53:20] So, my sense is that there was an element of spiritual maturity in that. So, some, you know, mixed with devotion and things. And as it turned out, he also accused Trungpa of being too late once in another situation and... he got a similar response. It was in a place where there were like 200 people. So he didn't say that, but he did say after the man was sitting, was standing up. And Trungpa says, after he's been told, like you don't care about your students and all, you're three hours late tonight to this whole thing. Trungpa says... "You know, I thought... that if I waited long enough... only the serious people would be left. But I was wrong." [laughing]

[00:54:23] Today in this, at this point, that is hilarious. At the time, I couldn't sink down in my seat far enough... I was identifying with his humiliation. It was very deeply humiliating and I felt humiliated. I hadn't even done anything. It just was so powerful. And when I turned slightly to

just kind of, you want to see like, what's this person doing now? Again, the *same* guy I knew at that time later... bowed, sat down. The first and second time he was there and he criticized Trungpa. And Trungpa kind of leveled him. And then he bowed and he sat down and he was there for the whole retreat. And I *did* have an opportunity to talk to him afterwards. And I was very impressed... that he *used* those circumstances as part of his path. That he did not actually think Trungpa was out of line, but that... it was helpful for him to get slammed... like that because he knew that it was part of his relationship with his teacher.

[00:55:48] So I think, actually, our work... is to work with very difficult situations like that. For him to stand up and say, you don't appreciate your students, you don't do all these things. It's terrible. You come late. It's like our time doesn't have any value whatsoever. And then when Trungpa levels him with a comment that he doesn't really know in advance what it's going to be, he's doing that in front of a hundred other people who are now thinking like, whoa, I would not ... sure glad I didn't get that. And actually, he's glad to have gotten that. I've never lost my fascination with that. It's like, wow. He goes on retreat. That's a real retreat. So there's something there that is not... he's working on something really difficult. So I think that in smaller ways... our mind-training practice is about, how do you work with difficult situations? The happy ones... we try to give up the attachment to them being permanent. But... the *really* negative ones... are difficult and therefore in some way... they are more interesting than the easy stuff.

Student 6 [00:57:13] So being slammed down is not too bad in terms of the Dharma practice? [laughs]

LMC [00:57:19] Oh, not too bad? Yeah, it's too good, maybe. [laughter] You know, we want to have all of this... kind of *tuned*... for us. That is to say, I would like to be challenged... just short of up to my limit. That's what I would like. But we can't predict that. And so... we need to work with difficult situations often until they become easy. And at the time they become easy, maybe you have some situation like this man with Trungpa and, and you feel... like, it's very difficult for a few moments and then it passes and you feel happy about it. And other people are around... and that sense of... that was good... somehow. I'm getting something there. Might actually... instill some inspiration in other people who are around, too. So in *that* way, we not only benefit others, but we benefit ourselves at the same time.

student 6 [00:58:36] Thank you.

LMC [00:58:45] Yes, it's time. So we'll dedicate. Thanks.

sangha [00:58:53] *dedicating the merit*