

Freedom Beyond Hope & Fear

(Based on a talk given by angel Kyodo Williams in 200 at Center for Urban Peace: New Dharma Community, Oakland, CA)

This is the book *Meditation in Action* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. It's essentially organized around the *Six Paramitas*, one of which is patience.

“Patience, *kshanti* in Sanskrit, is usually taken to mean forbearance and the calm endurance of pain and hardship, but in fact, it means rather more than that. It is forbearing in the sense of seeing the situation and seeing that it is right to forbear to develop patience. So *kshanti* has an aspect of intelligence, in contrast, one might say, to an animal loaded with baggage, which might still go on and on walking along the track until it just drops dead, that kind of patience is patience without wisdom, without clarity. Here we are referring to patience with clarity, and energy with the eye of understanding.

“Generally when we talk of patience we think of an individual person who is being patient, but it also has a great deal to do with communication. Patience can develop if there is discipline and if one can create the right situation. Then one does not merely forbear because it is painful and unpleasant and because one is just trying to get through it, but patience can develop easily with the aide of *virya*, or energy.

“Without energy one could not develop patience because there would be no strength to be patient, and this energy comes from creating the right situation, which is connected with awareness. Perhaps the word *awareness* is a little ambiguous, since it often connotes self-consciousness or just being aware of what you are doing, but in this case awareness is simply seeing the situation accurately. It does not particularly mean watching yourself speaking and acting, but rather seeing the situation as a whole, like an aerial view of a landscape which reveals the layout of the town and so on. So patience is related to discipline, which in turn is connected with awareness.”

I especially like this part about patience **not** being just forbearance through painful situations and hardship so that you can just get through it. It's patience that has clarity. So last night when I exhorted you all to “stay the course,” rather than just saying, “hold still” or “don't move” or “there's just five minutes left; deal with it,” the energy shifted a little bit. I gave some instructions and support to offer clarity to the situation so that you could have, not just forbearing, a kind of living through it, which is what we do with a **lot** of our life, but rather so that you could develop true *kshanti*, patience.

This kind of patience is absolutely necessary and it is what is being particularly cultivated here. Our continued frustration with things not being the way we like them to be comes from an inability to see things clearly and accurately.

We filter information; we filter the situation through our own wants, our desires, and maybe even through things that we perceive as needs. Because we're doing that we're disabled, we're blinded from the capacity to see clearly, to have awareness of the situation. And as Trungpa Rinpoche was referring to, awareness is not just peering at your little self, trying to figure out what you're doing, but it's also having a spacious relationship to the entire situation all while keeping to your own business.

This is not something that we do often because we're usually in a place of either moving towards or moving away or we're in the third place that many people don't actually acknowledge, a kind of mindless indifference—we're numb. So we're either grasping or avoiding, or we're just indifferent. We're indifferent but not in the way that acknowledges the impersonal nature of all things. Right? So whatever's happening is not all about you, and thus you can have an impersonal relationship with life, an impersonal relationship with life that comes from the freedom of obsession with yourself.

This kind of indifference instead comes from a numbness, a dulling out, a checking out. So there isn't really movement. We don't observe energetically, or otherwise, a moving towards or even a moving away, rather we're just kind of there. That's a trick of many of us, to use this indifference as a way of muddling through things, forbearing hardship and pain without wisdom, without the clarity that comes from awareness. When we do that we know we're doing it, and we have a nice little person on our shoulder that says, It doesn't matter. And we might spend a little bit of time quibbling with that person by saying, Maybe I should be paying attention. And that nice little person on our shoulder says, Na, don't. It's none of your business; it's too hard. You will have to deal with things that you don't want to deal with. It'll open up something that is better left untouched, and so on and so forth. Usually all of those things suggest you will have to take some responsibility.

As I say that, some of you might catch the conflict between this and one of the other things I say which is, mind your business. And this is the sweet spot, for a lot of spiritual teachings, to figure out the Middle Way between teachings such as you must take responsibility and mind your business. I think it's of particular interest to people who are looking at the world through a lens of changing or transforming themselves for society. We have a difficult time discerning how to do both.

How do you take responsibility and yet, mind your business? How do you take action and exhibit non-doing? How do you be a *bodhisattva* that hears all the cries in the world and has the intention, the vow, to be of service to all beings and yet as the Iching would say, "keep to the small," which is to tend to your business right here?

This back and forth conflict, I think, is a huge question for people. And what often happens is they lean hard in one direction or the other. So that people end up gazing at their navels for so long that they forget any relationship to humanity. They either end up hanging out in the higher echelons of consciousness such that they don't want to get sullied by the messiness of life or they end up burning out through so much doing and doing and doing that they're not able to tend to really anything at all. A whole lot of stuff gets done, but nothing gets accomplished, and sometimes we find ourselves recognizing that place.

As I said, the third tricky place is where people hang out in indifference. One of the most difficult things about this culture and this country is that most people are hanging out in indifference. They either turning inward—even if it's so far inward that they get lost in their own navels—nor are they doing anything that recognizes and acknowledges the truth of the debilitating culture that we are creating, fostering, and continuing to manifest and that kind of indifference is particularly dangerous.

So this patience business has a lot to do with discovering where the sweet spot is between taking action and allowing things to be as they are. One of the reasons that we're generally not able to tell the difference is because we cannot see clearly. We're busy seeing things through our own filter, through our own lens. We think, This is what needs to be done; this is what needs to happen, and it isn't clear. It isn't clean.

We're pretty good at convincing ourselves that we do know what's needed. We tell ourselves, No, yeah. I knew that's what was needed, so I just did it. But without a practice of developing the capacity to **see**, we just don't know that to be true. And we can see that manifest as a large part of our own circles and communities that are out there blazing away, doing good things in the world but heeded and twisted in their separation from the other.

So their actions are not coming up out of a place of simply recognizing what needs to be done in the best way, but rather in opposition to something else, a kind of self-righteous: It oughtn't be that way and I'm gonna fix it. And certainly, from my own experience, more times than not, that desire, that drive to fix things, is a misdirected need to address one's own areas of discord. And the more heeded, the more disconnected, the more off something is in us—often, conversely in direct proportion to the disconnection, the more *vigorous* our efforts are to fix something *out there*.

In our current social muck, it's very hard to grasp the value of stepping back. Very hard. There's so much to be done. There is so much need. There is so much out of balance, so many wrongs that need to be righted. So many misappropriated resources that need to be put back into balance. So for some of us it can be very hard to contemplate the question of needing to step back

and address one's own issues. And surely that goes against the *bodhisattva* vow, no? You're there to save all beings not just yourself.

In fact, this is the distinction of the two major schools (some would say three) of the Buddha Dharma, one being the way of the elders in which the ideal is self-liberation, and is called the Great Vehicle, the *Mahayana*. In the *Mahayana* tradition the ideal is for the Awakening Warrior, the *bodhisattva*. *Vajryana* is a particular thread in the *Mahayana* tradition. So the *Mahayana* ideal, the *bodhisattva* ideal, speaks to us readily so we should be available to be of service. And not only should we **not** have concern about liberating ourselves, but we should hold off our own liberation until **all others**—not half of them—**all others** are free.

There's a real intention there. It's not: I'm going to take ten with me. It's like being on the raft and the raft is going down and you're not saying, Hey, I'm going to take this raft and I'm a good rower. I'm not talking about a weak person—I'm a good rower. And so I'm going to take a *whole bunch* of people with me! In fact, I'm the only person that knows how to steer this raft, I think. So, I'm going to take a whole bunch of folks with me in the raft to cross to where? The other shore.

When you get there you're going to toss the raft on over the side, and you're going to toss the folks in after it, and you're going to stay on the ship until everyone is off. Do I mean all the people? Yes, and the mice, the roaches, the rats—all sentient beings. That might mean rocks too. Trees! **All sentient beings on the raft**. And there you are hanging out up to your waist in it—not nice clean water, but mucky, mucky, messy stuff. Diseased, soiled, dirty, smelly, just an all out kind of funky situation. So that's the idea.

What is this business about minding your business? Well, you won't know even the difference between yourself and others, unless you develop the capacity to see clearly. You won't know which raft this person should go on and which raft that person should go on. You'll end up putting somebody in that raft who's going to sink it. This raft over here's got a hole, and it's going down real quick, but the passengers are your friends so you want them to go first.

You won't know that you shouldn't put the rats in that other raft because they're going to chew through it before that raft can get anywhere. In fact, you won't even recognize the toilet is just leaking and the damn raft is not going down after all. You will have tossed everybody onto this raft to go someplace that they didn't need to go at all because you got your own drawers in a bunch and decided this is what's needed.

That's amusing. It's pretty much true. It's pretty much what's happening. The toilet is overflowing and we think the whole world is going down.

And there we are putting all of our energy in saving folks because we can't tell the difference. Why? Because we're actually worried about our own little feet getting dirty, and we're so caught up in that that we can't tell it's just a little toilet leak, a nasty toilet leak, but it's still a toilet leak.

We don't have perspective on what's happening, because we haven't developed the capacity to see clearly. And we haven't developed the patience, the patience to create the situation that let's us see clearly. And because we have worn ourselves out minding other folks business, we have no energy with which to sustain the patience that will enable us to create the situation so that we *can* see clearly.

Following this thread: Mind *your* business! Mind *your* business!

Will some things fall? Yes. I always say that this is not a painless journey, but it's the pain that leads to freedom versus the pain that leads to more suffering. So when some things slip through your fingers because you took the time to take care, to work through your stuff before going out there and fixing the whole world with your stuff, you will be wounded, you'll feel hurt, disappointed, upset that something slipped through. You might even have to let some folks go...and some situations go.

You know how it is. When things are real to you they're just really, really real. And it seems as though because you built this up you need this. You may think, Of all the things I gotta let go, I'm not going to let go of this one thing. And it's probably the thing that's keeping you tethered from here and now, because here and now is what? Is freedom, is freedom.

So you'll experience pain with having to let some things go and, this is not to be cavalier, you've got relationships, you've got people in your lives, you have things you have investment in—I'm not blind to any of that. I'm saying this out of my own direct experience. This is not out of a book—that you can't see clearly until you let everything go.

You will spend so much unnecessary time convincing yourself that you can see **clearly**—out of *this* eye. You will spend so much unnecessary time turning around in circles believing that you can work this situation out while you're being hobbled by your blindness. This is what I meant when I said folks want freedom; they just don't want to give anything up for it.

We don't want to give up sleep.

We don't want to give up lots of food, using lots of resources.

We don't want to give up the little bits of attention that we can snatch here and there.

...And it's the little part of you that *needs* to hold onto **that**, to the way other folks see you, to the way people think about you, that is keeping you anchored, tethered, stuck in some moment other than this one **here**. So there will be pain, there will be loss, there will certainly be difficulty and challenges, but there's only **one** Way. You must see clearly in order to be available to anyone or anything. And you cannot do that when you are mired in your own stuff.

When you are filtering the whole world through the scenes of *me*, when you are painting *I* on everything, you just can't see. Most of this seems relatively harmless. I mean, what's the big deal, right? What's the big deal if we take this distraction or that distraction? It's just for a minute. I mean, what's the problem?

And I turn that question back to each of you. Tell me, what's the problem? If you're not realizing—and remember realizing is present tense and an active, dynamic word—it's constant, constant, constant—not *have realized*, realizing. It's present, it's now, and it's ongoing. If you're not realizing your freedom, you tell me, what's the problem.

Speaker One: It's one more minute of not being free.

As you make your choices in your life, in these minutes here, ask yourself how many minutes of freedom you have to give up.

On a mundane level, just on a mundane level, ask someone who is physically incarcerated, how many minutes of their freedom they'd give up? That's mundane freedom, small scale: this body, this little physical world, the absolute freedom.

How much more exponentially significant is that? Because it's not just freedom for this lifetime; it's freedom for all lifetimes. And it is freedom on behalf of all beings, truly. So even if you are particularly persnickety and willing to give up just four or five minutes of freedom, just four or five, remember that those aren't just yours either. If we go back to that raft, shit could sink because you chose to give up that time.

On behalf of all beings you have a charge. And if you're not going to take up that charge, don't bother saying the vows, really. It's okay. Nobody's going to point at you and go na-na-na-na-na! You're not saying the *Bodhisattva Vows* if you don't truly take up the charge. But when you take it up, you take on the question itself. If you don't intend to do that, if you don't intend to bring your attention to that then don't bother, it's okay. The Heart Sutra's really good to chant, *Sho Sai Myo* very, very helpful. We've even got some new ones in there; the Warrior Spirit's my favorite. But the *Bodhisattva Vows* are serious business. The *Bodhisattva Way* is serious business. The Awakened Way is serious business.

Life or death?

Don't take it too seriously.