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Self-Discovery through Maitri practice

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After my first year of study in the U.S., I went to attend a one-month advanced intensive Buddhist studies program. I felt frustrated, disconnected and dejected most of the time during the program, although most of the other people there might not have been able to discern my true feelings, which were hidden behind a calm and quiet facade. However, when I began a Maitri practice to learn how to see this journey in a respectful, open-minded and curious manner, all the difficulties were transformed into an interesting and meaningful self-discovery process.

The first challenge for me was the intellectual learning, which I often perceived as if I were living in a fuzzy, cloudy world. The students in the program came from different countries and different states of the U.S. They had very different accents and speeds of speaking in English. An especially challenging class was the Mind-Only class taught by a knowledgeable German scholar. The materials of this class originated from the debates of different Tibetan Buddhist schools, and the English terms we were taught were very strange to me. Whenever students asked questions, the instructor always had answers ready. Sometimes he had a long dialogue or debate with the student who asked the question. I got lost most of the time when I was trying to understand the questions and answers. Since I couldn't determine if those dialogues were on important topics or not, the anxiety of missing something was being generated all the time. Sometimes I was sapped of my optimism, and I slumped into a hopeless feeling, thinking, "Oh! I will never learn English and Mind - Only philosophy well at all." Sometimes I tended to ascribe the blame to the instructor's or some students' verbal expression, holding on to a cold resentment while I was in a continual state of uncertainty and confusion.

There was a sense of uptightness because I was fixated on a particu-



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慈悲修行中的 自我發現

當我坐在教室，在一群以英語為母語的人環繞中，能力不足的自卑感油然而生。那就有如一場永無止盡的追逐過程。

完成了在美國第一年的學習後，我參加了為期一個月的密集進階佛學課程。雖然，那裡絕大部分的學員可能無法察覺到我隱藏在沈著、安靜表相下的真實感受。然而，事實上，多半上課的時間裡，我都覺得挫折、孤立與沮喪。但是當我開始慈悲的修鍊，學習以一種尊重、開放和好奇的態度觀察這段旅程，所有的困難都轉化成有趣且深具意義的自我發現歷程。

對我而言，第一個挑戰是智識的學習，在這方面，我常感覺彷彿住在一個模糊且烏雲密佈的世界中。課程裡的學員們來自不同的國家及全美各地，他們有著非常不同的口音，說英文的速度也不同。尤其有一門極富挑戰性的課程，那是由博學的德國學者所教授的「唯識論」。這門課的教材始於不同西藏佛教學派的論辯，而其所使用的英語術語對我來說非常陌生。課堂上不管學生問什麼，教授總是對答如流，有時他會和問問題的學生進行冗長的對話或辯論。當我試著去瞭解這些問題和解答時，多半迷失其中。由於我無法判斷那些對話是否是重要的議題，所以總是不斷憂心錯過某些內容。有時我原有的樂觀性格被削落，跌入了一種絕望的深淵，心裡想著：「噢，我怎樣也不可能將英語與唯識論學好了！」有時我傾向於把失落感歸咎於教師，或是一些學生們的口語表達。當我持續處於不確定和迷惑的狀態時，心中會對他們懷著一種冷漠的忿恨。

因為自己被固定在某種特定的邏輯上——深覺如果我無法清楚地

lar logic: I felt I couldn't learn if I couldn't understand it all clearly. This was combined with a need to be right and perfect. In trying too hard to figure all out, the mind became fuzzy and tied itself into knots. I spent more time confronting the "solid unknown" than dividing the whole into small parts to improve my understanding. Therefore, there was no room for relaxing and learning step by step.

There was a sense of incapacity when I sat in the classroom among a group of native speakers. It was like an endless chasing process. The harder I tried to catch up, the more behind and exhausted I felt. People's rapid speaking became the justification for the reason that I couldn't learn well. When people discussed quickly, I felt it as if there was an external threat to my understanding, when actually the threat came from my inner fear and insecurity. From this fear, the distorted energy of anger is fabricated to blame someone else or to be hard on myself. By denying instead of accepting my weakness, I built a wall between other people and myself, locking myself in a closed and isolated room.

The strong feeling of inadequacy described above actually comes from a sense of self-importance. When I was in my country, it seemed to be easy to get what I wanted. Unconsciously, there was an illusory superior sense which was based on instinctive comparison I made between myself and others: I believed that my speed in understanding and responding to situation was not supposed to be slower than someone else's. The symptoms of this proud mind are experienced at opposite extremes—being superior or being inferior. Being in another country, the fear and insecurity are thus generated from losing the ground to achieve excellence in learning, or more precisely speaking, to maintain a "superior self" .

Then, what is the superior self? I have learned Buddha's non-self doctrine used for a long time and have thought that I understood it. However, this experience woke me up and showed me how I was fooled and trapped by grasping onto an illusory self, which made things more complicated than necessary. When I started to relax myself and simply connect with my fundamental being, I also compassionately embraced the sensation of anger, weakness and fear. A deep feeling of contentment and appreciation arose. Many different difficulties might pop up in my life again. But no harm will be done, as long as I composedly connect with the intrinsic limitless space within.

瞭解課程全部的內容，就無法學會——使我有了一種緊繃的感覺。這份緊繃感和一種準確、完美的需求息息相關。由於過度用力於釐清所有的內容，頭腦反而變得混沌不清，而自個兒糾結在一起。我白花了許多時間對抗這「頑固的未知」，而不是把整體化分成幾個小部分，以增進瞭解。因此失去了放鬆及安步當車的學習空間。

當我坐在教室，在一群以英語為母語的人環繞中，能力不足的自卑感油然而生。那就有如一場永無止盡的追逐過程。我愈努力試著跟上他人，反而愈覺得落後他人且追得精疲力竭。學員講話的快速，成了我之所以無法學好的理由。當學員們快速地討論時，我感覺在理解上受到外在的威脅，然而實際上，這威脅來自我內心的懼怕和不安全感。從這份恐懼，一種被扭曲的憤怒能量滋生，向外怪罪他人或對內苛責自己。在排拒而非接受自己的弱點下，我於是在其他學員和自己之間築起了一道牆，將自己封鎖在隔離與孤立的窄小空間裡。

前文所描述的能力不足感，實際上來自於自大的心理作用。當我身居母國時，我似乎總可以輕易得到我想要的。不知不覺中，有著一種虛妄的優越感，基於本能反應地比較自己與他人：我相信自己的理解力和對情境的回應不會落後他人。驕傲心理的徵狀以優越感或自卑感的極端面貌呈現。身處異國，因失去了可以成就最佳學習的堡壘，更準確地說：無法維持這份「優越的我」而產生恐懼和不安全感。

那麼，什麼是「優越的我」呢？我已學習佛陀教導的無我教義好長一段時間，且自認為已了解這項義理。然而，這份學習歷程敲醒了我，並向我示現：自己是如何緊握著那「虛幻的我」而被愚弄，並受困其中，把事情搞得比實際的需要複雜許多。當我開始自我放鬆及單純地連結內在基本的存在，我也開始慈悲地擁抱所有憤怒，脆弱和恐懼的感受。一種深深的知足和感恩心油然而生。我知道不同的困境或許還會在生命中再度浮現，但只要我得以放鬆地連結這份內在本然的無限空間，將不會有任何傷害得以發生了。☸