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*omniscience and interdependence, importance of not knowing, aspirational bodhicitta, **Carrying Practice**: enhance Bodhicitta in small simple ways, simple yet profound mahayana teachings, the need to write down our questions, view of uninterrupted continuum, **Carrying Practice**: with unbounded view (supermarket teaching), **Carrying Practice**: reading to encourage 3 wisdoms*

**LMC** [00:03:25] Well, thank you for coming back. What we have now is an open conversation about anything. The practices that we did this morning, or whatever outstanding things there that you might like to discuss, we can do. Or general questions about the Dharma, whatever is on your mind. And we'll try ... if we can't tell the truth we'll at least make it interesting. [laughter] Can see already, it's interesting.

**Student 1** [00:04:29] A small question. I've been using a different dedication at home and it says, "By this virtue may I obtain omniscience." And I wonder what that means? [laughter].

**LMC** [00:04:42] Knowing what other people are thinking, maybe. Nah, I'm just kidding. We already tried that. It didn't work. [laughter] Yeah, we tend to use that word in a kind of literal way. And by literal, even just the kind of vernacular, like what is meant by that. And I'm quite sure within the context of the Dharma, that's not accurate. I'm not sure that it's an accurate way of viewing it, even within the context of other spiritual traditions.

[00:05:30] It may be a little bit childish, certainly, but omniscience is a *really big deal* from another perspective. It's one of the qualities that comes with full enlightenment. Which doesn't mean that you know everything that everybody is thinking and what's going on. But any situation that you encounter, the skillful, most helpful, beneficial thing to do is immediately apparent. Without conceptual overlay, it's like just immediately apparent. The example, which is in a certain way, not a very good example, but in one sense, it's perfect. It's like you're walking with your child and your child runs out in the street in front of a car. You don't think. You immediately know exactly what needs to be done and you do it. And so if you can elaborate that in the direction of all circumstances, then you have a closer sense of what omniscience means. And of course, it doesn't just mean... that I don't think I just react, right. It's not that either. But it's actually driven by skillful means and wisdom we say... *always*. And that's *not* how most of our decisions are made, of course, which is why we pray for that omniscience... on behalf of all beings.

**Student 2** [00:07:21] Would that omniscience be also... Thragu Rinpoche once described what the 'endless knot' represented. And he said that it was the mind that acts without hesitation, that knows deeply and acts without hesitation. And that kind of reminded me when you're talking about that going out into the street.

**LMC** [00:07:41] I think that's fair. In one sense it's also not fair. Because there's an aspect of it which embodies a really thorough understanding of interdependence that also needs to come from an *actual* authentic understanding that is not just a clear understanding of interdependence. Which probably, all of us in this room have... a fairly clear understanding of interdependence. Things affect each other. And the result is further effects that affect and affect and affect and so on. And generally speaking, we see a small fraction of those. And yet we have a very clear conceptual understanding that this is actually how the world works. If I scream at you today, you won't speak to me tomorrow.

[00:08:42] You know, it's actually pretty simple on the surface. And you can elaborate it and it gets more complicated and more complicated. And pretty soon it's too complicated to function from the perspective of... intention. Because our intention and our skillful means and our wisdom are too small. So we can't actually function clearly from that. But we would... if we actually had the view and the understanding was deep enough. And we can see how that would work, but we can't quite implement it. Kind of like you watch the kid next door get on the bicycle and ride it every day. But you've never gotten on a bicycle, so... you can't quite make it happen.

**Student 2** [00:09:26] I can conceptually get it, but it's not experiential. Not directly having that experience.

**LMC** [00:09:31] Right. And if we *stick* to the experiential, that can also fall into the trap of... I just stick to my attachments and aversions. However much they flare up, I act on them. That definitely is not it. [laughter] We all have got that one down. And this falls into that really broad category, which the great Suzuki Roshi talked about... and many others too, that in order to know certain things, you must be absent of knowing. You have to be in the 'not knowing' place in order to know certain things. Because the knowing takes the place of actual understanding. So that is often a trick with these things.

**Student 3** [00:10:45] How do we help other sentient beings before we obtain omniscience?

**LMC** [00:10:52] It's a great question because we all love to hear talk about the ultimate. The ultimate's fantastic. You know, if I was Donald Trump, that's what I'd say. Spectacular! And it actually is all of those things, so we're drawn to it. But... in the meantime, before we have the ability to mentally and physically function in a way which is really helpful for other beings, you might say that almost everything we do is for the maturing of our understanding. Everything we do is for that maturing!

[00:12:14] Another way to look at it, which is actually is not entirely wrong, but it's one lens through which you could view it. And that is to say, that almost everything you do is for you. ... For *your* maturing, for *your* understanding. Because it's through that deepening understanding that it becomes possible to help others. Not through helping *them* get that, but ourselves to understand it. So... partly that's about looking to see what we think our obstacles are, our obscurations. For example, and I'm sure we can dredge up at least one hundred examples of this, but we all have opinions about the way that we function in the world that we wish was better, somehow. You know, maybe we tend to be kind of a hothead. Like if we're not understood immediately, we blame the other person, do something, have some reaction and all. And we might do that under the guise of skillful means even. And think like, this is skillful! You know, teach them a lesson. And I've never seen that work, but it's tried often enough. [laughter]

[00:13:33] If you look at the practices in the mahayana, you can see that it's all about developing a level of understanding... that we currently do not have. And so we look at, for example, the Aspiration of Bodhicitta, which we say a little prayer with, and sometimes quite a *long* prayers that one can recite also. In fact, you could take the entire mahayana tradition and say it is *all* about aspiration bodhicitta. There *isn't* anything else. *That's* what it is! And that's all about... relating to other sentient beings... in a way which is positive, in a way which is aspirationally positive. Like I wish that I could free *all* sentient beings from suffering. That's a starting point. Not bad. In fact, you might say, you can't do anything else without that. Everything else *starts* from that.

[00:14:42] I make the aspiration. Then, probably, I have to back up and recognize I actually can't do that... yet. So now I know I need to know, like where do I start from? Well one thing that's, I think, important to understand, because we often want to shortcut our path. We never want to shortcut the hot fudge sundae. We want a second one. Even though it's going to make us sick. So in this case, we could say... you really don't want to shortcut the path of ultimate bodhicitta and relative bodhicitta. Because they should be an unmitigated joy. So, if you can experience them as unbounded joy, then you wouldn't rush to get through it. You would just take it as... if this is all I ever did from now until eternity, it would be great. And then you can enjoy it. Let go of the outcomes.

**Student 2** [00:15:58] And enjoy both equally? I tend to get in the trap and think, oh that bodhicitta's the ordinary stuff we experience every day. And then I want to get through it, but I see there's way more involved. I get caught in the trap of just wanting to get through, or somehow transcend, relative bodhicitta. Because that seems to be, that's the samsaric everyday stuff. The way we see things and experience things. And the ultimate... they can't go without one another. But yet I'm drawn to the ultimate only haven't got a clue... as to what that is, I'm just trusting that somehow, you know, they are there. Working together somehow or... yeah.

**LMC** [00:17:37] There are still, in this world, many really great beings, great practitioners, and quite a few lineages of Buddhist practice. And some of this stuff you can understand conceptually. But... the conceptual alone is not enough. And sometimes you can't get the direct understanding. You can only get the conceptual. And it's helpful to even just get small pieces of these things. And if you have the chance... to actually even listen to someone who embodies those teachings, it's worth listening to them. Like, going there and listening. Because something different happens in that situation. If that person says you need to abandon some wish that there'll be some outcome that works for you somehow. Because that wish is actually the antidote to joy. It's the *antidote* to joy, not the thing that *causes* it. And so the joy needs to come from just the overriding intention and wish to be able to really benefit others without any sense of attachment or aversion to outcomes and all. Just to be able to hold that wish for a long time.

[00:19:18] So I can remember for a long time thinking, I don't believe that. Early on I thought, of course, they clearly don't know as much as I do. [laughter] And so, I would have this sense of like, I don't know why I shouldn't have this, because it makes sense to *me* that that's the way the thing would work. And I imagine that actually they were hiding a piece of it because they thought that everybody wasn't up to it. But I figured I *was* up to it. This kind of cycle just went on for years and years until at some point... something happens. And then you see, oh, I see... how this works.

[00:20:06] And the best thing is when it happens to you *personally*. When you disliked somebody or some group of people and at some point you actually came to have a big soft spot for that person or that group of people. And you recognize the connection between the practice and that soft spot. Then you realize that you've got that connection because of that person who said... this is what it is. So then everything kind of connects up. And then you feel like, I think I'm ready for something that I wasn't there for. Which, of course, is never the end. It's always just the next disappointment. [laughter] But the disappointment itself, then in time becomes... the sign. I'm disappointed again. The last time I was disappointed... *this* happened. So this can't be bad. I'm actually disappointed because what I thought was true... for *me*... is actually not the

case. So there's something else behind it. So that kind of continuous investigation, I think, is a big piece of the payoff. Insights come regularly. We should rejoice in them.

[00:21:40] The ability to genuinely help others is very difficult. But you can help others in small ways. Like you see somebody, that you've never met before and they look like they're trying to find their way. I mean, ordinary. Like, where is this place I'm trying to find? You know, it's like the supermarket or the shoe store or whatever it is. Then you make an effort to touch that person. Just to be kind and to say something nice. And sometimes it's worthwhile, just during the day, walking around and holding the view... with the aspiration that every person that I connect with, I will do *something* to make their day happy, pleasant. Nothing more. Like no *big* thing, just that little thing. But if you do that ten times every day, you start to get a sense... oh, see how this is. And I can actually enhance the bodhicitta a little bit and try it *that* way. And a little by little, through simple things, you discover the entire path.

[00:22:52] So I think actually the most profound thing we have are the simple mahayana teachings. The simple teachings about helping others. It's not just a good citizen thing. It actually *is* the path. And those little actions that we take and that we learn from, in some kind of magical way *are* the entire path. And they gradually mature and morph and change. And we encounter teachings. And we have this insight like, oh, I see what I'm doing here. I could do this too. It's not... work. It's like enhancing your own joy.

[00:23:42] We used to say when we'd go and see Bokar Rinpoche in India, people would come with *big* problems, and the great majority of the time they're going to see him and they couldn't remember why they'd even gone. [laughter] Everything would just feel like... I'm not even sure what to ask. So we used to say, you need to write down your question before you go, because you will not remember. 'Nah, I'll remember.' Later they'd say... I couldn't remember. And I think it's because... there's something that is incalculable... that happens in our interrelationships that we ordinarily do *not* acknowledge or recognize or overtly experience. And then sometimes we meet someone who actually 'knows' and we have this sense, in their presence. And things change right then in that moment. And we can't remember why we're there. Because we've actually like kind of gone into some space that we hadn't been in before. And so what made sense before doesn't make sense. I think actually it is good, though, to write your questions down. It's much more satisfying.

**Student 2** [00:24:59] You know, I had to for Thrangu Rinpoche because it was a burning question. And I had never had an interview with him... and only had one. And so it was like, I have to ask this.

**LMC** [00:25:50] Up at Cloud Mountain, the meditation center up towards Seattle, I used to do interviews there and there was a sign of a sign on the wall that I always loved. It was that the path is long, so don't forget to pack a lunch. [laughter] At first I laughed at that, and then I started looking and thinking like, what does that mean? Why did they put that there? And little by little, I had no idea... that the meaning that *I* applied to that was ever meant by anybody. But it seemed like it was great advice... great advice. Like there were all of these pieces that were there and you really needed to have some sense of *all* of them and how they fit together. But you didn't actually need to know *precisely* how that worked. Just some sense how it was. That was what I got out of it anyway. It wasn't really about food, but it could have been. You know, it was one of those very clever things where wherever you are, this is going to have some meaning. You'll find something in this.

**Student 4** [00:27:22] I'm going to ask a simple question, I hope that there is no such thing as simplicity.

**LMC** [00:27:28] Oh, you're backing away already.

**Student 4** [00:27:33] So... my meditation's great when my body is feeling okay. And then if I get in some weird position or in pain, I lose concentration and you know, my thoughts are all over the place. And I thought, well, I wasn't going to ask this question because the answer seems really simple and that I thought, well, someone else may be asking it. So what the heck.

**LMC** [00:28:00] What's the answer? [laughter]

**Student 4** [00:28:01] Well, I just thought you fold it into the meditation. Everything we do in our lives is part of the path. So experience the pain, try to adjust my seat, you know, so I *can* go back to meditation if I can. If not, well... oh well, it's part of life. And you just try to... be there with it, you know? I don't know. Is there anything else I could do?

**LMC** [00:28:32] Sure. I don't think that we have the months that it would take to say what else you could do. ... We go back to the beginning, a question around how we actually benefit others and all. We *really do* have to be able to benefit ourselves. That doesn't, in and of itself, benefit others. But it definitely seems to be a prerequisite. Like if we don't *feel* like we're getting anywhere with our practice... to then decide, well, I think I'll stop benefiting myself and benefit others with this. Like, just where I am, that may not be particularly helpful. First thing I would do is lie down. The back hurts? Lie down. Just do what you got to do. And you can't say that to everybody and you can't take that instruction from everybody.

[00:29:47] But I would say first and foremost, you need to be able to engage in some practice where you *feel* like... I'm doing it. It's working. I'm doing it. It's working. And it doesn't have to be working in the sense of... all sentient beings in the world, they're getting better. I can see it. It's not that! It's just this sense of... maybe you feel, in a state of angst. And things are very difficult and you're not sure what to do. And it's feeling heavier and kind of crazy. And then suddenly you decide, well, I think I'll just stop. And you actually manage to stop because you've stopped a thousand times in your meditation. And it does stop and you relax and exhale and feel like... that's better. ... Just that much. Like, oh, there it is. You know that that works. It doesn't *fix* the original cause of the angst, but you step outside of that place. You don't have to be in that spot at that time.

[00:31:07] So, there is a way in which we often criticize the substitution of self-help programs for actual meditation. ... But I think there is a problem there sometimes, a lot of the time. But from a *personal* standpoint, I think we still have to find the place where... we can step into that practice and feel like, okay, this is not enlightenment. But this is an improvement. So that we can then start to at least *toy* with the idea... what transcends this? Not just what improves it. What's the aspirin? I'd like to actually be free of my brain tumor and aspirin isn't going to do it. But still, I'll take an aspirin.

[00:32:05] So in this case, it's more like the full Monty, if you will, of the confusion which started before this life. Which is also very interesting beautiful, is it not? What if you imagine that your entire mental state and physical makeup is the result of all the things that went before this life. What happens in your life? How do you view your experience if you hold that view?

**Student 5** [00:32:43] Carefully, because it will impact your next life.

**LMC** [00:32:47] Okay, yeah, sure.

**Student 6** [00:32:51] Show a little kindness for yourself.

**LMC** [00:32:57] Show a little kindness for yourself, *a lot* of kindness.

**Student 7** [00:33:01] It's an uninterrupted continuum... from before now, now and forward.

**LMC** [00:33:06] Exactly. Yeah, well, that is the standard view. The standard view within virtually all of the Buddhist traditions, but certainly in the mahayana, certainly in the vajrayana and the tantra. It's an uninterrupted continuum. Which is really the meaning of tantra. An uninterrupted thread of experience and things unfolding. And so there's no beginning. You might say there's a middle, except you couldn't measure where that would be. And no end to it. This, for most Westerners, is the single most important and difficult thing to get. Because culturally, we *totally* don't buy that.

[00:33:53] My life begins when I was somewhere between conceived and born, right. And it ends when I die and that's it! And there may be other lives, but that's another life. Not connected to this one. If I got away with murder in this life, I'm free. But from the uninterrupted continuum perspective, you don't get away with anything. You don't lose things. You don't gain things like that. The interconnectedness continues to unfold.

**Student 2** [00:34:25] Is that a helpful contemplation?

**LMC** [00:34:29] That depends on what you've been contemplating and what you have to contemplate. And helpful is kind of a relative thing.

**Student 2** [00:34:39] I mean, is it useful to rest the mind on. I mean, to contemplate?

**LMC** [00:34:45] I remember having a conversation with a teacher who I had not known for a long time, but he was quite well known and a little bit on the kind of magical, crazy side. And I was walking with him one day in San Francisco in Union Square. And we were talking about things. And he was challenging me. And I was pretty ...new. And I was kind of awestruck by this guy who was about 10 years older than me. And he was challenging me in a lot of different ways. One of them was, I said, I have a real problem with the unbounded view, which is this uninterrupted continuum. I just have trouble. I don't know what to *do* with that. So I don't really believe it. So therefore, I don't use it. I don't look at it. I don't know that I *should* believe it. I don't know... what is it, really? And his answer to that... determined, I almost could say, the rest of my life.

[00:36:02] He said, you have, what is common in the West, a misunderstanding of this. Because as Westerners, we're always looking for the truth. We're always looking for what is real. We rarely ask what real means. Because we have an assumption about what real is. And he said, that's not what the unbounded view is about. It's not about the *truth*. And then he used the example, which I have used over and over because it was so apropos. It was a sunny day in San Francisco, so a rare day in that sense. And he said, if the sun is out, really bright, you put sunglasses on. You don't ask, are these glasses the truth? No. They shade your eyes. They're functional. You put them on. They have a function. So to ask, "Is the unbounded view the truth?"

is the wrong question. The right question is what do I get or lose by virtue of holding that view?  
... Everything changed.

[00:37:22] So I said, so what would you tell me to do in order to work with that thing? He said, which many people here have heard me say, go into a retail store like a supermarket once a day and just walk around in there. And imagine that every person in this store who's walking around has been your mother in the past. Just imagine that. Imagine until it feels like it *could be* that truth. It's not that you're supposed to *believe* that it's the truth. This is an issue of how does that function for you? And as you walk around, he says you should have a conversation with one person in that store every day. But you have that conversation through the lens of... I'm talking to my mother. And then he kind of laughed about it. But I remember him saying, and of course, you're not telling anybody. You know something they don't know.

[00:38:31] And so you just have that conversation through that lens. Ordinary! Don't try and be clever. Just like you would if your mother was really there. You wouldn't try and be clever. You would just have a conversation. So just have a conversation like that. Knowing that this person has been your mother. And just one, just one... every day. Well, from day one, it was like day and night! It was just an amazing experience, which was totally not expected. It only really took me one day and I was looking forward to the next day. Going in and finding somebody. Kind of like when you were a kid, you saw your mother go into a store and you're trying to find her all around. You're going around and around trying to find her. That's what I was doing. And I find like, who could I do this with? And actually, it was really easy, really simple. 'Do you know where the soap is? I'm looking for the soap. You know where it is?' 'Oh, I don't work here.' 'I just thought you look like somebody who probably uses soap.' [laughter]

**Student 2** [00:39:56] Bet that's fun to do. Because you walk up and just say, gee, that's a great looking sweater. Or, how are you doing today?

**LMC** [00:40:01] Exactly, exactly. I had some of the most emotional encounters of my life in *that* supermarket, which I went in the same place over and over. It was really extraordinary. I mean, within a week, I realized, oh, this is the whole path. I see the whole thing is just unfolding here in this thing. I looked forward to it. And I totally couldn't even remember why it was that I wanted the truth. ... I just wanted the insight. I just wanted to *see*. I just wanted to *feel*, you know, that thing.

[00:40:46] I think that every authentic practice of the Dharma contains every element of the Dharma. Every great teacher says that. You practice shamatha, the entire path to enlightenment is contained. ... We get discouraged. We practice a day or two and we can't see what the benefit was. And so we move on to something else that we can't do. [laughter] When actually I think the trick is, can you find *something* that works for *you*? Like the supermarket gambit was a great one. What works for you? What can you actually use? And then, when you hear Dharma teachings, don't change your understanding and relationship to that thing that you're working with that does so well. Just keep enhancing and enriching it all the time, little by little.

[00:41:41] And give up the idea that you're going to accomplish anything by the end of this life. You know, it's like... it doesn't matter. It's accomplished. The moment you start, it's done. ... It's joyful. So why wouldn't you do it? Joy will tell you this is good enough. You know, it's good. Every day I leave somebody with more smiles and more feeling good about themselves. So why wouldn't I just keep doing that? If that's all I did in my whole life, that would be a worthwhile life. And due to the truth of interdependence... then I have to have some confidence... that that will

also be beneficial... beyond this life. Whatever brought me here, this will carry me to the next place. Good enough. Like, what else would you want? The other things come anyway. But they come better without the expectation. They don't know what to expect!

[00:42:52] It's odd... I mean, I think we all could say, I don't know what... if I think that I'm going to expect to attain enlightenment, I also have to expect that I would know what that looked like. But actually, I have no idea what that would look like. People used to say to me, because I was studying with Kalu Rinpoche, 'Oh, you're so fortunate. You get to study with an enlightened master.' And I always used to think, like... what are you talking about? How would I know? How would *he* even know? So I don't know. He would never say that. So why would I say that about him?

**Student 7** [00:43:40] But isn't it true that you've said... that it depends on your view of your teacher? If you carry that they're enlightened, then you will get the blessings of an enlightened teacher.

**LMC** [00:44:00] He said that, actually. He did say, if you hold that your teacher is enlightened, you get the blessings of enlightenment. And then there were like three or four stages down to just an ordinary person. And the statement then was, if you hold your teacher is an ordinary person, then you get the blessings of an ordinary person. But I pondered that, too. And I think it's good to ponder those things. Not just to swallow them without some contemplation at some point. Like, what the hell does that mean, exactly? I guess you could say, well, you know, you wear dark glasses, you get less macular degeneration. So... also true, if you hold your teacher to be... a crook and a thug, then you have a certain relationship with that person. If you hold a view that whatever they do is for your benefit, then all sorts of things that you might have felt were not so good for you, now can be viewed and experienced as good for you. So I don't think it's quite as simple as just one or the other thing. The exploration is a worthy endeavor. What do I get for this? And I think that it's good for us to start. And actually, I think it's actually good to *continue* also.

[00:45:28] In a certain sense, I count the meeting of the teacher in Union Square in San Francisco as the beginning of the path. Even though it was five years earlier at least, that I met Kalu Rinpoche. In one sense, I would say *that* was the beginning of the path. But the teaching that I actually embraced and used came five years later. So would I have met that person, if I hadn't met Kalu Rinpoche? Almost for sure, not. Almost for sure not.

[00:46:03] So... I guess what I think is that it's good to shoot high, but the work that we need to do is actually right at ground level. So when we sit down and we practice shamatha and we look at our experience, we are actually just looking at our experience without any judgment. Just gazing at it, like it was some movie playing... is really quite an extraordinary experience. *Essence* of simplicity. And yet we all know it's difficult. We get distracted. We get excited. We get depressed. We get high. We get tired. We wake up. All these things go on during that time. But normally we don't watch them. Normally we don't see them. We're just carried along the current of our experience like a, you know, like a bottle on the waves. ... Suzuki Roshi once said, in the moment that you see your own experience, clearly, you are the Buddha. ...

**Student 7** [00:47:30] Is that up to us? So if you see your own experience clearly, does that mean you've witnessed your own enlightenment? Because if you're the Buddha... I didn't think you could.



**LMC** [00:47:50] Well, I have Suzuki Roshi's phone number here. [laughter erupts] He used to say stuff like that. I don't know. I suspect his students also had lots of questions that he never answered. Or maybe it's more true to say he answered all of them, but no one heard them.

**Student 8** [00:48:28] Even if you could... be aware enough to recognize that you were witnessing your own enlightenment, the whole thing... would be fine. Because how many more people than you can reach. There wouldn't be any impediment.

**LMC** [00:48:55] Why do you say that? If you witnessed your own enlightenment?

**Student 8** [00:48:58] Yeah, Why not? Well, I don't think it would be out of place to do such a thing.

**LMC** [00:49:06] There is a little bit of a 'why not' to that. It is embodied primarily, in the largest obstacle that we all have to attain enlightenment, which is a very strong sense of personal identity. And so that personal identity, as Chogyam Trungpa once said, the greatest obstacle in the West is not that we witness our own enlightenment, but that we *want* to witness it. So the wanting to witness it... pretty much assures that we *will* witness something that we think is enlightenment. And immediately, at that point, we've derailed ourselves from where we were. That always rang kind of true. He also added to that, I think, like you *can't* witness your own enlightenment. There's no drum roll and celebration at the end. And yet we kind of manufacture that internally, that there must be something like that.

[00:50:36] It's always suspicious when we think that we've accomplished something. And of course, we do that... a lot. So the trick has to become... it's like the woman in the supermarket, you have to think... not only is that person someone who was your mother, that person is today your guru. So they're appearing in the guise of your mother. So you have two things. You have some level of devotion to have there. And also, maybe, a little suspicion about our own motivation, what it is that we're doing... so that we can be ready, should she turn around and throw us a half open box of soap, you know. Normally we'd be pissed off if that happened. I mean, 'What, are you crazy?' Appropriate response might be, 'No, but you are'. So these are tricky things. Actually the practice itself is not tricky. It's very straightforward. But we're tricky... because of our needs and our ideas about ourselves. Personal identification is a very big deal, of course. ... Does that make sense? Not quite?

**Student 9** [00:52:23] I guess what I'm hearing is that maybe it's not possible to witness your own enlightenment. Who would be there to witness it?

**LMC** [00:52:33] Exactly. That's exactly right. We're even pretty tricky around that. We can actually have the experience of no personal identity. Which then becomes our personal identity. [laughter] It is not... so conceptually clear as it might appear. We have to *catch* ourselves. And depending upon who we are, go through the disappointments of realizing what we just did. The personal aggrandizement, given that we didn't see what we just did... yet. And then the humor at it, when we catch ourselves enough times. I always think that it's always a turning point. After a long time and being depressed about not getting what we want, we suddenly see the irony in it all and we find ourselves laughing. Sometimes that happens to in the middle of the night when we wake up. And we just had an experience and some of the pieces fall together. That can happen any time. And then of course, we want to think that was really a big deal. And it's okay that things are a big deal. The issue really isn't the big deal and the big experience. The issue is

like instantaneous identification. Even to the extent of... we can pat ourselves on the back for *not* identifying with it, which is just coming in the back door. [laughter]

**Student 10** [00:56:49] Couple of Sundays ago, I remember you saying something about how the act of contemplation is very important. But that most of us don't do it very well. And so I realized in that moment... I don't do it well. And I was wondering if you had some help. You demonstrate it, I feel like in... often when you speak, you will share how you've contemplated certain aspects. But I wonder if you have some advice for how to do it.

**LMC** [00:57:42] I don't know if you'll find this helpful, but I think that it *could* be helpful to always remember the three wisdoms. Remember those? Here you say, mmmm. [laughter] The three wisdoms are the *context* within which contemplation needs to occur. So it works like this. The first thing is, we hear an instruction. This is how interdependence works. Something like that. Or this is, how we think of an unbounded, continuous stream of experience. In other words, a *conceptual* teaching on something. That's the first wisdom. So we have to get the conceptual understanding to begin with. And one could say, well I'm not so sure you need that. But that's the nature of the teaching on the Three Wisdoms. You start with conceptual understanding.

[00:58:58] Once you *have* the conceptual understanding, for example, the understanding of impermanence. Right. Easy, right? You don't need a college education. You don't need any education at all, really, to understand impermanence. But you may not understand it as *deep* as you could. But still, most people, if I said let's make a list of what is permanent. ... What item would go there? We can't find anything, right. So impermanence is kind of a universal truth, if you will. Things are impermanent. Not just because they're poorly made. They're *inherently* impermanent. And the most challenging one for us is... *us*. Once we get that down, we then contemplate it. And I'll just add on here the next step, which is meditation. When the contemplation is done, the meditation occurs.

[01:00:11] Now, the contemplation can include almost anything. And it can be creative, like, well, I understand impermanence. ... The entire galaxy is impermanent. Everything is impermanent, like just... then you start to contemplate this thing. Challenging it, testing it, is it really true? Everything is impermanent? I mean, sheeesh, it appears to be that all the galaxies in the universe, they've been here a long time. Even at some point, Albert Einstein said they're permanent. Albert Einstein! For some period of time... thought that the Milky Way itself was it! All there was. And there was a period of time when he thought that was it. So *anyone* could be fooled by that.

[01:01:11] So we contemplate the impermanence of those things. And a little bit maybe, we wonder, like, why is it so difficult? Like, what has been so difficult? Why is it so easy now to see all of that? Or is it so easy? What am I missing? What's impermanent that I can't quite see somehow. So that also is partially a conceptual looking at things, but not just. It's almost like you could hold it in your hand and kind of like look at it and see what it feels and looks like. And so it depends on what the teaching is. But that contemplation, looking at it, is the second thing.

[01:01:57] The third thing is the meditation. Now, the problem here is, is that we actually, for the most part, I really want to say, *we never*, but I don't think that's quite right, we never get trained in school to contemplate. We get trained in how to calculate certainty. That we get all the time. We get trained in meditation by being told to shut up. Be quiet. Sit in the corner, whatever it is. But we never get this kind of chain of... what can you understand conceptually that is very clear. Can you challenge that? You know, like they used to do with gold. They'd cut it up. They'd see if

it can be cut. They'd melt it. They do all these things. Yeah, it looks like it's gold. So can we do that with something like... challenge it and work it and manipulate it and see? And then when we feel like we've just tested and tested and tested, then we let go of it completely. Let go of the contemplation and slide into that meditation.

[01:03:12] And when you move into the meditation, *this* is the tricky part. You've just brought all of your conceptual equipment to bear. Investigating, contemplating... this thing. And now will you have to do is *completely* let go of that and just rest in the experience. If you can do *that*... for want of a better expression I will say... it will pop. It will just... happen. And because you've got all of this energy into it, you will be present... for some period of time. Even if it's only five seconds. But that five seconds you will recognize as... *that's* the meditation.

[01:04:04] So do it with shamatha, for example. Watch a couple of breaths go by and then, you know, that's the instruction. Watch a few breaths, for example, then rest the mind... in that, for a little bit. Then watch another couple of breaths, few breaths, three or four breaths, then rest mind a little bit. You go back and forth like that. It's one very simple instruction for shamatha. And then maybe we add the thing in of, you know, every so often in an hour's period take three breaks. So... very clear. Easy to understand.

[01:04:45] But why do I do it? Why do I take the breaks? What happens when I take the break? Do I get something or lose something? ... Is losing something bad? ... What if I lost myself? What if I lost that 'thing' I identify as *me*? What if I lost that? Would I'd be crazy? Or enlightened, sane? Where would I be? Do I want to go there? Nobody's telling me where '*where*' is or how to get out when I get there. [laughter].

**Student 10** [01:05:28] So is asking those questions... that's contemplating?

**LMC** [01:05:33] That's contemplation. Asking the questions. Question. Question. Question. You can go back. But I would recommend, because we really have a dearth of training and contemplation, as a culture. We just can't do it. We're great at the original contemplative study thing. We're fantastic at it. But when it comes to the contemplation, not so good. We don't know where we are. People will say, like I'm totally confused. I don't know what to do with it. What's the *It*. They don't even know what the '*it*' is. So of course, we are not good at it. We think we're looking for the truth. We're taking all the pieces apart to see. Here's the bones. Here's the feathers. Here's the meat, the this and that. There's no truth in there. There is no truth in there. So what does contemplation mean?

Student 10 [01:08:1] When do you let go of the contemplation?

**LMC** [01:08:23] There's no formula, really. We want to end up in the meditation place. And the contemplation can be fodder for that. Can feed that really nicely. One of the interesting things about this is... meditation, we usually think of as... even if you're sitting in a room full of people and everybody's meditating, it's still a personal experience. Right? But you can, from the contemplative standpoint, you can practice that in twosies, threesies, groups, small groups. But the content of the exploration between two or three or four people has to be conducted in a certain way in order to get the contemplative side to it. Like... what are we really good at? Opinions. Who's no good at an opinion? We're all experts at opinions. And what do we feel about opinions? I'm right. [laughter] Somebody else *might* be right, but definitely I'm right. And that's how we feel. We identify with those opinions. This is my opinion. I'm sticking with it. It's a joke, but it's also the height of identification.

[01:09:58] And so what we want to do is abandon the identification because it's clearly a speed bump in the path. We don't want it. On the other hand, functionally... and nobody ever said the Buddha was dysfunctional. He meditated, became dysfunctional, and we had to institutionalize him. [laughter] I never heard that story. And I suspect... it would be everywhere if it was true.

[01:10:28] So... *inquiry* is the heart of contemplation. Endless inquiry. Looking at every corner of something. So you can do that with other people. It's very interesting. If you try it with someone else and they understand that the point *is...* to investigate, just investigate. You can add into it... we will have one opinion and investigation. We'll have another opinion and investigation. And every time you investigate, you understand the opinion is only fodder for the investigation. It has no value in and of itself. It's almost like you had a list of things to investigate. So when there's an opinion that just goes on the list. Have to investigate this thing. And it can help communication with other people to practice that same thing. It's amazing how many people will *not* want to do that. I mean, even about things that are not important, people do not like to do that. It's not natural. Well, actually, I don't want to say that. I think it is natural, but we have a cultural natural. Which, you know, preempts any other natural. So contemplation is questioning and investigation and it definitely can be done with other people. Sure, why not.

[01:11:57] But the real thing is, of course, now the three wisdoms: study, contemplate, investigate. And study can be listening too. Which is mostly how originally those three wisdoms were. So today we say study, like you can read a book and study. But there didn't used to be books... so people would listen and then contemplate. And then the third wisdom was meditate. Having heard the instruction, having contemplated and investigated the instruction. Does it make sense to me? Do I understand what it is? Do I need to ask some questions of somebody else? All those things. And then you literally, in that moment, there's a moment in which you need to like, let go of the contemplation... 100 percent. Kind of like you finished your cup of coffee. You don't put half the cup down, you put the whole thing down and you just let the mind settle into meditation. And that contemplation and the study and all of that become a kind of a hard rock foundation for the meditation.

**Student 11** [01:13:09] Could you think of it as like adding yeast to the study? Is contemplation like... I think about bread baking. And you knead it in, it's a process, right, and this whole thing....

**LMC** [01:13:24] Yes, if that's helpful. ... I think you've got to experiment with this. But if you can understand these three levels, it should be possible to experiment with it. Pick a book up that describes something, like a book on the Dharma, for example, the seven-point mind training. Just pick it up and start to read it. Read a paragraph. ... Read a paragraph. This we do often with books. It's actually a great, great practice. You want to know what to do with your time? You like to read? Read *different*. Pick a book up that you really like, like some of the examples on meditation and mind training. And of course, there's a lot of it in there. You can pick it up and read one little section, which is probably 100 words at most. And then you just contemplate it. Read it. Then put the book down and just *think* about it. Just think about it. Does that make sense? Do I understand that? What I'm doing here, if I decided I wanted to do that, would I know how to do it? And then you finish the contemplation, then just put it down. And just sit quietly. And let your experience arise. Don't force it.

[01:15:02] Don't go into contemplation. Things aren't happening fast enough. I better contemplate, you know. That's going back to pre-first wisdom. We've seeded the whole thing

very carefully. Then you just shut up and sit still. And keep your mind's eye open and see what happens. Let the contemplation... seed the meditation. Do not go back to the conceptual until you're done with that process. And then, of course, you may do the exact same thing again. You'll never get the same result twice. But you'll make discoveries. Right?

***sangha*** [01:19:59] *dedicating the merit*