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*ism's and awakened mind, setting & holding intention, **Carrying Practice**: really short sessions in daily life (reasons and methods), placing and holding, simple methods that evolve into profound, working with relative & ultimate, story of crying bodhisattva, about taking refuge*

LMC [00:03:48] Whatever is on your mind, this could be your last chance.

Student 1 [00:04:08] This morning, when you reminded us about *all* sentient beings... and bringing them, as we're taking refuge and raising bodhicitta... and the way you introduced it this morning... almost answered my question that I had from yesterday when you introduced that. Yesterday, I had the feeling of... isn't it a bit presumptuous or arrogant to think that 'this' is for everybody? And when you described it this morning and you said, "by the pure vision and intention" and "drawn like bees to honey" that eased my mind a great deal. But then I live in a relative world... with only some glimpses of pure vision. And so part of me there's still a niggle, which is, is it okay to think all these sentient beings? Yes, and we're all taking refuge in these three sources. But there's many paths up the same mountain. And is it okay to think of them as in... whatever way they're doing it... in our universal, pure nature, in the variety of teachings, in the variety of role models and companions on the path... is it okay to kind of open it up to other people's methods... and their intentions?

LMC [00:06:26] Can you give an example?

Student 1 [00:06:31] Okay. I live in a mixed marriage. I study and I come here and practice. And I look at my husband and he supports me, but he doesn't want any part of *Buddhist* practice. But he is very supportive of me. But I study and practice and I look at him and I just go... he just lives it! With equanimity, with interdependence, with impermanence. But he's taking a different path. And that's one example. There's many examples.

LMC [00:07:10] So what's the example there?

Student 1 [00:07:13] That he's not doing the 'Buddhist' practice. Because I think I get hung up on the word buddhahood or buddha nature. It's like that doesn't sound very... that sounds *exclusive*. And so I like it just awakened nature, pure nature.

LMC [00:07:38] What's the difference?

Student 1 [00:07:40] I don't think there is. I don't think there is.

LMC [00:07:43] Then it's solved. [laughter]

Student 1 [00:07:47] Simple. Thank you.

LMC [00:07:56] Sometimes we joke... because there are some, kind of scriptural authority, that would say that the Buddha was not a Buddhist. Because when we're talking about 'isms'... at the time of the Buddha, there was no Buddh-ism. But there *was* awakened mind. So these things... I think that we were particularly sensitive about in the West, from abuse of all kinds, and I think it's natural, it's okay to be suspicious. In fact, I think that's part of a contemplative piece of the three wisdoms, is a little bit of suspicion. But the suspicion runs both ways. Like we need to

be suspicious of ourselves and also suspicious of the isms. Chogyam Trungpa used to talk about how committed he was to... and then he would say this like very kind of distinctly tabooed... I'm not so sure about the *ism* piece. But the awakened mind, he said, I feel totally committed to it. So I think amongst great beings, there's no problem here. If there's a problem here, you're not talking about a great being. You're talking about just some ordinary person. And we want to set our standard higher than a cultural norm.

[00:09:52] The questions that we have about the practice, about the philosophical underpinnings of the practices and so on, they should be always open to challenge. Like not just today, but forever. You have to try it. You have to test it. See, so that you can say, you know, it's not really working for me, exactly. Is there something I could do so that would work for me also? I don't see arrogance in magnetizing beings... such that they are drawn to a potential promise of freedom from their suffering. There *is* a little bit of arrogance in it from the side of... 'when they get here, I will fix it.' That's a little problem. Because after you haven't fixed it, then you have the disappointment.

[00:10:54] But those things are all just a piece of the path. Like if you already have those things in place, you don't need to practice. But we don't have it in place. So we struggle. We trip and fall down and skin our knees and get up and keep moving. Like Suzuki Roshi used to say, when you're walking down the sidewalk and you trip and fall down, he said, it's not appropriate to curse at the sidewalk. He said, in fact, the sidewalk is what allows you to get back up. [laughter] It's funny and at the same time, you think about it, that's *exactly* how every time we fall down, the very thing that caused us to fall down is the means by which we get back up. ... No arrogance. You can be joyful. No arrogance in joyfulness. ... I made you happy. You owe me. That's a problem.

Student 1 [00:12:11] Because I'd owe you big time.

LMC [00:12:11] You bet! [laughter]

Student 2 [00:12:35] It's a stupid question, but...

LMC [00:12:39] I've never heard a stupid question, so I'm hoping that you fulfill your promise. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:12:50] It's about the same setting the intention at the beginning of the practice. Bringing all sentient beings into the practice. And then your instructions were to hold this intention throughout the practice. I have a hard time holding anything in my mind. And I can see sandwiching, you know, the dedication at the end and kind of bringing it that way. But I have a mind like a sieve and things just like go through. So... I don't know how to hold something like that during the practice.

LMC [00:13:38] Maybe you are holding something, but maybe it's not the thing that you want it to be or think it should be. Like if your mind is busy and you are easily distracted in the middle of that practice, then... there's a kind of stability there. It's just not the stability you want.

Student 2 [00:14:01] Well, no, I'm not I'm not complaining. I think my stability is decent. I'm not talking about *not* having stability. I'm talking about the practice of riding the breath. You ride the breath. You watch the thoughts come and go. You feel the body sensations. You feel the spaciousness. And then you're supposed to also *hold* something like the intention. So is it just

part of the picture, you're holding the intention while you're doing all that? Or do you just take the essence of that experience?

LMC [00:14:39] You can do that, too. It's okay. It's okay. If you go climb a mountain, your experience climbing the mountain at the base when you begin, is different than in the middle, which is different than in the end. Right. In the end, you might, for example, harbor regrets that you even began the journey. [laughter] But in the beginning it's blissful and it's a beautiful mountain. You want to climb the mountain. So I think here we have the intention. And I think mostly what we do is we establish the intention. Which is actually, for most of us, not so difficult. Just *establish* the intention. But like you say, holding it is different. And maybe then following the breath is also a little bit iffy.

[00:15:41] But let us also not forget one really big important element. In the moment that you see the distraction, you're not distracted. We're distracted when we don't see it. By definition, a distraction is something that we didn't decide to do. Can I call a distraction if I decide to think about something other than the meditation? I *decided* to think about it. So it's not exactly a distraction. Might have been an unskillful move to go and think about something else, but it's not a distraction. So the distraction occurs because the context is... that we intend to keep our mind on the breath. Follow the breath. And then we find ourselves thinking about something else. *That* is a distraction. In one sense... no fault. That's also the nature of distraction, is that there's no fault there. So your mind just drifted off. What are you going to do? It is what it is. But when we decide, *wow*, that's an amazing distraction. In fact, I think I could patent that idea. You know, I think virtually anyone who's meditated for more than three or four hours has thought about patenting their ideas. [laughter] Some have even succeeded on that score.

[00:17:22] Things do come up that don't come up in other circumstances. And usually they come up when we don't expect them and don't even want them. That sort of seems like the nature of the beast... is that things happen that you didn't think you wanted. And then sometimes you look and, *whoa*, I am brilliant. This is really something. I mean, the Tibetans joke about this, too. I think every culture jokes about the distractions in meditations. That we *intend* to have a very stable practice. The mind is going to rest on this. And we *know* what it's like when it rests on it. And our intention is that it's just going to rest there and everything is going to be okay and then it's not. And then all sorts of things can happen.

[00:18:17] There's no harm done by virtue of an *actual* distraction. The harm is done at the point where we decide, I'm leaving the meditation behind and I'm going to engage in this distraction. Because if I just work on this for 15 minutes, I have a real idea! And of course, we've now seeded, in both meanings of that word, we have ceded the stable meditation, that is to say, given up. And secondly, we've changed what we were doing to something else. And we're still calling it meditation. So there is the problem. That's not going to work for us.

[00:19:06] So I think part of the part of the solution to this is... short meditations. So I can say from my own experience, that's what worked more than anything. Like *really* short meditations. I thought short meditation meant, because we used to do like an hour or two, so I thought a short meditation means like half an hour. So it was a little bit of a shock to hear from somebody who I felt, and still do think, was authoritative in this thing. And he said 30 seconds. 30 seconds. Start the meditation, 30 seconds. It's almost like... if you are distracted, someone will shoot me. You know, I just have this like... it *must* be. And at first there's *no* relaxation. And it's almost like you just got to, like, tighten down on it. But after you do it a few times, you realize 30 seconds? I can relax a little. If you can relax in 30 seconds, you can relax in one minute. If you can do one

minute, you can relax in two minutes. And so you just kind of like inch it out, kind of like the tide of awareness is beginning to flow in. And the secret was... short sessions.

[00:20:24] I remember one teacher who came from England said ten seconds is even better. Yeah, like just... this is not a time game. It's an issue of... *stability*. So not very many people can have a stable meditation for an hour. That's like just extraordinary. But we get the expectation, well that's what it should be. So the way we do it is you got to tough it out and get through it. And then, of course, you're just exhausted and you don't want to sit down again. So I thought the ten second one was just right because I could do it *any* time. At least nine times out of ten, I could go ten seconds... relaxed, not a single distraction. And when there were distractions, they were in the last second, it was almost like I just couldn't allow myself to have success. [laughter] So it was just... it would come in.

[00:21:32] But all of that is just kind of... funny stuff. That's our mind going and we see it. So it was a big insight for me to be told, if you see the distraction, you are not distracted. You have to be really clear about that. *Oh!* One second left and I was distracted! No, at the moment that you saw it, that's not a distraction. That seeing... your own experience, that's not a distraction. Distractions you're not *intending* to do. It's like if you intend in the middle of a meditation, well, this is a great idea. I'm going to follow *that* now for the rest of the time. That's also *not* a distraction. You just intentionally left the meditation behind. So that... cut, you know, that clear difference between a distraction and just leaving the meditation behind on *purpose* is totally different. And the nice thing about 10 seconds is almost anyone can do it. Except [someone's] raising her hand, so... can't really trust this.

Student 3 [00:22:48] Has to do with method like... so if you want to use this as a formal practice, you'd go for refuge and then just start out with short 30 second sessions and work up to... like, wait a few minutes and do another one?

LMC [00:23:07] Yeah.

Student 3 [00:23:07] And then, you know, when you feel like you've done enough, then you just dedicate the merit?

LMC [00:25:52] It's the principle of the thing. If you get why you would do those things, it's good enough, then you can manage it. It's not like a minute or 10 seconds or whatever is a formula that's going to work for everybody. But you get the principle. A short session. And if 10 seconds is too long, do five seconds, just whatever it takes. Like manage that thing. Like you would, you know, it's a hot day. So how long do you stay in the sun before you go inside? You don't have a set time. It's really hot today and tomorrow is cool. So you modify things. If the mind rests easily for ten seconds, then move it 20 seconds or something else and see how that goes. But... the mind is a habit machine. So when you get it in the range that works for you, the habit for that will be easy.

[00:26:57] And distraction is largely a habit. It's not actually some inherent defect in the meditator or in the system somehow. Once we have the habit of *not* staying on it, then that's what happens. It's not a defect in *ourself* somehow or in the mind. It's just habit. The habit is not a defect. The habit is what makes it possible for us to live. I have the habit of breathing, you know. If I lost that habit somehow, I'd die. So I think that you can rely on the mind to do its job. When it finds a way to be stable for three seconds, it'll very quickly get that three seconds. And then you'll find it's very difficult sometimes to go another three seconds. But you

already know at that point... it works. All I've got to do is *do* it and I'll have six seconds instead of three and then ten and so on.

Student 3 [00:28:04] Is it better to like go to the next, you know, not wait very long, like maybe ten seconds or something before you reengage again? Or... I get to see the pitfall of the then second meditation and a ten-minute break. [laughter erupts]

LMC [00:28:24] Of course. Yeah. You've been doing that, haven't you. [laughter]

Student 3 [00:28:37] Yeah, but I mean, the long break ... like 30 seconds or something?

LMC [00:28:45] Well, just do it. I remember... for years I had this thing with myself. When I get in the car, I sit for one minute... in the car. And then I start the car and drive away. And actually, I didn't do it so well. Because the one minute, it wasn't scheduled for meditation. So I would just sit there and kind of mostly daydream for a minute. And then start the car and drive somewhere. Not very useful. May as well save the time, you know. But when I worked that out and got some of the instruction we're talking about *now*, then I would go and I would sit for 30 seconds, ten seconds, one minute, whatever I *felt* like. And I would just do my very best. You know, one minute. It was helpful for me to have a little timer, that I could just push. Because otherwise I'm going to like, is my minute over, is my minute over. You can't do it. And I, I really needed to have that thing like... fixed. So that when I started... and I *would* know when it was over. And that way I could just consistently hold it there.

[00:30:07] The holding that there is also a problem. Holding it there is kind of like your thumb in the dike. You know it's going to collapse on you at some point. When you pull your thumb out, then the whole wall of water is going to fall down. So that would happen sometimes. I would try and I could hold it. But actually, that's the fake method. To try and hold your mind to be stable, you inherently are unstable by virtue of that effort. So you really need to relax. Which is why I think three or five seconds comes in. Relax. By the time you've relaxed, it's over. You did it. [laughs]

[00:30:56] We don't give ourselves the credit for that thing. When I did that originally, I felt like, Whoa! I see how this works. I don't have to try at all. You have to do one thing. And that's called placing the mind. You must have a starting point and a method for starting. And the method here is, okay, I set the timer. Ten seconds. Now I have to *place* the mind. Many teachers will say placing the mind is the single most important thing that you're going to do in the meditation session. You need to have a starting point. So here you have something. [holds up an object] You need to place it... specifically, not just anywhere on the page, but right next to a word 'instructions'. So you put that there. You put your mind on the object, your breath. So you decide. Many teachers will say it should be on the in breath. Others will say it should be on the out breath. You know, that is just to give an answer to a question. [laughter] It doesn't have any inherent meaning whatsoever. Just decide. I'm going to place my mind by placing it on the breath. The breath is coming in. I just kind of, like, set my mind there on the breath and it kind of rides in. The moment that I put my mind on the breath, when I place it there, that's the beginning of the meditation. It's not three seconds from then. It's not ten. It's right... *that's* the beginning. And then you just follow it. It just rides in... and it rides out. Ding. Done.

[00:32:49] Then you have to do a report card. Did I do it? Was I distracted? You have to be *really* honest in both directions. Some people fall on the side of... I didn't do it because by definition I *can't* do it. So they fall into that trap. I must *not* have done it. They're so shocked that

they did it. They can't quite buy it. So you just do it. Three seconds, five seconds. Ten seconds. I think actually, shorter than you can do, is better. Because then you get to the place of like three seconds. Doesn't seem like any big achievement, but I did *do* three seconds. So, I'm going to drive to the market. And I'm going to stop and I'm going to get my little timer out and I'm going to sit there for a moment. [very softly] One... two... three... ding. And you realize, like, I did it. ... You can't sell that short. It's like learning to ski or ride a bicycle or any physical skill that you've got... you learn in pieces. The advantage of this is when you fall off, you have no skinned knees. So you can do it over and over and over again. And it will go from three seconds to five to six to ten. And you will get, if you keep at it on a regular basis, you will get 30 seconds, one minute and then you'll realize, why didn't I do this before? This is not a big deal.

[00:34:34] But it is a *big* deal in the sense of developing that skill, which is so important. Also it's empowering. It's empowering. You have a really bad day... physically, emotionally, some kind... you can go and you can gaze out the window and place your awareness on the mind and just see the things kind of spinning in there. May be *very* difficult to watch those things for a minute, but you can watch them for three seconds for sure. ... Without twisting and turning and manipulating and doing what just... it just becomes the object. So I think there's magic in that approach, really. ... Okay? [making a microphone with hands] So you will report back.

Student 4 [00:35:32] I think where I get confused is, like you say, you put your mind on that object. And what *is* the mind? Like my eyes are seeing that. And I read somewhere, somebody said, put 60 percent of your attention on that, but you're still aware of where you are. So, you know... where does the attention come from? And the second part of my question is, can you do that in nature, just like say I'm going to watch that duck in the water. And just really focus on that thing and nothing else for ten seconds?

LMC [00:36:12] Sure. I mean, there's nothing particularly profound about the breath except for the fact that it keeps you alive. But anything could work. The duck in the water or whatever it is. The downside of the duck, let's look at that for a moment. The downside of the duck is we think... oooh, a duck! [laughter] But if you're aware of that, now you have one of a myriad of experiments to run. What's the difference? The duck is there. I turn my back to the duck. I watch my breath come and go, three or four breaths. Right. Then you turn around, watch the duck and see, like, what's the difference? So these are the kind of real world things that we engage in and that become distractions and elements of stability and all. Why wouldn't you put your mind on a duck floating on the water or sitting? Nothing wrong with that. You could watch monkeys too, you know. They might be a little too entertaining... probably.

Student 5 [00:37:56] In thinking about whatever shows up and attaching a name to it. What if you can't really name what is appearing at all. It doesn't have a conceptual ...

LMC [00:38:24] Experience you mean? You don't need to name it. Can you give an example?

Student 5 [00:38:35] Well, I hesitate to call it if there's light.

LMC [00:38:41] Light? That's your experience... is light? Does the light have a source, or is it... if you turn the lights out, is it still there.

Student 5 [00:39:04] Oh, yeah. ... I was trying to figure out did I dream that up? Did I make that happen... whatever that is? I never asked anybody before.

LMC [00:39:30] Well, I don't know. Yeah, I suppose one could say we make most things up. So we know *that*. We're magicians, is the truth. We create magic shows... continually. And whether they're light or dark or whatever. To call them a magic show is to give them some value that is not inherently there. We assign value to all sorts of things and then assign more value to things. So I don't think there's any issue with that. But can you put your awareness on that and let the awareness ride on that experience? Because in the meditation, in the shamatha meditation, the calm abiding practice, we want to be able to rest the mind *naturally*. Not actually always hold it... as if it was some small, wild animal that we needed to hang on to or it would get away.

[00:40:38] If it needs to get away, we want it to get away. We want to be present with it getting away. Present with it staying. Present with its happiness, its unhappiness. Like all the elements, we just want to be *present* with it, not because that's a way to fix it, but because the presence itself is key. We normally are not aware of our own feelings. Where we're manufacturing them and using the manufactured feeling to create more things, more feelings, more relationships, more happiness, more trouble, more whatever it is. So we want to see it as it unfolds. Just clearly to see it.

[00:41:30] So if it's light, that's cool. Why not? I would avoid labeling it. Labeling it will almost inevitably include some kind of a judgment. Obvious or not, we're making some statement just by putting a name on something... always. And this we would like. The only name we even need, and we don't need that, is that it's calm abiding or shamatha, if you want to use Sanskrit or zhinay, if you want to use the Tibetan and who knows what else. But that thing should be so *dull* that we don't bother using it.

[00:42:26] I think... I have to tell a very short kind of miracle story. I wasn't there for it so I can lie and you won't know. [laughter] But a friend of mine was invited to go to India to participate in building a monastery. And it all happened very suddenly. And literally, at the airport, the invitation was made and he had literally one hour. Got on that plane and went and was gone for years building this monastery. The teacher at the monastery was quite renowned. And during the period of years that he was there, this teacher gave a teaching on calm abiding, shamatha.

[00:43:32] And the teaching included the kinds of experiences one could or would have, depending upon how long the mind was stable. So if the mind was stable for five minutes, there was some experience that was associated with that. If it was stable for hours, there was another experience associated with that and so on. All the way up to... the kinds of things that happened... if the mind could be stable for a week. They went beyond a week, up to like I think it was up to three weeks. And one of the things that he says is likely to experience, let's say, because I don't remember the exact amount, but let's say at one week stability, you have the ability to know that someone is coming to see you tomorrow. At two weeks stability, you know who it is.

[00:44:44] And of course, since I don't think there was anyone there who could even imagine what a week's stability was, it's a little hard to deny. [laughter] But I think if you can do a minute or two or five, the things that *come* from that can easily lead you to kind of be open to rather remarkable things, if one could go this far. It's kind of like if you're thirsty and you're going to die of thirst, but somebody gives you a little water, you immediately have the experience of the value of that water that you took for granted before.

Zopa [00:46:17] But I would like to go back to [a student's earlier] question, which led to a very long and erudite explanation of shamatha method. But [she] was saying, how do we hold the

intention? We set the intention of I'm here, doing this for and with all beings. And then do we just let go of that thought and go into calm abiding? Do we ever come back to that thought? Because you said 'hold that'... but while we are doing shamatha, we don't conceptually hold it.

LMC [00:46:57] No. I think normally... would you agree, that when we first receive those kinds of instructions, and our meditation is not particularly stable, what we are able to do is to give rise to that intention. And then we move into the practice. And the intention is kind of *back* there. We sort of left it by the road. But on the other hand, occasionally we remember we have that. But it's not really stable in one sense.

Zopa [00:47:39] And we don't put effort towards keeping it. And to me it's kind of like, I might push one button on a machine that's just kind of a low hum. And it's just going. Now I'm doing calm abiding. I'm not paying attention to that. But the intention has been set. Just like if I wake up in the morning, like I try to do in my practice, and say today, may I help all beings. May I not harm anyone. That intention goes with me through the day. I don't have to keep coming back to it.

Student 2 [00:48:19] Yeah, Thank you for bringing that up because that's my question about what is the difference between *placing* your attention and *holding* your attention. Holding the intention of benefiting all beings is a holding. And what you're describing in the technique is a placing of the attention and then/// hands off, just watch. So how do I carry an intention [set] at the first [of the] practice, through the whole practice? How do I hold? That's the question.

LMC [00:49:01] I think that the placing is really important. In a certain way, it's more important than the holding. It's more important than the stability. Because that placing action is maybe not so critical in the case of calm abiding. But when you get into other practices, like, for example, mahamudra and the dzogchen practices and all, the ability to place the mind... is really critical. Because what we want to do is, we want to sort of take this pure drop, you know, just to speak loosely, take this pure drop and place it in a certain *spot*, kind of, where our awareness is, in a certain sense, *waiting* for it. And then we don't want to do anything. We just want to remain aware and present. And those kinds of advanced practices that do not have supports and shapes to look at and all, then it's very ephemeral. And so, ephemeral things tend to disappear more easily. ... So that's where the placing becomes important.

[00:50:28] And I think in many of the traditions in the Buddhist tantra, the teachers will start people placing the mind fairly early on. Which in the beginning is nothing more or less than just the ability to start the meditation. But you're starting the meditation, by *intentionally* placing the mind. Not physically, but you know, it's like if you say, let's go get a hot fudge sundae, I just, without even thinking, I place my mind on the image of a hot fudge sundae. So here we want to do it *intentionally*. That's the difference. I want to *put* it there. And it's not going to stay there. It's a starting point.

[00:51:16] And I think here's a lot of pieces around that placing the mind. But I think it's helpful to learn to do that. Even with our calm abiding, you could even use that method for the intention. I place my mind on the *intention* to be a cause for benefit to sentient beings. That can be done conceptually by reciting something like that. Or by just putting it there... with the understanding that that's what it contains. Not such a big deal. I mean, in an ordinary way, we just place our minds somewhere all the time. We are continuously doing it. The only difference here is we're slowing down enough so that we can put it somewhere specifically. And then, of course, it will be distracted. But if you're engaging in a 10 second meditation, you may be able to get it all the

way there. And where you placed it, it's still is after 10 seconds. This is simple methods, right? Simple methods. They *should* be.

Student 2 [00:52:34] Yeah, but I am so accustomed to focusing, so accustomed to holding a particular image, or thought, or goal, or something, you know. I'm so... following the whatever. I'm so used to *holding* my focus that this *placing* is a whole different... it's like you got to kind of have to place it and then sort of perhaps watch myself move back. Because otherwise I want to just hold it. It's like your image of learning to ride a bike. That you do kind of have to hold yourself up... and keep going until the momentum of being *placed* there just goes on its own.

LMC [00:53:30] Well, let's enhance that slightly. Placing the mind is straightforward. Which is to say you're just going to put your attention... I *intend* to engage in the practice of calm abiding. And I intend to do that by following my breath, for example. And so, I start by placing my mind on the incoming breath, kind of like a conveyor belt that's coming in. I just put my mind there and I just follow the breath come in. And at some point I lose it, in which case I place it again. But some time, if I do it enough, I find that it's still there... after the seconds or minutes, whatever. And so you get better and better at it. But the idea is when you place it, you're focusing. You *are* focusing.

Student 2 [00:54:26] Focusing to me means... feels like control.

LMC [00:54:30] Yeah, that's right.

Student 2 [00:54:32] But control is holding.

LMC [00:54:35] That's right.

Student 2 [00:54:37] We're not supposed to hold!

LMC [00:54:41] Who's *we* here? [laughter] It's only a moment. It's only a moment. Let's admit, it's like in order to get started, you have to decide. And deciding there's also control. I'm deciding to sit down and meditate. Well if I didn't control *that* much, I wouldn't meditate. So, I mean, there is a difference between... the control aspect, which lets just say, okay, we're going to place the mind on that incoming breath. But as soon as it's sitting on that incoming breath is like, I'm done. It's kind of like you balanced a penny on its edge somewhere and you just pull back a little bit. And if you went aaaahhhh, that was enough, falls over. But for a moment... you gave up control. So that's what we're doing. We're just placing the mind there. Then we're giving up control. And what happens after we give up control is *completely* unpredictable. It should be! If it's predictable, we're not really doing it. We may have placed the mind, but now we may be holding it there. We're not meant to hold it there. We're meant to, like, pick it up, move it there. And then what do you do? Just... that's it. Then I just look at the little bell clapper. After I placed it there, I just have my awareness resting on it. It's not doing anything. It's just resting there.

Student 2 [00:56:20] So the focus is on awareness?

LMC [00:56:21] That's another practice. ...
Yeah.

Student 2 [00:56:25] But if you're not focusing there and you're resting in awareness, the focus is in awareness. It's more diffuse, obviously...

LMC [00:56:38] Could be no focus. Yeah. Could be no focus. No focus does not mean no awareness. So you can work the language around a bit. But the idea really is... to use this method as a means of remaining present. There may be an object that is the primary resting place of the mind. But there may not be. It could be that you are out walking and you just stop for a moment... and are present with whatever experience you're having. It's cold, it's hot, it's wet, whatever. And you're just there with it. No focus. No intention for it to be anything.

[00:57:40] But the methodology, I think, is brilliant. You start with something very, very small and very straightforward. Placing the mind, in the beginning is just bringing your mind to some place and putting it there. And I think we get screwed up about it. Like, how do you *put* the mind, which is not a *thing* somewhere. But we already know how we to do that. I put my mind on the cup and the next thing I know is... water. Mmmmm, need water. We all know how to do that.

[00:58:14] So the best practices... I would step out on in a little bit of a limb and say, the *best* practices in the entire tradition of Buddhism start out with something that we already know how to do. We know how to do it. Simple. All we're going to do is we're going to count it or we're going to do some little, small thing that's really easy to do. And little by little, that will gradually evolve into something else. And when it evolves into something else, now we have something that we want it to evolve towards. And since we learned the *one* thing, now we have the ability to evolve it a little further, if one cares to follow the instruction further. And gradually we end up with a series of approaches that actually are profound. But they're comprised of relatively simple things. When they're not simple things, we don't get very far with them. The more they're things we already pretty much know how to do, the more likely we are to get good at them.

[00:59:34] We know, for example, how to be angry. Someone could encourage us to be angry in certain circumstances. We would know how to get angry. But we don't know how to get out of the web... once we're caught in it. As it turns out, the exact same series of things that lead us into the anger are exactly the same things that can lead us out of anger. So, once we learn that, at a time when we would *like* to be out of the anger, because it won't work, [at] the time when we're happy to be angry, then we began to learn how to apply what we might call an antidote to the anger. Or we might see loving kindness in the anger. We might find very profound things to look at. But back to the same thing again. It's really an issue of... can you actually rest the mind undistracted for three seconds, for ten seconds for half a minute? The rest of it, you almost don't need an instruction for.

Student 2 [01:00:56] Thank you.

Student 6 [01:01:02] I think I understand what rest the mind is. Like, let's say, it's on this little bag here. It's a piece of candy. And you're just you're just looking at it. There doesn't have to be a lot of strain in there. You're just looking at it. Right. But you *keep* looking at it. And there doesn't have to be a lot of strain in continuing to look at something as uninteresting as that for a period of time. But where is this thing of holding it? And we say we don't want to *hold* it, but we want to rest it there. So what's the difference? What's 'holding it' mean? There's some sense of struggle, right. Or forcing, and we don't want that? What's the difference between that and just continuing to look at that?

LMC [01:02:03] Any other questions? [laughter]

Student 3 [01:02:07] I can look at something, but my mind is like everywhere else. Holding it would be [garbled]

Student 6 [01:02:17] Yeah, right. You're not letting your mind wander.

LMC [01:02:20] I agree with you. There could be struggle. There can be no struggle. But one of our struggles is that we struggle... to understand things in the terms that we know. When we're trying to understand something, we don't look for what we *don't* know. We generally are looking for the elements that we already know. And then we try to use that experience, and those terms and things that describe the situation that we're in, that feels unknown.

[01:03:02] But sometimes, especially when we're talking about approaches to the ultimate, and approaches to the relative, we get lost in that thing. And we end up coming to some kind of a, I think, fair to say, a *fake* understanding of the distinctions between the relative and the ultimate, which are completely conceptual. Which is okay in the relative, but totally not okay in the ultimate. And so we end up confused by it. And then we try even harder to rectify that with the language that we already know.

[01:03:48] You know, the ultimate is kind of inherently poetic... in a certain way, not without the language even. I remember Kalu Rinpoche once said, one of the most important *single* things to know about the distinction between relative and ultimate is that there's no distinction. And he said, if you forget that, you'll ponder and look and not find anything. Well, that doesn't give you much footing to go with. And I think, partly, that's a great example. We often say, you know, we live in a relative world. But really we also live in an ultimate world. Where are you going to draw the line between those two? If you don't already have the understanding of it, there's no line to be drawn. Any line that we draw will not lead to clarity. So... better start with shamatha.
[laughter]

Zopa [01:04:56] Yeah, every single tradition says it's experiential. So all these words like hold, focus, you know, place... what's going to get you get us somewhere is sit down, do it and see what happens.

Student 6 [01:05:21] Yeah, right. Like you realize that you can't control your mind. *Eventually* you realize it.

Zopa [01:05:26] Well, then you're never gonna nail it down with words. And I hate that.

LMC [01:05:36] You can nail it down with words. You just won't be right. [laughter erupts] You don't need to be right.

Student 7 [01:05:55] Well, I had two other things, but now there's.... So I read somewhere, I think it was in a book by Kalu Rinpoche, on shamatha and vipashyana where he laid out nine stages of the shamatha. One of which was called continuing placing. I think it's like number two or three or four, there's placing. And then later on there's *continually* placing. And I wonder if a discussion... like if you spoke about that, would that be of any help or with muddy everything up?

LMC [01:06:36] I wouldn't know, but when I'm qualified to speak about it, I'll let you know.

Student 7 [01:06:42] I'll leave my phone number.

Student 8 [01:07:54] Can you attempt to clarify the difference between holding an aspiration without getting caught in... I guess the question is more... how would you hold an aspiration without being caught in the hope, the hope and fear of trying to accomplish that aspiration?

LMC [01:08:14] There's no way to not get caught. Hope and fear, they really are kind of the engine of samsara. They are so key that many, many books, and many teachers would say that enlightenment itself is defined by the utter absence of hope and fear. I don't know that I'd worry so much about that. ... What was your worry again?

Student 8 [01:08:49] I guess it wasn't worry. It's helpful to just hear that that's natural to get sometimes caught in that hope part of the aspiration versus an aspiration can be... also, I've noticed that sometimes it is free from that hope. It seems clearer and more the driving force and not so diluted. But I guess maybe there isn't a way to *not* get caught in hope.

LMC [01:09:18] If you see it, you're not caught. So this is just that same old old thing again. In the moment that you are feeling a sense of angst about something... but you can't quite you can't quite pin it down what it is... the pinning it down then maybe is the mistake. Because you *want* to see it. You want to see something. But in the moment of letting go of that, you may see it very clear. And that clarity can be a little insight into the absence of hope and fear. Those two are always *exactly* brother and sister. They *love* each other, hope and fear. They never like to be separated. [laughter]

Zopa [01:10:07] And they never are.

LMC [01:10:16] There's a story from ancient India of a bodhisattva who is known as the crying bodhisattva. Because everywhere he went, he was crying. And I remember the first time I heard that, I thought, why would I want to study this tradition? [laughter] Cry all the time. But of course, there's some allegory in that whole thing meant to be understood. So he would go around and he would see people joyfully interacting and all and he'd cry. And the teaching underneath it was... he could see the *seeds* that were being planted of future misery. And he could see that that was *not* being seen by the people who were having these kind of joyful experiences. And so, he would cry because they did not see the misery that was coming. And therefore their suffering would be deeper by virtue of not seeing that and understanding.

[01:11:29] If we follow these trains of thought and teaching too much, it can leave us with a sense of feeling, you know, mentally exhausted. You're probably feeling that way right about now. Actually, I think it's helpful. It's good. It's nice. But in the end, we need to go back to the point of... we're training ourselves. And if you can establish that the training looks like it leads to something good, like would it be good to be able to just relax the mind without being distracted for some period of time? Most of us would say, yeah, I would appreciate that without having to take drugs and things. So do you need more than that to begin? You know, that's okay. So begin! And then little by little you can add on all sorts of things, a myriad of things. As we move into it, there's just endless options for practices and ways of leading one's life. So many things. But I would start with the simplest thing that we feel drawn to. And then elaborate it little by little.

[01:13:00] Some people like to go and do ten-day of vipashyana retreats. So that's not done so much in the lineage that we're part of, but people go and do it, and it's totally okay to do it. But if you try and do that *and* you try to do one-month retreats and you try to do this *and* that before any one of those mature, it ends up just being a source of confusion.

Student 9 [01:13:42] When I first started attending here, I asked this question regarding those of us who are fresh, thinking back to that advice, wondering if they thought back to when they were first fresh and new. So my question today would be thinking back to when you first took refuge, for those of us who are taking refuge today, what advice would you give us? Or if you could speak to yourself... back when you first took refuge, what advice did you get?

LMC [01:14:22] I don't think you want to go there. [laughter] ... I'm not a very good example of a way to approach the refuge. Partly because I was such a renegade at that time. It was sort of... and we had no instruction. I mean, like zero. Even the word *refuge*, we didn't have the *word* refuge. All in Tibetan, 100 percent. And you got a name in the end and you look at it. And I remember thinking like... what a crappy name, jeez. [laughter] I really didn't like the name. And then some years later, I found out that it was it was the name of a *famous* person whose name was Gampopa. And this was *his* refuge name that Kalu Rinpoche had given me. And I thought, wow, that's not so bad. [laughter] No progress whatsoever. I felt like jeez, then I felt like I should give the name back.

[01:16:36] Refuge is often taken as... the very beginning of the path. So whatever else has happened, it's the kind of formal stepping onto the Buddhist path. That's what it is. And there are elements of it which are very difficult to understand. You know, the easy ones are the... turning one's mind from relying upon all of our worldly things to relying upon, we say, relying upon the Buddha. What we really *mean* by that is relying upon one's own buddhanature. Not the *person* the Buddha, but because many people have trouble having *any* reliance whatsoever on their own primordially pure buddhanature, it's also said, like the Buddha's fine. Take the Buddha. Take the Buddha. Take those who are clearly great beings living in the world. Take the Dalai Lama, take the Karmapa, take this person, that person. There's at least half a dozen greats and everybody knows the Dalai Lama. So take that. It's fine. It's more than fine. We're lucky that the world is replete with some great beings still. So we can use that. And so you rely on that instead of... all the other things that we have relied upon in our lives.

[01:18:13] A funny story. Before I took refuge, I met this one man who I didn't think was very nice guy, but he was telling me the story of... he'd gone to Kalu Rinpoche and asked to be part of a refuge ceremony. And he said to Kalu Rinpoche, my life is a shambles... completely. I'm an attorney and I've trained myself in cynicism and hatred and all sorts of things and I'm really tired of it. As an attorney, I tried to only look after what I considered righteous clients. The result is I'm going bankrupt. And on top of that, he was getting a divorce. So looking bad, right? What does Kalu Rinpoche say? It's perfect. It's perfect. It's exactly what you need.

[01:19:21] And I think that's really the truth. We often say that people who are the best candidates for refuge are those who have given up. Those who are tired... tired of all the stuff in the world. Even if you could move from making no money to making a lot of money or even if you could give up caring about money and something else, it's just very difficult to step out of it. Your family, your friends, they don't want you to step out it also. So all the supports are for continuing to function in a state of bewilderment, in a world of confusion. And that person is the perfect candidate for refuge. Because they're actually willing... to try something else. And to try something else is... rely upon your own primordially pure nature. Great! It's actually not so hard to get some sense of that. Rely upon the teachings which we call the Dharma.

[01:20:31] In the West, in particular, this is normally where we start. We don't know who this guy the Buddha is. Or even if there was such a person. But if the teachings themselves make

sense... to us, then we're prepared to take another step. Like, well, that looks pretty good. I thought about that. That makes sense to me. So what else could I know? And little by little, we began to work our way into it slow and fast. And then we begin the practices... when we start to see the connection between some of the things that looked good in the meditation. That leads us there and there and so on. So that's the Dharma, the actual teachings, spoken, written, practiced. That's usually the kind of thing that makes Westerners... sing for it.

[01:21:35] And then there's also this thing we call the Exalted Sangha. Which are all of the great beings who live around the world currently. It's pretty easy to visit great beings still. They're not rare at this point. More rare than they used to be, maybe. But still, you can go and be inspired by a lot of people. So there's that.

[01:22:05] Then also many people will say that they're looking for a teacher. That's a very common question that people raise. And I think most of us would say... wrong question. You look for a teacher, unfortunately, you're likely to find one. Unfortunately, it's not likely to be a good match. [laughs] And so my advice has always been, don't look for a teacher. Teachers get grumpy... they die... they move. All sorts of things happen to leave you feeling short of what you were looking for. So I still feel like the best approach is... look for a community. Communities, healthy communities, support themselves, kind of grow together. And then if the teacher there dies, there's bound to be somebody else who's there also. Because you know more than one person. Maybe the great teacher up in Vancouver or the one over this place or whatever, and you can travel there and get things and feel like you're part of something bigger than what you thought you were part of.

[01:23:45] Refuge is literally about *taking* refuge in those three jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as a refuge from confusion. Not just the world of confusion, which is easy for us all to agree on. This place is really confused. But also our own confusion. It's a refuge from our *own* confusion. So when we feel confused, we can recognize the confusion. And then we have a whole myriad of options play out. People to see, things to do, practices to engage in. ... Retreats to go to.

sangha [01:27:58] *dedicating the merit*