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experience fresh, we have exactly what we need, kindness of intention

LMC [00:02:08] So I'm sure you all have many interesting things on your minds. And I wanted to stir it up a little bit. [laughter] For those of you who are not familiar with our kind of open conversation following meditation, that's what it is. It's an open conversation. And you're encouraged to participate, *especially* if you don't want to. [laughter] Because everyone who wants to, will take care of themselves. But we try to generally get into issues in the practice of meditation, and the Dharma in general, and find some clarity.

[00:03:22] So this morning, in contemplating... *this morning*, one of the things that occurred to me, which is one of the great teachings that we have in the Dharma, is that there is no experience or thought that ever occurs twice. In other words, whatever it is that we feel has been on our minds, for some time, it actually isn't like that. When the experience arises and we tend to bring a kind of judgment to it. Which is that I'm having this experience again. When we look close, we see that actually we're not having it again. We're having another experience. And because we *tend* to think of things as repeating themselves over and over, we miss one of the most important things that we have in our practice. Which is the experience of freshness in *all* of our experiences, all of our thoughts, all of our emotions. Where we tend to kind of concretize a sense of who we are and how it is we think. And that's debilitating. It's especially debilitating in times when we need to think fresh. The truth is, we *are* thinking fresh, but we're not recognizing it. So we need to recognize it... in order to give rise to some fresh wisdom. And when we do that, we feel different about ourselves.

[00:05:20] So that's why we said this morning it's important to be able to be *present* with our experiences as they arise. Not necessarily to *do* anything with them, but to just see them. So if we're joyous or we're suffering or whatever it is... to be present with that experience. Recognizing it as new every time that it occurs is of *great* importance. And it's also considered a fairly advanced level of realization. So, the nice thing about *that* comment is that when you fail, you can write it off and say, well, you know, it's an advanced realization. So, of course, I'm failing. [laughter] On the other hand, it's very easy to understand conceptually... that what arises in our experience is fresh. It hasn't occurred before. It's very easy to understand that conceptually. Understanding it conceptually can help us actually have the experience. At least from time to time, if not continually.

[00:06:36] The more that we can remain clear and present with our experiences, well let's say that we call that a kind of compassion. If you have the same experience over and over, or at least that's your experience that it's 'the over and over, the same thing', it's very difficult to feel a sense of kindness and compassion for yourself. After all, you're just the same old thing all the time. It doesn't feel like you're alive. It doesn't feel fresh because you're making it 'the same thing' again. When it's actually not the same thing again.

[00:07:22] So I thought that would be a good subject for conversation this morning. Though you can go anywhere you want with it, especially given the difficult circumstances in the world at this time. [Trump was inaugurated] There's a tendency to increase our judgment of people, of ideas, of all sorts of things and get ourselves into a kind of loop where we just feel like we have the same experience, maybe the same angst. We have the same judgment about ourselves, about others. It gets into a really vicious circle that's hard to get out of. And we can each practice

getting out of that on our own while we're sitting on the cushion. There's never a moment we're not having an experience. ... I mean, we would say, as good Buddhists, even when you're dead. [laughs] So here's the opportunity. Let's raise that issue and explore it a little bit. What does it mean to have the experience that our sense of our experience is fresh, continuously?

Student 1 [00:08:48] Can you talk a little bit about that but also in relationship to our habitual patterns. You know what I mean? Yeah, of course you know what I mean. I understand... like you said, conceptually, the idea that each experience is fresh because it's happening in that moment. But I know I still have habits and patterns that are really easy to fall into, you know. So how does that fit in with each moment being fresh, yet, I feel a dichotomy with my habitual patterns?

LMC [00:09:38] Where it falls in because when you say it like that, we're talking about a conceptual idea that the experience is fresh. When we have the experience and look at it, it feels like it's yesterday's experience happening again. But in the moment that you actually just pay attention to the experience that is there now, it can feel, you can actually have the experience that... it's fresh. It hasn't happened before. We get into labeling our experiences. I felt bad yesterday. I feel bad today. When actually, if we just pay attention to our experience, we can see that it's not the same experience as yesterday. In order for it to be the same experience as yesterday, I have to kind of force that. I have to say that to myself. Remind myself, in the sense, that it's the same thing as yesterday. And after a while it feels like the truth. ... When we can... actually go the other direction. See it, the experience, name it as fresh. And after a while we begin to have *that* sense instead. I mean, we're very malleable. [quiet laughter] And so it's an issue of engaging in the practice of seeing things as fresh. When you see things as fresh, it's much more difficult to judge them. A judgment puts an end to kindness, to compassion, to insight. It solidifies. It stops.

Student 1 [00:11:34] So are we actually fooling ourselves about our habitual patterns? That is just a story we're telling ourselves? That actually if you just see it as fresh, that breaks what we call a pattern? I'm trying to wrap my head around this.

LMC [00:11:57] Try it.

Student 1 [00:11:59] Okay, just try it. that's fair.

Student 2 [00:12:04] Just to drill down conceptually a little bit. So, for example, my breath. In some sense, every breath is different. And is that just that it *feels* a little different? That's like empirically, each one is different? Or is it just sort of the tyranny of words here that I label that breath. And so I make myself see it always the same. Is it just, you know, the sort of wound... we are linguistic animals that operate, that live through words? So this is zabuton. This is zabuton. They are all zabutons. Is that what, you know, takes away the capacity for freshness or makes it hard for us to be fresh? It's just that we live through words?

LMC [00:12:55] Is it not the case, that we often use words in a way that removes that sense of freshness?

Student 2 [00:13:08] Oh yeah, so we can navigate.

LMC [00:13:09] Yeah. And it's not that one should give up language, but it's more the issue of experience. And training ourselves to see and not just to *label* as fresh, which is once again...

you know, this is a very difficult process. But if you sit, just in shamatha... so I think it's a very nice practice, in shamatha, to be aware of the experiences as they arise. So your mind can rest on the experience as it arises. And gradually you have this sense of... it really is the case that no two breaths are the same. That a thought that I feel like I have a lot of, is actually a different thought each time that it arises. It's an issue of paying attention to it. Shamatha, I think, is good because it's all about paying attention to something, resting your awareness on something.

Student 2 [00:14:19] Paying attention in a different way.

LMC [00:14:21] In a kind of loose way. Rather than I'm following my breath, if we pay attention to that too much, we get a sense of, again, we've concretized my breath. And if I'm having some asthma or some other kind of impediment to the breath, then I start thinking my breath is impeded somehow. And each breath begins to feel like it's impeded. And maybe each breath *is* impeded. But it could still be it's freshly impeded. It's not yesterday's impediment. It's this moment's experience. There's a line in a prayer that we call the Dorje Chang Thung-ma where, towards the end of that prayer, the meditator, who is ostensibly reciting this prayer, states that the realization of each experience as new, as fresh, is actually arising. He's saying that's happening. And it's considered, to actually have that stabilized, is quite advanced. But on the other hand, there's no one who can't have that experience at any given time. And it's important to have it as often as possible. The realization, I think, occurs gradually. In incremental stages, it becomes more and more stable.

[00:16:09] I think there's also another interesting kind of twist to the whole thing. When we feel like we have the same thought over and over, we can fall into a place of feeling sorry for ourselves. A kind of kind of depressing grind, as it were. But when it's fresh, when it's new, we're more likely to feel a sense of compassion for ourselves and also for others around us. Because we're having fundamentally the same kind of experience and struggle that everyone is. Anyway, that's my take on it.

Student 3 [00:16:53] On that note, what if on the note of a depressing grind, it appears to repeat over and over. Sometimes the actually... the depressing part is actually not so much about oneself, but about the suffering one sees around oneself. Or anticipating suffering coming to others because of current events. Is there a way to look at *that* that's any different than what we're talking about here, about seeing the moment fresh?

LMC [00:17:38] Is it not the case, or is there another way to look at this, that the more that we judge our experience, the more it becomes a kind of... to put just the word of 'a drag' on things. And the more that we can see it as fresh, the more our response and our relationship to it also then becomes fresh. So the creative impulse to work with it in a different way requires that we see something different from what we saw before. I mean, otherwise, how do you how do you move out of where you are?

Student 3 [00:18:32] It's the same, whether that depressing grind is about one's own condition or about the personal conditions at large?

LMC [00:18:42] Due to the truth of interdependence, [laughter] which is always easy to state because we all kind of *get* it... merely by saying it to ourselves, that yeah, there is a truth to interdependence. Then part of that is... who you are... with others. So, if you have a sense of the flow and the change of things in your own mind stream and your relationship with others and yourself and your experiences, that affects other people, too. It can affect other people in a

really positive way. But if you're 'talk' to yourself and to others is always the same, that has a different effect, different result than if it feels more fresh.

[00:19:42] So faking it is also, you know, we often say this, that a large part of the Dharma is faking things that we can't do. And not because we never will be able to do them, but because you get good at it by faking it. Almost everything that we're really good at, we had to start by faking it. And then we get good at it. And then we say we're not faking it. But actually, if we're going to get better, we're still faking it, right? It's another way of talking about learning and growing. When you're three months old, you're fake crawling. Right. And then things evolve around that.

Student 4 [00:20:35] Would that be the same as assumption... of faking it?

LMC [00:20:40] Why do you say that?

Student 4 [00:20:48] Well, it's a word that I got from the Aspirations for Mahamudra. Now we might, start out assuming that we can do it. But we want to reach the place where we're not doing that anymore. Free from an assumption and denial.

LMC [00:21:06] Yeah, right.

Student 4 [00:21:07] But there may be a place for it in the beginning, yeah?

LMC [00:21:13] Yes, I think that's a good point. Yeah, that's a good point. Assumption can be a support... for something. So in this context, we could say... that I have looked at my experience, carefully. I have contemplated my experience, kind of conceptually analyzed it. And I've come to hold the assumption that actually no experience arises twice. Now in the context of actually developing the ability to more or less continuously have the experience of that freshness, that assumption could be helpful.

Student 4 [00:21:59] Yeah, because you'd have it always in the back of your mind, you know. Whenever you start to feel the 'drag', out comes the thought... it's fresh.

LMC [00:22:09] Yeah. Rather then, there's you again.

Student 5 [00:22:20] On a similar direction. So if fresh, that I can evolve from moment to moment. And from last moment to this moment, maybe there was an insight to get past my being a jerk. And then if I can do that moment to moment, then the person I'm with, who maybe did something inconsiderate, he might have the same possibility. So, when I hear something said now, I cut loose the ties of... it's not coming from the same place of being inconsiderate, because it's fresh. So to help me... I always have questions about... is this tool of a training wheels, a dead end or useful? So the tool that came to mind was telling myself, with words, that could be a rut, but telling myself, 'oh, I think this is just the same.' 'I think this is just the same.' But can that be a way for my intellect to try and open me up to the experience of it not? And is that a training wheel that I could use and let fall away? Or is it a training wheel that will habituate a new stuck pattern? I think this is. I only think this is.

LMC [00:24:13] Stuck in new may not be so bad. [laughter] I'm just joking. I think actually that the real development process includes being stuck and being unstuck. And recognizing that at this point I see what happened. I got stuck. I formed an opinion. I had an experience. I formed a

judgment. I formed an opinion. And now I just repeat the opinion to myself. And there's a certain level of satisfaction. You know, I don't need to deal with this new crap. I already know what it is and I'm sticking with it. That kind of thing. And then you recognize, oh, this is actually not helpful. I'm not happy with it. It's almost like I'm happy being unhappy with it. And so I just repeat it. *Recognizing* that... is the requisite insight. It's actually *not* true that even my opinion, which I feel like I have held for a period of time, repeating it over and over to myself, sharing it with my friends. And my friends, are those who hold the same opinion. Those who don't have the same opinion are not my friends. And that whole process then we recognize as... this is actually moving away from the practice that I cherish.

[00:25:49] And so it's straightforward, what one needs to do. We need to see when we're hanging on. That's a fresh experience, even though we're hanging on. But it's a *fresh* experience. I hung on yesterday, too. But actually, I'm not the same person as yesterday. Nor is the experience of hanging on exactly the same. So gradually, through the process of seeing it as something fresh, maybe we dissolve it. It's not real! You know, it's not really solid. Conceptually we can fully understand that. There's nothing in my experience today that is identical to the experience I had yesterday about anything. But in order to see that, we have to look, kind of with fresh eyes.

[00:26:44] And we don't have fresh eyes most of the time. So we're looking through yesterday's sunglasses and everything looks dark. But actually, if you take the sunglasses off, everything looks a little brighter. But it's fakery. The sunglasses are fakery, and taking them off is faking it, too. But the game is about seeing that it's fresh. It was fresh when you saw it dark. It was fresh when you saw it light. It's an issue of training ourselves. We can decide, I will train myself to have the experience and the understanding that *each* experience that arises... is fresh. It's new. It's very uplifting, which is kind of, you could say, is that all that it's about. is uplifting? I would say, no, it's not all about that. You want to recognize the nature of mind; you have to understand the nature of mind is the core source of all of our experience. So... there's nothing in the manifestation of experience emanating from the nature of mind that is old. It's always new, it's always fresh.

Student 6 [00:30:36] I'm having trouble with that. It sounds like you're giving an antidote, in some way, or a helpful kind of tool for us in these times. But I think about trauma... as being always the same. You know, that trauma affects individuals and communities and nations in the same way all the time, over and over and over and over again. There's nothing fresh about the way that trauma behaves. And it has its own momentum. You know, it's not impeding trauma. And so to see an experience as fresh, you might be experiencing trauma again. There's more trauma. There is more of the effects of trauma. You know, there's anger. There's defensiveness. There's division. There's, you know, all this trauma again and again and again. And so I'm having some difficulty in seeing that again and again and again... in a fresh way. You know, it's not me. It's trauma that keeps showing up. And that's my issue with it. Can you talk about that?

LMC [00:32:11] Yeah, sure. I suppose it's the case that not all things are equally easy or equally difficult to see as fresh. There is a certain way in which we also have survival reflexes, right. That are physically and mentally just there, kind of automatic. And what we're talking about here is partly difficult because of the *automatic*. Which is part of our way of being. In a certain sense, it's part of our survival. But it's also not always helpful for survival. So exactly like what you're saying, if we *feel* traumatized in a kind of chronic way over a period of time it's very difficult, and not particularly helpful, to say to that person, actually what you experience as being a day after

day event is not like that. It's actually fresh. And I think, you know, there's no benefit to saying those kinds of things.

[00:33:48] That's not to say that that person, or those individuals, cannot rise above that situation where they feel like every day is another day of abject suffering. They *can* rise above it. But not everyone is in the exact same place, ready to do it. And I think in this case, if we talk about trauma and you might say habitual suffering, and I don't mean that like it's caused by the habit of the person, but that may be true too, then there's a different approach. And then we come to the issue of... if we were to take individuals, we would say... even in this room, we would say there *is* a set of practices which could be very helpful for *each* individual in this room. But the practices would not necessarily be the same. They be a little different.

[00:34:57] And yet, what do we do? We come together as a group and we're kind of, let's say, as a group of people, as a sangha in the Dharma, we're reasonably close to the same practices. But we also get flummoxed and confused by virtue of not having the... for want of a better expression, 'personalized help' that's needed to get it to work at its best. And so we work at it. And then occasionally we discover, you know, this isn't really working for me. And then we have some conversation and we work out a variation that maybe works better. Some people find it easier. Some people find it more difficult. For somebody who has had chronic trauma... shamatha may be the absolutely worst practice that they could be engaged in. Not helpful. And for other people, it might be absolutely perfect thing for them at that time. Ideally, we would all have personal, highly realized mentors. [laughter] But, you know, it just isn't the situation that we have. So we all do our best. It's part of what the sangha is meant to be about. Is that we, ideally, do what is actually a requisite... level of help. Which is to say a willingness to work together on these things.

[00:36:48] But it also requires a certain level of personal insight in order to break through some of these barriers. Just like it does outside of the Dharma, just in ordinary, confused living. Still, there's insight required in order to break through habitual patterns and things. And I think that the Dharma has a very rich set of tools to work on. It's not the only way that it can be done, but I think it's a particularly rich. But that alone is not enough also. If you take somebody who wants to be a carpenter and they haven't yet learned to work with hand tools and they start with power tools, that could be a big mistake.

[00:37:40] So in the same way, I think, as Americans who know everything, of course, we always want to start like Bill said, at the other end. We want to begin with... it's already perfect. And then we'll work on refining it. It's a weird approach, but that's what we do. So then we talk about it and maybe it's helpful. We talk as a group. We talk collectively. We talk individually with each other. And little by little, maybe we develop some patience. Like, this is not going to be as fast as I thought it would be. I'm smart. I did good in college and all of that. I don't know why it's taking weeks to attain enlightenment. [laughter]

[00:38:33] So I agree with you that when we talk about freshness, really, ideally, we need to talk about freshness in a different way with every person. Ideally that's what we need. Yeah, I'd say that. And then there's a part of me that says, ennhh, I'm not so sure about that. Maybe we need exactly what we're getting. Which actually is another kind of, we might say, intermediate, profound realization. Like what I have is exactly what I need. And I'm not saying that in an objective sense. I say it because I know that if I hold that view of things, what I have *is* what will be the most useful. And thereby, another step is made in that direction.

Student 6 [00:39:42] Yeah, and I think that... as you're speaking, I thinking also that the experience of the experience of trauma, the experience of the experience, can be... that we can work there. That's fresh. The way I experience, the way we experience. I think that we're experiencing trauma en masse. And we have been. But now we're aware of the experience. So to be able to see, oh... that's trauma. And have a different experience of anger or different experiences of, you know, distress and worry and concern for other people. Maybe that's the place where I can work with this.

LMC [00:40:44] Yeah. It's funny, you know. We speak in symbols. I mean, the word trauma is a symbol. Right? So that can be really useful. Can also be a level of subterfuge... in labeling and speaking with language. The depth of insight does not occur in that context. That's more or less a setup for the depth of insight. But the work is actually something else. So we get the conceptual understanding. We can talk about it. And I can say, yeah, I understand, like someone who has chronic trauma, they can't work with it like this and that. But those words are not the actual work of dealing with it. They're just a way of turning our attention. And sometimes we put too much into the words and thereby inadvertently skip the work.

[00:41:58] We don't get to the work because we think that we've come to an understanding of what the issue is, because we understand the words and the grammar and all the pieces of it. So that's why I think that Bill's comment about you got to start at some point. Start at some point, you work with it. It goes a little way. Then it doesn't work. Then we get frustrated. Then we talk about it a little more. Then we come back and work on it some more. I think every person does that. I don't personally know of an exception. I think even when we were working with Bokar Rinpoche and Khenpo Rinpoche in India, it was clear that they did that with each other, with things. They raised things. And even on occasion, argue about things and then they find something that mostly was invisible to us. It wasn't done openly. But I think we all have that. And if we can have a sense of... kindness of intention... in coming together. The intention is to be helpful. And I will do my best to not hold on to my opinions and all. There's a kind of softness that's helpful. And at times it's sometimes helpful to be a little bit more definite. It is an experimental thing. And I don't think you can avoid it and be successful.

[00:43:40] When we were talking about the creative thing, seeing things as fresh. Sometimes it's helpful to *force* things as fresh. I'm not actually having the experience of *fresh*... here. I'm having the experience of same old, same old! But conceptually, I understand that actually the same old, same old is my deep habit around this thing. So if I could just like, soften on that, I might see something else. And if I work on it, then more often than not, I have the experience of oh, it actually *is*. Not what I've been pretending it is. ... I mean, it's the tool thing again. You've got to work it. And I think that has to be done individually. Even if you get help from others, whether it's a therapist or a guru or whatever, it still comes down to, the person who is engaging in the practice is the one... they have to *do* that or the fruit doesn't happen. ... You have to fail. [Laughs] All right, so let's dedicate the merit.

sangha [00:45:21] *dedicating the merit*