

2017_01_29_pm2_QA_LMC.mp4

eyes open or closed, daily practice is critical, working with pieces of experience, benefit of community, seeing and working with illusory nature, relax in space of not being relaxed, Carrying Practice: being present with experience in daily ordinary activity

LMC [00:00:04] So if you have things on your mind in particular, now's a good time to raise them and we can chew on them and entertain ourselves with them.

Student 1 [00:00:55] Because I'm new to this, I'm actually curious just about the basics of... eyes. What to do with your eyes while you're meditating? Open or closed? Focus?

LMC [00:01:19] Do you have a preference?

Student 1 [00:01:23] I like both.

LMC [00:01:24] Did you experiment? And what did you find?

Student 1 [00:01:33] I was more awake when I was... like if I was starting to go down, I could open my eyes and would kind of bring me up, but then I could easily get distracted by things.

LMC [00:01:43] Yup. Generally, as a kind of principle, we have a bit of a preference to having the eyes open. Partly it's because... here we are. And we're surrounded by visual things ordinarily. So if we can sit with our eyes open, then we don't divorce ourselves from the rest of our experience. Visual experience, which is such a big piece of our experience. But that said, it's also nothing really inherently wrong with closing our eyes during meditation. And certainly, our stream of experience doesn't stop with the eyes closed. It continues anyway. So we still have an object on which to place our awareness and kind of *tether* the mind to those experiences. So if you find that one thing tends to work better, and the mind is more still, I would say it's fine to go with that

[00:03:02] Later on, with other practices in this tradition, it becomes important to actually have your eyes open during meditation. But I can say from my own experience, for some years, I just couldn't keep my eyes open during meditation. It was really difficult. And maybe it was because I was working long days in a job and I was just too tired to keep my eyes open. But... ultimately, having the eyes open was a little more challenging, but also a little more rewarding... to come at it from that perspective.

[00:03:51] You know, there's a teaching, in general, that is about our confusion about who we are and the environment that we find ourselves in. And the teaching is about the kind of the world of illusion that we live in. It's an illusion that we perpetrate, that we make, and then we live in that space. And it's important, along the way, to, at some point, we have to discover that that's actually where we are. We're living in an illusory state. And by virtue of not recognizing that, we're barred from certain insights. And when we recognize it, then certain other things open up. And I think that, if you stay with it long enough, you'll get reminded of that often enough. Such that you'll *want* to experiment with the eyes open, closed and various things. You will come to some fruition on its own. I wouldn't put a big weight on it one way or the other. It's a good time to experiment. Make sense?

Student 2 [00:05:28] I want to sort of ask about... embodiment, being fully sort of present with experience moment by moment? I have been finding, especially with the start of this school year, September, October, November, December, that I have a very old sort of pattern of reacting and dealing with stress and feeling uncomfortable in my own body. And I have a very old habit of sort of not being fully present with it. The experience is kind of like I'm here and I'm either a little to the left or a little to the right of where I actually am physically. [laughter]

LMC [00:06:28] That's more or less a human norm, isn't it?

Student 2 [00:06:32] Now that I am aware of it, and I notice it and unlike a lot of other experiences that I have, noticing it doesn't kind of dissolve the experience. I can notice it and then I'm just kind of there with it until I'm distracted again. And then I don't notice it. It just kind of, it feels... and it's not necessarily always there, but when it is there, it's present for a very long duration. Longer than I can actually be aware of it and be mindful of it. Was kind of curious about how to work with that, because I've been noticing....

LMC [00:07:05] That's a great question.

Student 2 [00:07:06] It comes up daily for long periods of time. And I've noticed that it's very difficult to relax in the deep way that I want to. That, you know, in a way that would really be beneficial to me. I find getting to that place of 'relaxation without effort' really difficult to get to in those situations.

LMC [00:07:36] Do you have a daily meditation practice?

Student 2 [00:07:42] Currently, it's pretty much not.

LMC [00:07:47] That can be helpful. I mean, I say that somewhat tongue in cheek. But what I really like to say is that really, *really* would be helpful. And it's not easy. I think anyone who has a daily practice that is consistent will say... it's difficult! That's difficult in this world of distraction and all the things that we get ourselves involved in, is very difficult to set aside any time. One of the advantages... you actually pretty much just stated, is that you can work with *pieces*... of your experience. Because you don't need to work with your entire experience. You just can work with pieces of the experience.

[00:08:36] So if you're having this kind of disembodied thing, for want of a better phrase for it, you can sit down and just be present with that particular experience for a while. And if you do that every day... sit down and just sit for a moment and notice what your experience is, or maybe you sit down because you're *having* that experience. Then it doesn't take very long before you start to have the sense of, I see what this is. Maybe I can't put words on it and describe it, which is actually better not to usually, but at least I can see what it is. In the same way that when you go outside and the sun is warm, you feel the sun. You just feel it. Or it's cold and you feel it. And so you can *feel* these things. Which maybe feel a little bit odd when you're trying to put in quotes, 'function'... un a different way. When you sit down to meditate, function isn't relevant. It's all about being present with whatever experience there is there. So you don't need to change it. You just let it be and look at it. Be present with it. So my recommendation is get a daily practice

[00:10:10] You can talk with Bill or Zopa or myself or other people in the community. And sometimes it's helpful just to share experiences with the practice. And it helps create connection

and all. Those things are more important than the actual thing that you're working with. Sometimes people say, for example, how do I find a teacher? And my usual response is the worst thing you can do is look for a teacher. You might find one. [laughs] It's kind of like saying, how can I find a briar patch. You might find one and then you would be sorry you looked. But a community of people who are engaged in pretty much the same thing can be really helpful, to develop connections and friendships. And talk with people who you think might be helpful to explore these things with, that also can be helpful.

[00:11:13] But going back to the principal issue, the daily practice is really critical. It's kind of like home base. You get used to it and you don't want to give it up, at that point. And because you're getting insight gradually developing... to what's going on.

[00:13:03] [Dora suggested mindfulness in the body practices] Those are great. That's good. Thank you. It's really good. Practices are easy to understand and relate to and they're deep enough so you can just work with it for a long time. Really good.

Student 5 [00:19:55] You're talking about living in the illusion just a little bit ago. Have really been looking at that, some big changes and just really seeing the illusions that I'm moving out of. And I try to create new ones. And how easy that is, not only to create new ones, but just to move out of the old ones. It's almost scary how easy that is. And I don't know, there's something frightening in some ways about just seeing the whole thing. Just the whole illusion of it.

LMC [00:20:30] It's not entertaining?

Student 5 [00:20:32] I mean, sometimes it is. Sometimes it's wonderful. Like, just so real. It just feels like almost too real. When you can see the illusion, it's like, oh, this is just an illusion.

Student 6 [00:20:51] How can an illusion be real?

Student 5 [00:20:54] No. I think I mean it's the opposite way. Seeing the illusion. It's like, oh, it's actually *not* real. That's the scary part. It's like, oh, well then, what is there? Which is this. There's a way in which my mind is maybe not prepared for that level of reality. Seeing it. And there's a way in which it is. Just being in the Dharma is really helpful. Maybe one of the only ways to really do that. But, there's something with that.

LMC [00:21:39] Well, if one regularly engages in their meditation practice, you're bound to run into that. It's important to run into it. And see it. And have the sense that... more or less, you know, as much as you can have it and still remain sane in a kind of ordinary way, that things are not as they appear. They're just appearances. And as time goes on, then there's more practices to work with that. And I think Dora's suggestion for the mindfulness practices is also really excellent... for starting with the body and gradually working through the four foundations of mindfulness. Where, as you move through those four, you get more into the illusory issues. And it's helpful to have kind of a means to work with those things. It's very difficult to work with the occasional sudden insight that what we think is kind of solid and predictable is actually neither solid nor predictable. So we feel a sense of groundlessness. And the best time to have that experience is while you're sitting on the cushion with a practice that allows you to work with that.

[00:23:19] It's fundamental to the philosophical system that we live in an illusion. And we live in the appearances of that illusion. And we *believe* in those appearances. And by virtue of believing in those appearances, we get ourselves into all of this other confusion. So it's

important to confront them. But you can't confront them from the ordinary perspective of being in the illusion. [laughs] You're no match for it... by the time that happens. So having a daily practice, again, is really, really helpful. And working with other people who you trust and can work with is also very important and helpful. It's not bad, I mean, as anyone who has been a teenager, can say that they spent a lot of time searching for illusion so they could be confused. There's kind of, you might say, a 'high' from being confused for some period of time. But when it doesn't go away, then it starts to feel like an illness of some kind. ... We get trapped by our own stuff and believe in it.

[00:24:57] So I think most of us who have been practicing for some time would say, the path is profound. The tools for working with these things, in a way which is not only helpful but powerful, are all there. But it doesn't mean that because they're there that one can just pick them up and thereby, we get the benefit. We actually have to engage in the practices over time.

Student 5 [00:25:36] Can you say something about why you said that it was better to engage with that... with, let's say, the direct experience of illusion? That it is better to experience that when you're on the cushion.

LMC [00:25:54] Well. Yeah, generally, I would say that's the case. [laughs] I mean, we encounter our confusion all the time. But at a certain level we will each have a sense of being able to tolerate it or even enjoy it... from time to time. But when we get really trapped by it and believe in it, then we can have a sense of despair and all sorts of things can happen.

Bill [00:26:34] Can you give a practical example? Sort of like make that into a story as opposed to a more abstract statement.

LMC [00:26:44] Shall I tell a story about me or maybe I'll tell a story about Bill. [laughter] Well, for example, we tend to experience things as permanent. We know that nothing is permanent. We all know that. You don't need to meditate for one minute even to know things are impermanent. But when I was teaching classes at community college, I used to like to ask people to make a list of things which were *impermanent* and very quickly, of course, the list filled up. It was like, quickly realized that you couldn't make that list complete. So then I said, well, maybe we should try making make a list of things that are permanent. And very quickly you realized you couldn't think of one thing. Well, in order to think of one thing, you had to go to the metaphysical. Like, well, maybe, maybe God is permanent or space is permanent or some kind of thing that we couldn't get our hands on could be permanent. But we also encountered this principle when, for example, we get a job. And we're pretty good at it. And we take it for a while, and then there's a big layoff. And we encounter the impermanence of what we thought was very stable. Or we fall in love. We get into a relationship. The relationship comes to an end, even though we thought, well, this will last for life. Doesn't. And those things confuse us deeply.

[00:29:04] And understanding the interdependence of all things can be very helpful for that. So that's one meditation system, is just meditating on the interdependence of things. If I say something nice to you today, you'll say something nice to me tomorrow. But if I say something really mean spirited to you today, something not so good will happen to me tomorrow. It's not... magical. It's just the nature of interdependence. And so the more that we can explore these things of... the illusion of permanence, the illusion of stability. Or the illusion of, you know, we overcome that illusion when we realize like... we're not relaxed. And the harder we try to be relaxed, the less relaxed we are. Again due to the truth of interdependence. So as Bill said, I think, if I get it right, we need to relax in the space of not being relaxed. We need to relax with

being not relaxed. But the only reason why that's a little weird is because we're using the same term. But if we actually just look at the experience of being relaxed next to being *not* relaxed, we can relate to, yeah, I think I can have both of those... at the same time. I don't need to be confused by the language. ... Now, where are we going with this?

Bill [00:30:43] Why it's better to have the experience with the groundlessness on the cushion.

LMC [00:30:53] This morning, we had a conversation which is somewhat relevant to this. That an awful lot of our practice is focused on developing the ability to be present with experiences as they arise. Which really means *just* to be present with it. And not to try and do something with it. Not to try and conceptually understand it or anything. Just to be present with it. In the way that you might sit on a hill and watch the sunset... is an example that I always like. Because when you sit on the hill and watch the sunset, you don't feel like there's anything you can or need to do about the sun setting. It will set without your intervention in any way. And so therefore, you watch the sun go down and it's a kind of relaxing event. Where it's just something you're watching. There's nothing to say about it. Nothing to do about it. Sometimes it's better to do it alone rather than with someone. So you don't find yourself talking about it with somebody. And there's something very pleasant about that.

[00:32:11] We have that ability all the time with our experience. Because we're *continually* having experiences. As we said this morning, even when you're dead. [laughs] The experiences may not come to an end. They just run continuously. So we have, in a sense, something like the setting sun with us all the time. Something that we could just look at and be present with without any intention to change it or make it something else. That's a very grounding experience to have. To be able to just put your awareness on *any* of your experiences. The experience of breathing. You watch the breath come and go. You know, headache, you watch the headache kind of come and go and change and things move. You look at your experience walking down the street, you can see that it changes continuously. And there's nothing that needs to be done, or in a certain sense, *can* be done. Except for one thing. You can be *completely* present with it without any ulterior motivation to do anything. That's an important skill to develop. It's a skill that is very difficult to develop *off* the cushion. It's not particularly easy to develop *on* the cushion. But it's a critical skill. To be able to just be present with experiences that arise, pleasant and unpleasant experiences.