

2017_03_26_am1_Shamatha_LMC.mp4

detailing the 4 immeasurables with focus on equanimity, the practice of contentment

[00:09:25] So first of all, good morning to all of you. There are a few people who are here for the first time, so I would like to welcome you and make the wish on your behalf that your visit will be fruitful.

[00:11:27] The last few times that we have met, we have talked about... so I'll say this from my own perspective, because I don't know what yours is, but... the intention was to explore what I think is *true*. That *any* of the meditation practices that we do contains the entire path to complete enlightenment. And this is not a trivial proposition. And there are some things we can do to discover that on our own. And we *should* do them if our interest is in pursuing the teachings of the Buddha.

[00:12:30] The Buddha has been quoted from time to time, I don't personally trust 2,000-year-old quotes, since two-minute quotes seem to be a problem for us. But nonetheless, when we hear something, rather than merely determining whether or not someone really *said* that like that, in this case, we can make an effort to run the experiment and see... does it make sense? Is it in accordance with my understanding and so on. If your understanding can come to the place where any of the... practices, meditation systems, if *any* of them you can get close to and feel connected to... then from that perspective, you can get close to all of them. Because they're fundamentally all have the same basis, the same assumption, the same focus... on our benefit as meditators.

[00:13:56] Normally, as what we call 'sentient beings', that is to say, all of us here... we focus on our *own* benefit. By focusing on our own benefit... we expect to get something from our meditation. And it's reasonable to expect that. In fact, one might say that if you have no expectation, probably you're not here. You're somewhere else. So to make a blanket suggestion that we abandon all of our expectations won't be particularly fruitful.

[00:15:03] This morning, I wanted to say a few things leading up to the meditation and then we can discuss those things after the- meditation and the break. ... There is a teaching, a *system*... of meditation, which is called the Four Immeasurables. ... And these Four Immeasurables are called immeasurables... because they are meant to be focused upon uncountable, infinite if you will, sentient beings. Humans, animals, visible and invisible beings. Not even limited to this planet... or even this solar system or this galaxy. But the practice itself means immeasurable, like beyond countable. Uncountable. And the four meanings that go with the Four Immeasurables are *easy* to understand and embrace.

[00:17:38] They include loving kindness... for all of these immeasurable sentient beings. Loving kindness has the aspect also of... the wish... that *all* of these beings would have the causes of happiness and experience happiness all the time. And the second one then is immeasurable compassion. Which we also all can relate to. So *easy* to relate to. And the compassion is, in essence, the wish that all of these uncountable beings were to be *free* of the causes of suffering. Completely free of the causes of suffering and suffering itself. And then we have immeasurable joy, which for the moment I want to put aside. And the fourth immeasurable is equanimity. Equanimity, you might say, is the spiritual equivalent of valuing diversity.

[00:20:01] When we bring our awareness to the practice of equanimity, we always find ourselves a little bit stumbling. ... It's easy to feel sympathetic joy. It's easy to feel compassion and loving kindness for everyone for whom we feel compassion and love and kindness. Our friends, when they're our friends, [laughs] we tend to focus these high-minded attitudes on individuals that we already admire, feel good about. ... And herein lies the *essence* of the practice. Equanimity, on the list, is always the last item, but it is also often the first item that we need to learn about.

[00:21:25] Immeasurable... cannot be an effective understanding from the perspective of... I can have compassion for *most* sentient beings. If there is *one* that is held out, the whole thing crumbles. It doesn't work. ... The *basis* of the practice is that we are all... let's call it 'ill'. [laughs] We are all ill. ... Being ill, we find it difficult to engage in *any* meditation practice other than... I need to be free of this illness. But until we explore that illness and see it clearly and experience it clearly, we cannot apply the antidote. ... We are our own doctors. You can study and listen to the teachings, but no one can do it for you. We all want to be free of suffering. We all want to have the causes of happiness. We all want to experience unbounded, immeasurable joy.

[00:23:41] Most of us, at some time or another, would like to help others also. It's difficult to help others when we can't help ourselves. We try. And we get some... benefit. And perhaps others also get some benefit. But sometimes we're told, "I don't need your help." We're not always competent at helping others. Nor are we always competent at helping ourselves. That old adage, 'physician, heal thyself' is apropos in this case. ... The practice of equanimity is the *key*... to the other three immeasurables.

[00:25:22] As we have done in the last couple of months, or maybe it was the last couple of weeks, focusing on the stream of our experience as a meditation practice. Without trying to manipulate it or change it. Just resting one's awareness on the flow of one's experience... is a great approach to the practice of equanimity. Because invariably, as we put our awareness on the flow of our experience... we discover, or maybe we think we knew it in advance, that some of those experiences that are flying by, I love them and I want more of them. And others, I want to figure out how to be rid of them.

[00:26:39] Culturally, we would say this is not only normal, it's sane. You can't actually *improve* things without taking some steps to improve them. But from the spiritual perspective, the steps we are likely to take are exactly in the direction we mean to get away from. Dividing our experiences up into those we want and those we don't want. ... Does not improve the situation. And the *proof* of that is, having tried that for years, some of us could say decades, It doesn't work. Still, after a very long time of trying to make things better, we are in the same river of experience, having the same sense of, I want to keep that. I want to be rid of that. Equanimity is not only the practice of embracing the benefit of all sentient beings. It is also the practice of embracing our *own* benefit.

[00:28:30] Sounds paradoxical, but actually it's not. First, we have to begin with the intention of exploring this practice of equanimity. And for most of us, the truth does not lie... in *attempting* to experience equanimity in relationship to others. It's far more pertinent, far more powerful ... to practice equanimity in relationship to our own experiences. And equanimity here means, as we sit in meditation, neither holding on to the experiences nor rejecting them. It's hard for us to not hold on to things... and hard for us to not reject things. The practice will be... to first *notice* whether we are holding on things or not. The *things* are not what's important. What's important is our relationship with them. Can we just have what arises... without the added analysis of

whether or not we should have it. Whether or not we could have something else or be rid of this and get something else?

[00:31:04] Part of this is also the *practice* of contentment. Yes, contentment is a practice. Normally we think of contentment as something that happens *to* us. We are contented or not. How often do you hear someone say, 'I'm working on my contentment'? More often we hear, 'I'm working on my discontentment and I know *exactly* where it comes from. It's somebody else. ... So when we engage in our practice in this way of wanting things to be different... one of the *causes* of our discontent there is we have a false refuge. We are going for refuge, you could say, in *my* own benefit, in *my* contentment. I hope you have some, too, but... I'm working on mine. In the practice of meditation in this tradition, to practice and accomplish contentment is *absolutely* critical. It's not just a 'feel good' thing. It's actually a *key* component to successful practice. Contentment.

[00:33:04] And so we begin our practice always, as most of you know, by turning our minds *intentionally* from... refuge in all of our worldly concerns, refuge in all of our worldly relationships, refuge in our possessions, our position, even our physical and mental health. This we call a false refuge. It's false not because some third party great being said, 'don't do this' It's false because we would like to be happy and have the causes of happiness, free of suffering and its causes. And that's *not* what happens when we hold on to some experiences and reject others. When we engage in the practice of *discontentment*, it gradually leads to more suffering. So as we prepare to engage in practice of shamatha and we recite the liturgy... one helpful approach can be, especially if you've *never* done it before, is to understand the liturgy and the practice and the meditation itself as a way of becoming... content. Building contentment. So we'll start by reciting this liturgy three times together, which also includes the aspiration to be *capable* of bringing great benefit to others as well as ourselves.

sangha [00:35:29] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:37:26] Now you can practice the immeasurable equanimity... by sitting still ... not speaking. ... And if there is no experience occurring, that kind of rises up in our attention, then we just sit still. And as experiences begin to flow, some pleasant and some not so pleasant... embrace the value... of your own diversity. ... In other words, embrace the totality of your experience... rather than dividing the experiences up into good ones and bad ones. Or by whatever standard, you might divide them. Just rest your awareness on each experience as it arises. ... And even if you're distracted... it is possible to put your awareness on that too.

[00:40:05] *period of meditation*

sangha [00:57:05] *dedicating the merit*