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not recognizing nature of mind is source of confusion, and taking refuge as first step of its antidote, benefitting self and others

[00:05:32] First of all, this evening. I want to remind us of a couple of things regarding our opening recitation of The Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer. As we all understand, there is a great deal of emphasis placed upon developing our relationships with other sentient beings... in a way that encourages and expands our experience of compassion and loving kindness for others. This approach, of having a foundation of loving kindness and compassion for others... is common to nearly all spiritual traditions. And mostly, I think we could say, that approach is a cause for some joy.

[00:07:41] Sitting, as a kind of balance to that... is a common universal teaching regarding all sentient beings. Sentient beings then, we can define as those beings that have a mind. ... And do not recognize the *nature* of that mind. Whether they are human beings or animals or insects, fish in the ocean, birds in the sky... not recognizing the nature of our own minds, we are in a more or less perpetual state of confusion. Confusion regarding the arising of experiences in our stream of consciousness. That since we don't recognize the nature of the source of those experiences, we remain confused.

[00:09:30] So if you look at the teaching closely... and in your own experience... look at it regularly, you can come to a kind of conclusion... which is mostly accurate from the perspective of Buddhist teachings... we're a little perpetually on the crazy side. ... To say it slightly more kindly and maybe more accurately, not understanding the nature of the *source* of our experiences and the nature of the experience itself, we pretty much continually engage in things with our bodies and our speech and our mind... that undermine our happiness, our joy and our ability to help others.

[00:11:03] So the good news... is that the antidotes to that confusion are always with us. Our challenge is to recognize it. Recognize the confusion. And implement the antidotes. And so, therefore, we begin the practice, always, with first going for a refuge to the Buddha. That is to say, really, when we say Buddha, it can be helpful to hold that as refuge in the person who *was* a Buddha on the one hand. But sometimes we find it more useful to go for refuge to... our awakened nature or buddhanature, so that's the first refuge. The second one is all the teachings which lead us away from the confusion. And the third one is refuge in the exalted sangha. So, the great beings who are in this world living. And those who *once* lived but are no longer living, we may find great inspiration and value in studying their teachings and practicing.

[00:12:59] So there's one more piece, before we begin. And that is that when we engage in the practice of loving kindness and compassion... we can imagine that our efforts are focused on the benefit of others. But even *more* important than imagining that our efforts are for the benefit of others... is to recognize that we are each the *first* recipients of the benefit. By virtue of appreciating others, by virtue of appreciating the *suffering* of others and the happiness of others, the *value* of others without exception, we purify our own mindstreams. It's so easy to experience that. You don't need complicated, sophisticated practices. All you need to do is remind yourself how important it is to give rise to a feeling of genuinely *caring* about others. And our mindstream begins to be purified. So once the mindstream is *purified*, then we become more capable of

actually benefiting others. So those few steps we could elaborate on. And if you want to do that on the break after the meditation, we can, or anything else.

[00:15:22] Try to keep in mind, when we give rise to high aspirations for the benefit of others, that we are one of those others. We are not separate. And our aspirations for others will take root in our own mindstream even more powerfully by virtue of holding that aspiration like this. So we'll begin by reciting this prayer then three times together.

sangha [00:15:57] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:18:09] As we sit together... and meditate together this evening... we each experience a unique number of experiences and kind of experiences. Experiences which flow through our mind continuously. If we like those experiences, then we might say we're happy. And if we don't like them, we might say something like, I wish this particular train of thinking would come to an end. And if you've meditated for some time and had these experiences, surely you must have noticed... that wishing for certain experiences to end... is an impudent wish. It rarely works. And it never works, except in the short term. And if the experiences are pleasant, even very pleasant, we might wish that they could continue indefinitely. And that also has its own period. After which it will be gone. And we are powerless to repeat those experiences or stabilize them.

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[00:20:59] The best thing to do... and the thing which can be very helpful... is to just decide you will this evening remain present for every experience which arises in our mind. Whether it is joyful or some kind of suffering. Whether it is some kind of physical sensation or merely mental. Make some determination that you will... neither reject nor hold on to those experiences. But just let them come... and flow... like a river, as if you were sitting on the bank... observing all of those things floating by. ... Even when you're distracted, while it's good to bring your mind back to what you are doing... it's also good to acknowledge that the experience that distracted you is also just another experience.

[00:22:56] *period of meditation*

sangha [00:47:27] *dedicating the merit*