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Four Immeasurables in detail, distractions as object of meditation, conceptual can enhance understanding

LMC [00:01:49] So this morning we had a conversation about the Four Immeasurables. And we could continue that this evening or any other questions or things that you would like to cover this evening. We can do that. Or we can do a combination of those things... or neither.

Student 1 [00:02:20] Four Immeasurables, starting with equanimity.

LMC [00:02:23] Well, that was this morning's thing actually was equanimity.

Student 1 [00:02:27] Well, you got some reason why we didn't do it again?

LMC [00:02:33] Well, I can always think of reasons why not to do things. But... we can do that. Anyone else have any competing interests?

Student 2 [00:02:54] I do want to hear something about joy.

LMC [00:02:58] Joy. That's right. That's right. Now, you've really got me. I don't think I can get away this time.

Student 2 [00:03:04] So I'm not going anywhere this time. [laughter] I was [here this morning], but I didn't stay for the question and answer.

LMC [00:03:28] Actually, this evening we began by looking at the... just a touch, we mentioned the way that developing compassion and loving kindness, I'll leave the other two of the four aside for a moment... developing compassion and loving kindness is very helpful. So it's important for us to remember that *we* who develop loving kindness and compassion... we do that in order to purify our mindstream. So it's not just about being a good citizen in the world and developing and loving kindness and compassion for others. But in the process of *doing* those things, we change our own mind. And *that* then becomes the basis by which we *actually* can benefit others. So that system is important to understand like that. Otherwise, we end up identifying ourselves as 'I am a compassionate person'. The moment we say that we know there's something wrong with that. Not quite right.

[00:04:53] So in the system of the Four Immeasurables, we have loving kindness. Which is the wish that *all* beings would have the causes of happiness and the experience of happiness. And the compassion, the second one, immeasurable compassion is that all beings would be free of suffering and its causes. And then there is this joyful thing. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:06:11] How is this a purification of your own mindstream so that you don't become... the person doing it?

Student 3 [00:06:26] Conceited was the first thing she said.

LMC [00:06:28] Yeah. Oh, I see. That's a separate issue. First of all, many people I think, and my guess is, you're not an exception to this, that when you actually practice loving kindness and

compassion, just those first two to begin with, we have a sense that what we're doing is something good. Just engaging in the aspiration that there's something positive about that... first step. Just something positive about it. And from a Buddhist perspective, we might say that one of the things that is positive about it is that... we kind of *ignite* that potential to feel that way about others, which may not always be so active. And the idea is that by engaging in that practice of loving kindness and compassion, we more and more ignite that and it becomes more and more natural.

[00:07:44] So the loving kindness, which is, you know, focused on having the causes of happiness and the experience of happiness, we wish that on others. So no doubt we are likely not able to do that, even for all of those sentient beings that we personally know. The idea is, is that, we make that wish for *all* sentient beings without exception. But in the beginning, we naturally play this little trick on ourselves. And that is that it's easy for me to experience loving kindness and compassion for those beings that I *like*, for those who are helpful to *me*, for those who don't undermine me or say bad things about me, we divide the world up into these pieces. Like those who could be our friends, and the rest are kind of potentially enemies of some kind. So the Four Immeasurables is meant to undermine that. Like we do our very best to give rise to the wish that *all* beings experience happiness and its causes.

[00:09:10] If we just take the Four Immeasurables, they're actually pretty easy to understand on the surface. The wish that all beings would be free of suffering and its causes, the wish that they all have the causes of happiness and experience that happiness... and the *joy*. The joy generally comes from the place of... practicing giving rise to joy when we see that someone is engaging in some kind of activity, whether it's mental, physical, speech, whatever it is, that they're engaging in some kind of activity that is *highly* likely to lead to the experience of happiness for them. In other words, those are the things that we would call 'virtue'. So to see somebody engage in virtue... we take that as the probable outcome is they *will* be happy from that. And therefore, we give rise to a sense of joy. It's really important to recognize that when we say 'give *rise* to a sense of joy' that may be easy and it may not be easy. It's not always easy to give rise to a sense of joy. It's not always easy to acknowledge that what someone is doing is actually some kind of virtue... that will benefit them and others. *That's* not always easy. And that's why the fourth immeasurable of equanimity is so important.

[00:10:54] Equanimity... is usually the *first* immeasurable that is taught when you're engaging in the *practice* of the Four Immeasurables as opposed to the philosophical system of the Four Immeasurables. So they're really the same in the sense that anyone could approach them in any order. There's no specific order. But the greatest barrier to the *practice* of the Four Immeasurables is the lack of equanimity. So equanimity is sometimes... for me, this is always the case... I always feel like you teach about the Four Immeasurables, the first thing that's important is equanimity. We talked this morning a little bit, I think it's worth repeating. And I'll phrase it slightly different [than] this morning just because then I'm entertained and therefore, I'm happy. And if I'm happy you're happy, [laughter] You can slap me at any time.

[00:12:12] The enemy of equanimity is judgment. It doesn't matter whether it's a big judgment or a small judgment. The enemy of equanimity is judgment. Somebody wrote and put it on the dining room table at a three-year retreat one day. And I just happened to be going through the dining hall and there was a little note that said, not written to anybody... I can't remember the exact order of the words, but it was... to give up all judgment is to, kind of automatically, engage in the genuine practice of equanimity. Like it just happens. Judgment is the problem. And equanimity is, on the other hand, you could say, an antidote to judgment. But until we actually

experience that lack of judgment and the equanimity, it works more, I think, along the lines of abandon judgment and the equanimity arises easier.

Student 2 [00:13:29] What do you mean by judgment?

LMC [00:13:31] Judgment? Well, almost any judgment... a judgment primarily about, in this context, let's say, a judgment about somebody's activities. So if they do something or they say something, for that matter, even if you could see it, they think something and there's some judgment in there. That judgment undermines the equanimity. What we're actually doing when we engage in a judgment, if we don't see the full picture, what we're actually doing is we're denying a certain experience in our stream of consciousness. So what we want to do, like this evening, we sit down and the ideal is that we let the river of experience flow. We don't look at it and say the water's too rough, the river is too deep, there's too much pollution in it. There's too much of this. It's too wide. It's all of these things that normally our mind is filled with. And there isn't any problem with the judgment in and of itself. It's that we *believe* it. And when we believe it, the equanimity is, in essence, it's trashed.

Student 3 [00:14:57] But that judgment comes. It happens.

LMC [00:15:01] Judgment happens. Yes!

Student 3 [00:15:04] If it happens, it happens. That's experienced.

LMC [00:15:11] That is true and there's nothing wrong with that experience. So that's what we're trying to get at here, is what actually do we need to do? So, we cannot just decide, 'I'm not going to have judgment.' Try it. [laughs] I hope you have a sense of humor after you decided to give it up.

Student 4 [00:15:33] Forgiveness.

LMC [00:15:35] Forgiveness? Well, the problem with forgiveness is it's just a latter-day judgment. So, you know, it's yeah, you know, it's good. It's okay. But the real question here is if we can see the role that judgment plays in our *own* mindstream, we can then have a sense of where it comes from and how it works. And we're starting to have a sense of equanimity with the experience of judgment. So we *always* say, when it comes to equanimity, there's no problem with judgment. For that matter, there's no problem with *hatred*. Let's just put the big one on the table. The problem is, is that we believe it and we're attached to it and we identify with it. *That's* the problem. An experience flows through the mind... there's hatred. That's how I'm feeling about myself today. That some other... it doesn't matter! If you don't stop it and hold on to it, it's not poisonous. As soon as you identify with it, you are *poisoned* by definition. Equanimity now, for the time being, is pretty much impossible.

[00:16:50] So the trick is, can we just see that stream of consciousness flow continually? It's very difficult. It's partly difficult because of the... if you have done a lot of shamatha, it can be very difficult to... not stop, for example, when something... when a distraction occurs and the distraction just naturally, if you've done a lot of shamatha, the distraction is the enemy of the shamatha. So you have to do something to fix that. And that's, of course, a totally legitimate and probably most common method of meditation in the entire world. But we're talking about something which is a little deeper here. When we sit down with a willingness to just see our own minds mindstream, whatever occurs.

[00:17:59] And probably the biggest difficulty of that meditation is that... from time to time, things will arise that we have the habit of calling the enemy of the meditation... a distraction! Almost anything could be a distraction. I mean, I can look at this thing [bowl striker] sitting here and think it needs to be kind of aligned. [laughs] Simple distraction. Or you can just use the distractions as the object of your meditation. And that is very difficult. But that's what we're playing with, really.

[00:18:42] And when we talk about the Four Immeasurables, the Four Immeasurables are often, I mean, they are taught very early in our meditation, learning to meditate. And I think there's a value to that. Because most of us will say, I would like to be more compassionate. I would like to be more kind. I would like to be more joyful, especially when I see people who I think have *no* positive qualities and I see them doing something good. Can I rejoice in that? Maybe that's hard. If that's hard, that's a good place to stop and look. All the things that pass through our stream of consciousness are things to see. We are seeing the manifestation of our own mindstreams, which is the most intimate process that we could possibly engage in.

Student 5 [00:19:44] Could you put expectations and judgment... kind of the same?

LMC [00:19:56] Would you call an expectation a judgment?

Student 5 [00:19:59] Yeah.

LMC [00:19:59] Yeah. That's kind of my sense too. We can get kind of strung out over the, you know, the fine details of a definition of something. And oftentimes, some of the great teachers in the past, when they would write, and today we have their books, and often in the beginning of that book, there'll be an injunction against paying too close attention to what you're reading. [laughs] Like you need to kind of step back from it a little bit and get the *feel* of it, the sense of it. If you get down to the point where you're defining words and trying to think whether or not it's the best word for the thing, then you may be missing the real point of what you're reading. So I think that we can sometimes be silly about this thing.

[00:20:59] What was the word you used? Expectation. Yeah. ... But even expectation, in a moment, if you're intending to practice the Four Immeasurables, and you have an understanding of all four of them, you see an expectation arise. And that can easily be embraced by your sense of equanimity. What has arisen? I can call it an expectation. But it is also just like a thought. It's here one moment. It's gone the next. And if it's not gone the next, it's probably because I keep reaffirming the expectation. ... Is that okay?

Student 6 [00:22:08] So when you mentioned joy, an old kind of question popped up again. It's popped up a number of times over the years. And that is, how come, sometimes I am just plain sobbing... and yet my sense is that the basis of that is joy?

LMC [00:22:32] What's the basis?

Student 6 [00:22:35] Even though I'm sobbing... not happily sobbing, but still, I have a strong sense that the basis of it is joy. And something you said like, well, maybe not judging on the surface of what's going on, but what it might lead to or the idea that it may be virtuous or something. And it's like the sense that I've had of the sobbing being joy is because of a connection. And so to me, that's... one of the bigger, useful things in relative reality, is

connections between people, beings. And so then it's dropping the judgment about, well, sobbing should be painful, right? It's like... no, there's some joy there! And sometimes when I'm aware of that joy in the sobbing, I think, well, maybe I'm just wacko. [laughs] But it feels like there's joy. And then the only thing that comes up when I'm contemplating after is that it's that connection which is virtuous. So I don't know how that fits in the teachings on joy.

LMC [00:24:33] Yeah, it's a good question. Because... obviously, if there are Four Immeasurables, there's meant to be four, not five and not three. And there's something included, some way in which those four, usually within the context of some Buddhist approach to something, they'll say there's this many or that many and so on, and there are some exceptions. But usually that is meant to be kind of a package. You know, that's it. The Four Immeasurables... teachings on them are some of the most profound that there are. And they link in and are part of, my brain is wanting to say, virtually all. But actually, I think it's more accurate to say they link in and are integrated with every practice that we engage in. There are no exceptions. ... You're looking for one, aren't you? [laughs]

Student 6 [00:25:54] No, I'm just... reviewing.

LMC [00:25:59] They're really of critical importance. And the joy piece is, in a certain way, the most difficult. And I can say from my own experience that there, for a long time, used to be a sadness about loving kindness and a sadness about compassion. And equanimity was more of a conceptual understanding than experiential. But the joy piece is there, with some importance, because we can feel a sense of sadness, and even in compassion, where we're having a sense of making the strong wish that all beings, and maybe we're using somebody in front of us at that very time, or we're feeling this compassion for them. And so we make the wish that all beings will be free of the causes of suffering and experience freedom from suffering. It doesn't feel inherently like there's joy in there.

[00:27:24] It feels like would be nice if there was some joy in there. But actually, I'm dealing with a really difficult situation here and it doesn't always feel joyful. But that's where we start. That's not inherently the case, that a very difficult situation for someone, that the potential for joy, right in the middle of that, is always there. It's never somewhere else. Just like in the midst of joy, there can suddenly be something that causes us to weep. And it could be a joyful weeping. It could also be a not so joyful weeping. So we don't get to separate this thing, actually, in a way which is kind of in accordance with our Western scientific approach to things.

[00:28:29] These Four Immeasurables are actually all one thing. But it's difficult for us to *get* to that place all at once. And so we practice these things separately in little chunks here and there, when we can. So, for example, the practice of joy could be... it's commonly stated as 'joy in the virtue of others.' *But...* what about joy in my own virtue? Do I not get to have joy for my own virtue? No. That's self-aggrandizement and it's all these other things. But that's just to say that our meditation and our practice of the Immeasurables is not perfect. But when we *feel* that compassion, that wish for beings to be free, it's important that we *seed* that with joy.

[00:29:36] What is the basis of anything good that we might do that isn't preceded by the wish that thing would happen? Someone who's dying and certainly going to die, like if you're in a hospital and someone who's dying is certainly going to die, there are times when people struggle against that. And it's hard to see the joy. But there should be *some* joy, from your perspective being there, if you can actually make the wish, which is actually relatively easy to

make in the presence of someone who's dying, that they would be free of the causes of suffering.

[00:30:22] Which are *not* the *actual* circumstance that we can see with them. But rather they're some combination, almost surely, of their attachment and aversion. The higher the aversion goes, the greater the suffering. And we know, if not from experience, we know that you can't just say, 'give up your attachment.' Most of the things that we might say when somebody is having a lot of suffering will actually not be helpful. So there's a whole range of things that need to come about by virtue of just working with this material a lot over and over and over for a long time until we gain the skill to see what's happening.

[00:31:22] And the Four Immeasurables are meant to be an antidote to the lack of loving kindness, the lack of compassion, a lack of joy, in general, in our practice. And the lack of equanimity, which is a really big deal. Really big deal.

Student 6 [00:31:55] While developing skill, it's... essentially gaining strength from believing that it's the right direction. Trust in the direction. And so then it's... I'm not skilled yet, but there's some strength to be gained just from believing that while practicing,

LMC [00:32:31] We may be our own favorite person in the whole universe. But we also may be our most despised person. In other words, we are with ourselves like we are with others. And so when we engage in this practice, we need to not only make the wish to be free of suffering for *ourselves*, because we're talking about *immeasurable*... loving kindness. It's a serious mistake, not a small one, to include *all* sentient beings in your aspiration except for yourself, who *clearly* doesn't deserve it. [laughs] You know, we just have that sense, like I can't do it for myself, but I can do it for others. This is not correct. There's a mistake in there. Both in the understanding of the Four Immeasurables and in the practice of them.

Dora [00:33:45] So this is a tangential question, but I've just been wondering ... and theoretical, I guess... wondering whether... so we talk about joy. We talk about ordinary happiness and we talk about, you know, ultimate happiness. We talk about, and sometimes the joy one is translated the supreme bliss. There's obviously some different joys. And I'm curious whether what, you know, sort of... making the grossest distinction, like... is there a relationship or what is a relationship, if any, of just an ordinary sense of joy or happiness and real, you know, ultimate happiness? Is it a question duration and intensity, or is it just a whole other thing? You know, what is the relationship?

LMC [00:35:13] We need to get Ken McLeod here. [laughter] He's coming to town, you know.

Dora [00:35:25] Well, have him over here.

LMC [00:35:28] We could ask him this question and one thing we know for sure; he would have an answer. Would we even *like* the answer is another question. He would have an answer. ... This is what I think is the case. It's not one thing or the other. So especially... you're kind of taking it up, notches here, all of us could say, 'I know what joy is like, even if I don't have much, I know what it is.' And we have some idea about how to magnify and enhance that joy. And we know what gets in the way of it. And so we could have a series of ordinary practices, not even inside of a spiritual context, right. Like, this is just kind of like skillful living. You want to have more joy? You do these things. And you want to have more friends? Don't yell at them so much, you know, be nice to them, compliment them, appreciate them and so on. [laughter] And

sometimes I think that's a good thing. That's a good starting place for a *lot* of people and really helpful. And then they experience some progression. And then they want more. And pretty soon now they're kind of at the door of wanting to transcend ordinary stuff.

[00:37:16] So I think that the ability to have the joy is based upon the transcendent. That's my own personal opinion. I have not heard that teaching, but I feel like my small experience of that progression is actually like that. When I look back at smaller joys, or I get smaller joys on a daily basis, I can see that they are connected. It's like I have that because there is this potential which I only get a glimpse of, and then I sense like, oh, I see... what this is. And I think it does go all the way... appropriately, it gets renamed. And I think there's a little bit of an unfortunate thing there because we often rename it before we know what the thing is we're naming.

[00:38:16] That can be a problem, I think in any spiritual path. You *name* the thing. And since we understand the *word* that we've called it, we now think we know what that thing is. And so, you know, we have this thing in the vajrayana of attaining the state of bliss. And that bliss is definitely associated with just a sense of joy and well-being. But that is to trivialize it also. And yet, it's also clear, that we don't have a word for that thing. ... Any word we put on it will not be comprehensible or helpful unless you somehow can tag it to some experience that you've had.

[00:39:09] You know, I could say, yeah, the shape of your head is known to be '*floch*'. Among head shapes, Dora has a floch. And you look at Dora and you think, what is it about Dora's face or head that makes it a floch? Well, we just don't know anything. And so it's *trivialized*, in this instance, because we don't have anything meaningful to connect it to. But if we go in hear some great teacher... I think it requires that for us at this point in time [laughs] to hear a great teacher and they talk about the progression of practice to the point of kind of a transcendent happiness, which we call bliss. And it is only *sort of* connected to our ordinary sense of happiness. We definitely don't *lose* that. On the other hand, the bliss is not just more... of the happiness. Like more hours of the day happier. It's is much more than that.

[00:40:28] It's actually also connected with the recognition of the nature of mind and a bunch of other things. And I have often thought, personally, that I heard the teachings on 'bliss' before I was ready. Before I felt like I had any sense at all of what it was being applied to. And I think those things happen commonly. In traditions like what we're working with, we hear a conceptual explanation of something, which, because we're all educated and smart, we understand the explanation and we connect it to that thing. But we actually didn't get it. And there is this injunction, in the mahayana, but really even more in the vajrayana, where... to give a teaching to people who are not ready is often a really terrible thing. Because they will practice it and not get the result. And then in the future, feel like 'I tried that. It doesn't work.' And that's considered to be a terrible thing. It's like you cheat people out of what they could have had. But now they're in a place of feeling like it's not worth working with because I already did that.

[00:42:02] So I think that definitely happened to me. I just had that sense of like, I don't get this thing. And what are they *really* talking about? I'm sitting here practicing all day and it's like I don't know what this thing *is*! And I'm looking at the people who are talking about bliss. And I'm thinking to myself, they don't seem to have what I think bliss is. But what do I know about bliss? Nothing. So it's kind of like the whole circle has felt not always skillful. But then there was Kalu Rinpoche who said, you know, there's a whole bunch of teachings that are so profound, you can give them to anybody. Because nobody, but somebody, who has had this level of realization can understand it anyway. So they won't have any relationship with it. So that's okay. [laughter] And I think there's a big piece of truth in that, too. To be careful.

[00:43:03] Sometimes I think we're *too* careful. We're so careful that people understand what it is they're doing. And they are hungry for the next piece. And we don't give it to them for a long enough period of time. And they abandon their practice at some point because it's not bearing fruit and they're not getting the next step. It's not working, like that. And I suspect that has been a puzzle since the time of the Buddha. Like, how do you do it... in a way which is skillful?

[00:43:48] Bliss. You hear the word bliss. "You will have bliss." You think, boy, when? Perhaps I could pay a little more today, and get it sooner.

Student 8 [00:44:05] I have a question. Kind of seems to me like in our culture, loving kindness and compassion are kind of interchangeable terms. What's the difference between loving kindness and compassion?

LMC [00:44:30] Yeah, well traditionally, the simple distinction is compassion is the wish that beings, somebody or all beings, be free of the suffering they have. Be free of the causes of suffering and free of the experience of suffering. And of course, for us culturally, that will usually have something specific about it. Like they would be free of *that* suffering. But in the context of the Immeasurables, it's just free of suffering and its causes. It's no good to be free of suffering and not be free of the causes. You just get it back again. And loving kindness is the wish to have the causes of happiness and well-being... and to experience those things. And I think I would add in there, and to see the *connection* between what it is you do and what the experience is. ... That's just my own thing. [laughs] ... Let's see, did you have something else?

Student 8 [00:46:08] I guess it's sort of... two sides of the same thing. Two-step process.

LMC [00:46:17] That's right. Yeah, I think that's true. And... you can also, if you work with any of the Four Immeasurables a bit, you can start to see all the nuanced pieces of it. Which there are just uncountable pieces of it. Nuances here and there. So, like what you just mentioned... is a new nuance. So you have loving kindness. I wish that you have the experience of happiness and well-being. And you also embody the causes of that experience so you'll continue to have it. So that can also be a nuance like, 'oh, I experienced well-being and happiness and now I don't.' So it could be, because I'm saying that refrain and repeating the Four Immeasurables, for example, in some way, then we're more likely to recognize... 'Oh, I'm missing the causes piece.' So it's natural to feel well-being at any given time. But it's also just natural for it to not be there. The way you make it there is by engaging in the causes that bring it about. So now you're looking at the study and practice of the Four Immeasurables, which is very nice. It's a very nice set of teachings.

Student 9 [00:48:06] You said a while ago, about equanimity, I think, or I imagined you said, whatever, it was helpful for me that you said that equanimity comes from meditation. I'm leaning toward the conceptual is really kind of inadequate for working with these kinds of immeasurables. But somehow... I'm wondering if... I hear often the 'practice of the Four Immeasurables... I don't have enough teachings on that. I don't know what that means, 'Practice the Four Immeasurables.' I know I would have trouble deciding I'm going to be loving kindness. I'm going to practice loving kindness throughout my day. So this person and this person and this person and this person, I'm going to work. That seems really conceptual to me. And I'm wondering if it's also true, maybe I'm just lazy, you know, wondering if also true that the immeasurables are the *fruit* of meditation? That they kind of rise from that.

LMC [00:49:15] Oh absolutely. Well, they do! Of course. I think that if you explore that experientially, as well as conceptually, you can see that almost every practice we do... let me reword that. *Every* practice we do includes, at the beginning, and really at the end, the immeasurables. But we kind of tease it out a little bit so that in a certain way, you could say it's thin. Thin enough to work with. Where we begin the practice by saying 'I will now practice the absorption of calm abiding to release all beings from their particular suffering and establish them in lasting peace and happiness.' If you know the Four Immeasurables, you look at that and there they are. They're not listed. This is one. This is two. This is three. But they're all in there. They're right there.

[00:50:15] And so every time that we engage in any of those, we begin to see how it's connected to the others. It's a very *simple* formula. Simple formulas, of course, we know in our own lives, are often the most profound. And the things that are used the most. [laughs] And therefore the easiest to embody in our practice, to remember, to do. Our great downfall, in terms of our abilities and to engage in the practices between sessions all pretty much comes down to... can I remember to do it? And most people will say, 'mostly not.' [laughs] I get home at night. And I intended to, at least give rise to one of the Four Immeasurables once today. And most people will say, 'I can go weeks and never remember.' It's amazing.

[00:51:19] So it takes something special in order to make it happen. And that special thing is often something *very* simple, that is *very personal*. We can remember it because of *this* thing. Like every day I see this person. And actually... this person, I'm actually saying here a little bit of a personal experience, this person is very unhappy. Every day they come to work. I see they're very unhappy... all the time. They are not nice to themselves and they're not nice to anyone else that they're around either. And so... you could take that person. This is *my* charge. My charge is to change that game. I will be sufficiently kind to them that they will have no choice but to respond. That might take months. Daily something, daily somethings. But it works. In my experience, invariably.

[00:52:28] And during that process then, because you're looking at the Four Immeasurables, you start to have a nuanced respect for those immeasurables. And you start to get subtle in the way that you understand them and how you relate to them and use them in relationship to others. ... It's easy to make somebody feel joy for a moment. It's simple. ... Especially if they don't know you very well. [laughter]

Student 9 [00:53:14] I just wonder if it's you, if it's your plan, if it's what you do, if it's that approach, or if it is simply the *practice* coming through?

LMC [00:53:23] It's the practice. Yeah, it's the practice. It's your own personal experience with your own self. As you love yourself and as you hate yourself and everything in between. That's exactly what the relationship with everyone else is too. So the conceptual thing is meant to be a support. Because we have that as a tool. Because of our education and our experience in life and being really forced to work, if you will, *paid* to work with the concepts often, then we're pretty good at that. And if we engage in our meditation, we can see that that conceptual understanding is *not* the experiential piece. *But...* I can enhance my understanding by working with the conceptual piece a little bit. So I think it's all of that.

[00:54:19] And to just kind of, you know, embrace another individual with your practice, with some kind of kindness. I brought someone that I worked with every day, it was an older woman and she was so sour. I used to get to work before she did and... she liked really strong coffee.

And of course, she continuously complained about how weak the coffee was. I mean, like and not just in the morning, *all* day. Complaints, one after the other. And so I would go into the little coffee room and I would put two bags of coffee and make a *really* strong cup of coffee, and I would secretly leave it on her desk. It took about a month before she figured out who it was, [laughs] but it was great. She had no idea who it was. And I used to talk with her and say, it's very odd, isn't it? Like, who would do that? [laughter] I found a lot of joy in that. She enjoyed the coffee. It was totally against the rules. She wouldn't do it. She wouldn't do it on her own. She wouldn't mix two bags in there because it's not good. You could lose your job. So I think we play with these things and we can beat ourselves up for being a little bit manipulative, but we're probably going to do that anyway, so what difference does it make. [laughter]

[00:56:03] I think our time is up. Thanks for coming tonight. I'm sorry we're a little over time. Let's dedicate our merit.

sangha [00:56:13] *dedicating the merit*