

2017_05_07_1_Human_LMC.mp4

refuge: causes of suffering from false and details of 3 Jewels, investigation as ground for confidence, 4 thoughts: being human

[00:01:51] [00:03:52] We always begin our meditation and contemplation on going for refuge and generating the enlightened mind. The wish to fully wake up in order to accomplish the benefit of all sentient beings. A rather grand aspiration. Meant to be not just a life's work, but life's work in the *plural* of many lives. A good antidote... to the wish, the attachment... to accomplish our own benefit quickly.

[00:05:29] Today's sessions are organized in a manner of a theme... for a specific purpose. And the purpose is one that we have explored before... and will be our *focus* today. That everything that we do... with our speech... with our bodies and with our minds... can be overtly, clearly, the practice of the Dharma... leading us in a direction of accomplishing complete awakening. No matter how mundane, or unlikely, the activities of body, speech and mind are... they can all be... and as serious practitioners of the Dharma, *should* be... not wasted. They can all become part of the path itself.

[00:07:38] And so the invitation today is to make a special effort in that direction. Which will require you, in some cases... to ponder, contemplate... some things which are joyous... empowering... delightful and sometimes scary. But if you will just stay with it for the duration today, perhaps by the end of the day, this afternoon, when we finish... you might see how all the pieces can fit together... in such a way that you can recreate the picture over and over again.

[00:09:19] So we'll begin with refuge and bodhicitta, which most or perhaps all of you are familiar with, but just so that we don't get off to a false start... we begin by understanding, contemplating, pondering how it is. ... I want to say, use the word *all* in this case, how *all* of our suffering arises by virtue of... our attachment to the wrong things, our desire for the wrong things. We pursue and grasp the very things... that bring us suffering. And then, when we clearly experience the suffering, we often decide that the problem is not the *false* refuge, but rather that we're not pursuing that false refuge with enough vigor. ... And so we increase our efforts... until the suffering is so intense... that we do a kind of reset and start the process over.

[00:11:39] So the first thing we do is recognize this phenomena. ... If we ponder it and look at it long enough, sometimes seconds is enough, other times it takes years, maybe our whole life, but if we ponder it enough, it will, at some point, make us laugh. We are shooting for the laughter this afternoon, at the latest. [laughter] The first thing of refuge is to recognize that we, somehow miraculously, managed to remain in the process of taking refuge in the very things we're trying to avoid.

[00:12:57] The antidote is to *press* ourselves into... a refuge which, at the *very* least, holds the potential... to bring joy and insight. And that refuge, the formal refuge, is to turn to refuge in... the Buddha. And the Buddha here can be any of a number of things that you feel comfortable with. But for this moment, let's just take the historical figure. Kind of a placeholder, if you will. We turn our minds to refuge in that Buddha. Not as a god, not as a deity. But just for now, as the recollection of a great being... who overcame the false refuges that we all so dearly hold... and rose above them. So, in other words, we're taking refuge in an *example*. Not a bad start.

[00:15:00] And of course, we all want to hear and understand all of the teachings about the meditation practices and the methods to accomplish our own benefit. And we call those teachings the Dharma. And because we are human beings... and our relationships with other human beings especially, but also with non-human beings... animals, our pets, birds. So we form, naturally, communities. There are a rare few who... can withstand not being in community of some kind. And so it behooves us on the path and beyond to take refuge in that community. Community where individuals share the same spiritual path. Provide everything from ordinary comforts all the way to... sharing realization on the path. Teaching each other the methods tried and not tried... succeeding and failing, at all those things. So we turn our minds to refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha. ... And when we have done that, we also give rise to what we call the enlightened attitude.

[00:17:36] Enlightened attitude. The attitude contains the wish to accomplish our own realization. Which *is* our own benefit. But accomplishing realization means that we are becoming more skillful, more capable of accomplishing, or *aiding* the accomplishment of enlightenment for others. It's meant to be a joyful aspiration. ... So we'll begin this morning, then by first reciting the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer three times together.

sangha [00:18:57] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:20:42] Now, the meditation practice called calm abiding... is, as we know, very simple to understand and very difficult to accomplish. In the practice of calm abiding, we put our awareness... upon some object, external, solid object. Or a visualized object. Or even a bodily sensation... and more. Calm abiding is the ability to remain... still and awake... in all circumstances. The latter is the difficult part. That 'awake in all circumstances' business. ...

[00:22:34] One of the difficulties with calm abiding is that often it's not interesting. ... So I brought with me this morning some suggestions for making it interesting and even compelling. So we'll begin with first one. I have four of them. They are meant to be interesting enough such that you'll feel compelled to come back after lunch. [laughter] First of all, should be easy for every one of us to acknowledge... that we take it for granted... most of the time, when we are *reasonably* healthy, we take it for granted... that we have a reasonably healthy body. We take it for granted that we were born a human being and not a worm or some other physical characteristic... that does not feel appealing. ...

[00:25:30] When we contemplate... the teachings of the Dharma, the contemplation itself, at its best, is often... *should* be, a kind of investigation. Investigating our understanding of the teaching. Investigating whether or not we are benefiting by the teaching. Or whether or not we feel *confident* that we understand the teaching. ... When we are at the stage, which we return to over and over for the duration of the entire path, when we are at the stage... of contemplating and investigating the teaching and our relationship with it... we are laying the ground... for *confidence*. ... Confidence in the path in general. ... Confident in the promise that our practice will lead to our own benefit... and the benefit of others.

[00:27:38] One of the great obstacles, as we mentioned first, is that false refuge business. And if one could snap their fingers... and effectively decide not to go for that false refuge, we would be way ahead. But it's so difficult. And we, generally speaking, don't look... for the effective refuge. We generally look for the one which, in the end, does not fit.

[00:28:55] In the context of great teachings on the Dharma, there is a fundamental teaching, which generally speaking, we say, one should engage in for the duration of their entire life until full enlightenment, even though it also happens to be a bedrock contemplation. We don't seem to ever get beyond it. So therefore, best to enjoy it. That teaching is on what we call the Four Thoughts. Sometimes they're called the Four Mental Turnings.

[00:30:06] And the first one has to do... with what we could call, in a kind of negative way, a lack of appreciation for what we have. ... We each have a human body. And we can go down the line, which is traditional, to enumerate what that means and all the things that we have that we take for granted. ... And we're all very smart, educated and so on, and so we figure it out rather quickly. After which, when we hear the words, 'The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind' we are like Pavlov's dog. We are instantly bored. ... And that is not the right response.

[00:31:50] So let us try, first of all, this morning, the practice of calm abiding. Placing our awareness upon various *alternative* possibilities that we are grateful did *not* occur. ... And we will cover the other three over the course of the day. ...

[00:32:41] The best way... well let's not be so rash, let's just say one of the best ways... to appreciate what we have, whether it's this life as a human being or whatever else it is, the best way to *appreciate* it, is to imagine not having it. And one thing we should be really good at as Buddhists is imagining. We are *professional* imaginers. Especially in the higher altitude of the vajrayana, we are professional imaginers. We can imagine the unimaginable. And live in that space.

[00:33:40] So this morning now before our first break, I'd like you to imagine... some form of existence that feels... well, let's say that you feel really glad... you didn't inherit it. The worm, the bug, the fish in the ocean. An animal in the forest. A ghost. Or a human form that is not entirely intact, in the sense that it's not quite possible to manifest our best given the circumstances. Think for a moment... what would be something that you would put near the top of your list to not have been born as. ... And don't get superstitious on me. Some people will say, if I imagine that I could have been born a worm, that the next thing is I will be a worm. So far, we've never even heard a rumor of such a thing. But it would be pretty exciting!

[00:35:54] Just take ten minutes. Imagine a form of life that you are so grateful to have not had, even though you're also not *very* grateful for being a human. Imagine yourself in this form. Place your awareness on it, upon *yourself* in that form. Not external to yourself, but as the very thing that you identify with as... yourself. Allow your mind to just rest there on the image and experience of being a different form. Ideally, it's a form that you do not want... that you would not have chosen. ... Treat the contemplation as a meditation... with shamatha, calm abiding. Hold your awareness on... the imagination of the form you have taken. When you are distracted by whatever thing, that you recognize you're distracted, bring it back immediately. Do your best to hold your attention on that form.

[00:38:06] *short meditation*

[00:41:28] Now, take a couple of minutes... and imagine... that you were born as a human being. Reasonably well fit, mentally competent and so on. But your circumstances were not good. ... Perhaps you were born into a time and place where war and famine were the norm. Not so difficult to imagine that these days. ... So just for a couple of minutes, place your awareness

upon that prospect. ... Holding the mind there, gently. Allowing whatever experience arises to arise unimpeded.

[00:43:03] short meditation

[00:44:21] And then... as we bring this first contemplation to an end... allow your mind again to rest for a few moments. Still and quiet.

[00:44:47] short meditation

sangha [00:45:26] *dedicating the merit*