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habituating patterns, discerning wisdom, mind training, 4 Thoughts as antidote to the causes of samsara, some pitfalls with insight meditation

LMC [00:00:01] [recording started late] However, that can give us a kind of awesome sense of one, certain powerlessness in all of it, and on the other hand, a certain power. Like anything that I do, will carry a result. So many of us could say, I don't know how to do it, but at least I aspire that every last thought, every last deed... would be something positive that would bear it's fruit. It's pretty easy to imagine that. What's difficult, to have our mind fall into that place... automatically, all the time. But mostly our habitual patterns happen automatically all the time *anyway*. So we understand how you get *there*. You just keep repeating the thing and pretty soon you discover, hey, I didn't even try to do that. It just happened. That's going to happen anyway, whether you're playing with it or not. [laughs] So you may as well play a role.

[00:01:06] And then we can see the Buddha said, you know, you can't see all those connections. Well, that should kind of come to the point of a sense of, *duh*. You know, I can't taste every drop of saltwater in the ocean either just to check and see whether it's salty, too. But we know by virtue of having tasted so much, that yeah, it is, it must be.

Student 1 [00:01:30] I loved your image of, you know, the rock into the pond. Which it's a simple image. I mean, you think that even the rock falls down into the water. We don't know if it's going to hit.... the bottom of the pond.

LMC [00:01:45] We do stuff all day long, all night long. We have no idea what the result will necessarily be. But the point of the practice is that... in a certain way it sounds counter to Buddhist principles, but what we're really trying to do is develop a certain kind of habitual pattern. And that pattern, if played out far enough, will actually undo itself. But, in the short run, it gives us a habitual pattern, which is at least useful for ourselves and for others. That's my two bits worth. Let's see. Now, the other thing was... ?

Student 2 [00:02:34] Some kind of practice... in judging.

LMC [00:02:57] Yeah, yeah. Well, one thing is the four things... we haven't done them all yet, but part of your answer is in the fourth one. These four contemplations are in so many of the traditions and lineages, it's like I don't personally know one very close that doesn't *emphasize* this. And we hear them so often that we feel... I know when Kalu Rinpoche was around, it's like every teaching that he gave had the Four Thoughts in it. There weren't any exceptions. Until you started thinking, like if he said we are going to do a teaching on the Four Thoughts, you go... oh wow... again! You know. And then I'd go and fall asleep and then wake up and all these things. [laughter] But it's emphasized so much *not* because... it's a beginner's practice, but because it's the foundation of *every* practice. Even after two years on retreat, the long retreatants spent two months doing nothing but the Four Thoughts. And predictably, what was their response when they heard? Oh, no! [laughter] And yet every one of them said, maybe the most inspiring two months of the entire retreat.

[00:04:33] So that's the other side of it, is that if you can actually rest your awareness on those things and contemplate them, and then you start to get a sense of like *deep* gratitude for our precious human existence. And then, like, what do I do now? You know, they've got all the tools.

So you just have to kind of push them along, make them go. And when they stop, you push them a little more and then it comes around. So on the one hand, they're beginning practices. On the other hand, they're right there at the most advanced practices too. They don't go away. Which tells you that they are very important.

[00:05:17] You're a human being, living with other humans and all. And you can't appreciate that you're a human being with other humans and all. You haven't yet entered the path in a certain way. There has to be a sense of appreciation of what we have. And there shouldn't be any judgment around that. You know, like it wouldn't be right for me to say, you're not a good person because you don't fully understand this. That would be completely against the whole thing. And it would not be helpful. And the likelihood is you never come back. [laughs] So it's clear that the nudge has to be kind of gentle and compelling at some level.

[00:06:00] And I think the fourth one, we'll see that... there's sort of a fifth one there that I cheated on and added it in. It's not... we'll see. [omitted Bill's comments]

Student 3 [00:10:01] I really appreciated the focus today, because you gave the teachings a couple of years at the New Year's Retreat. I just know you're going through the Four Thoughts That Change the Mind and I so appreciated today, you doing that again. Because, you know, I hear it differently.

LMC [00:10:34] Bill's point of discernment though was actually a critical piece. I think it is true that first, the most difficult thing is equanimity in relationship to others... is very difficult. It's not our habit. And we think of ourselves as discerning [laughs] long before we actually *are* discerning. We're just really rationalizing our actions and behaviors and all calling it discernment, if we use that word. But the discernment is actually really important. And it's not so difficult to understand that discernment, in one sense, as a *category*.

[00:11:16] Wisdom is generally divided into two forms. There's *discerning* wisdom and there's non-discerning wisdom. The discerning wisdom is the one where... you have advanced enough in understanding what you can do with your body, with your speech, with your mind that will actually be *helpful* for yourself and for others. So that you *stop* doing the things that bring about the suffering of samsara. You notice that when I'm really attached to myself and what other people think of me, I find myself in trouble most of the time. And so, at a certain point, maybe I notice like... *this* seems to be the problem. It's not others. It's me being attached to what they think of me, for example. And so then the issue is, how long does it take you before you can actually *act* on that in the midst of the pain? That's really what the path is about... for the most part, for a very long period of time.

[00:12:29] And the discerning wisdom also takes into account the creation of karma. So the causes and effects that we've put in place that we know will bear their fruit at some point. We want to create causes that bring about positive things at some point. Even if there's no truth to karma whatsoever. Even if *that* were true. Even if we couldn't even *witness* it in the short term around, that would still be a wise and skillful thing to do. To develop that discerning wisdom. Even in a smaller context, it would still be the wise thing to do.

[00:13:07] But at a certain point, we might say enlightenment, then the discerning wisdom gradually disappears and the non-discerning wisdom becomes the thing. Where there's no requirement to look at what we're doing, because the non-discerning wisdom is like either already enlightened or it's just at the kind of doorstep of it. Whatever is seen is immediately also

met with... the most appropriate, most skillful thing to do. In one sense, you could say the judgment is at another level. It's not weighing pros and cons. It's just very clear.

[00:13:53] The example that Kalu Rinpoche used to use, though in one way, it's not a very good example, nonetheless kind of points it out. When the mother is walking with the child and the child runs out into the traffic, they don't weigh the odds that a child will be hit or not hit. They're in the street, like rapidly. And *even* to the extent of breaking the child's arm to get it out of the way. And it's all skillful. It's all that discerning wisdom. Except in that case, it's non-discerning. No thought. It's just obvious what the right thing is. So that's not actually an example of non-discerning wisdom. Non-undiscerning wisdom is just kind of, what do you say, an analogy for it. Yeah. And the Four Thoughts are like part of that whole thing. Even though they're very simple to see and understand, they're critical. And we'll cover how those Four Thoughts actually come around in a full circle. In that all the way back to refuge in the enlightened attitude. ... Okay?

Student 4 [00:15:11] So I don't understand how we can arrive at a true discerning wisdom, if we have no way to *fully* understand what's happening and the causes of it. So I can I see relative. I mean, we all make relative decisions about what we know. Do we just know larger and larger circles, and so we grow into greater discerning wisdom? But can we ever really have discerning wisdom?

LMC [00:16:44] Non-discerning looks easier, doesn't it? Just do... whatever. But it's based upon actually *seeing* the entire situation in its *actual* nature.

Student 4 [00:16:58] Well yeah, but that's so far away.

LMC [00:17:00] So far away that it's easy. [laughs] Yeah, I get it.

Student 4 [00:17:02] It's easy because that's like, you know. Yeah, you know... ain't going to happen.

LMC [00:17:07] They can never hold this against me! [laughter] While the discerning wisdom, in a way, I think this is part of the conundrum of the Buddha saying, and I'm sure that he must have wished that he wouldn't say it or didn't have to say it... that sentient beings in general, they can't see all of these interconnections. Which is as easy to understand as it is to realize how easy non-discerning wisdom is too. Because I can't understand it. But what he was really just saying is, the myriad of interconnections is impossible to fathom.

[00:17:54] So, I think we would all say, that *doesn't* therefore lead... to a reasonable person concluding that there is no rational basis for discerning wisdom. The rational basis would be, or is, that understanding as much as you do, that... certain actions lead to suffering... you avoid those actions. Just in the most simple way. Of course, it can be more complex. But the simplicity is... that I see what causes trouble for myself and others, then I avoid that.

[00:18:42] Then there's the question of... how do I avoid that? How do I avoid that when my whole being wants to do something else? Like get a gun [laughs] or something that I *know* is not the right thing to do. But people do this all the time, day and night. In the entire world, they do the very thing that brings them suffering. Because they are not clear about the connection between what they do with their body, speech and mind and their own suffering. And the suffering of others, which doubles back on them and causes suffering and so on. Seeing all of that relative phenomena, *very* relative phenomena, is the basis of discerning wisdom. And it's

not complete because if you could see the *whole* thing, then it would likely be the non-discerning wisdom at that point. But even right now, you can't see the whole thing.

[00:19:43] If you knew that there was going to be a meteor hit the sidewalk right where you were going to stand in five minutes, you wouldn't go. And if 20 people were going to stand there, you would get them out of the way. You could say that's what the whole thing looks like, but we don't see the whole thing. And we don't even see the relative things an awful lot of the time. Where we're really just in our own habitual patterns.

[00:20:07] Starting with... the illusion of self and our enormous attachment to it. Attachment to it's well-being. Psychically, physically, in so many ways. And so it's difficult when we have that gross level of attachment to something which is fundamentally an illusion. You can say, if *something* isn't done about that, that's going to lead to some real trouble. And so we do our best to do something about it, to discriminate. Okay. I'm not going to do things that hurt me and others.

[00:20:48] Then the question is, how do you actually do that while you do the best you can? You read about it, you meditate on it. You look at what you've done, what you're doing and what others are doing and how it's affecting you. Kind of like a scientist, actually, looking at yourself, like just investigating. 'Wow, I was really angry when this happened. And in this other situation, I thought that person really liked me. And I felt like they betrayed me.' and so on. And so you learn to deal with those things in a different way... like in the mind training thing.

[00:21:25] One of the most famous aphorisms. 'drive all blame into one'. And it's not that actually you were *really* taking the blame for everything that happens everywhere, but you're just taking responsibility for your own reactions, really. More than anything else. If you can take responsibility for your own reactions and discover how to work with that, in a positive way, then you might actually say... then drive it into me. Doesn't matter. ... What's blame? It's not sharp. It's not pointed. It doesn't cut your head off, you know. So you can imagine at least getting to the place where... that's okay.

[00:22:16] There was a joke at one point, I remember Kalu Rinpoche used to say, that... and there are numerous practices, not just in the mind training with this, where the practitioner takes full responsibility for the state of the entire world of samsara, the entire world of confusion. Well, how do you take responsibility for that? It's kind of in the bandwidth of... why not? You know, someone's going to blame me for something anyway. [laughter] I'm going to die anyway. There are rationalizations for just saying, okay. It's okay. And then you discover, well that wasn't so bad actually, you know. So what?

[00:23:21] There's a lot of experimenting to do and a lot of apologies to make. And a lot of, you know, looking at your own mind. And is there is a point in the Four Thoughts where, I forget who the author of this particular piece was, they're saying that... we're on the fourth thought now, where we're looking at all of samsara, which is really the world of confusion. That's my personal favorite title for that realm. It's like it's the world of confusion. At its *best*... we've just been fooled... and we don't know it yet. That's at its best. [laughs] And if we're not careful, we're going to make things worse for ourselves and worse for others. So we don't have the discerning wisdom yet. But we're recognizing, *whoa*... it isn't just this country or some other country or this planet. It's... beyond global. And at its best, it's still confused. And sometimes, it accidentally brings benefit. Well, we all do that accidentally all the time, you know. [laughs] I intended to do something bad and something good came. I can't help it. [laughter] So that happens too. But all

that says is, yes... it's just a world of confusion. So what are you going to do? Throw fuel on it or are you going to put it out somehow?

[00:25:03] What we *think* we'd like to do is the heroic march against *others'* confusion. [laughter] Right? I would like to be responsible for eliminating your confusion. If you'll just step up, we'll take care of it now. And we know it's just blowhard baloney. It doesn't work. 'The drive to blame into one' is really about the teaching... there's only one person that needs to clarify their confusion. That's all. You clarify your own. The rest will take care of itself. Why will it take care of itself? Because if you actually do manage to clarify your own, you will be an example of clarity rather than confusion. Which will then become a cause for somebody to... 'I would like to be like that.' In its simplest form, we try to emulate certain people and avoid the characteristics of others. And the more that the emulation is going in the direction of clarity, the better. And the more it's going in the other direction, the more it tends to flow in that direction. Pretty simple.

[00:26:24] So the fifth thing is to recognize... this is the *nature* of samsara. This is what samsara is. It's about confusion. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's about war and killing and maiming and sickness and famine and all. Definitely it's *that*, too. But that's just incidental. It's also just about that sense that we have... sometimes, when there was just too much to deal with. We just feel like, I don't know how I'll *ever* get out of this confusion. It just seems like I'm locked into four walls and a top and a bottom. ... So we need to have a method for getting out of that. And that brings us the *full* circle and we can contemplate it then. And there's my own kind of favorite approach to it. We have a teaching called the Four Immeasurables.

[00:27:25] And the Four Immeasurables... many great teachers will say, this is really the foundation of the entire mahayana. And you want to clarify your confusion? You practice these Four Immeasurables. I'm going to call the first one the last one. Which is the *actual* direction that they are taught in often. Though, they're never listed in that direction. The foundation of the Four Immeasurables is first and foremost equanimity.

[00:28:00] Equanimity. Like you must have a sense that everyone's confusion is equal. Like... other people's confusion is not more than mine. Nor less than mine. It's right there. It's equal. They deserve to be free of it no matter *what* they have done in this life or any other life, which I can't see any way. But just looking at this life, I think no matter what I see, my practice is equanimity. They deserve to be free of their confusion and the causes of suffering. No matter if they were Adolf Hitler. It doesn't matter... who they were or what they did. They deserve to be free of it. And so that's a big piece right there. So what's 'freedom of it' look like? I don't know what it looks like, but what I know is, is that it will be helpful if I *think* and *act* towards them with loving kindness. That will be helpful, even if I don't know where it goes. Secondly, when I see their suffering, I relate to them with compassion, not with judgment about... eh, they deserve that, like they deserve even more than that. Wrong direction.

[00:29:25] And then we have the... joyous piece. So we have loving kindness and compassion and joy are the three of the four. And the joy is described in various ways. My favorite description of joy is that it's all about *rejoicing* in the virtues of others. It's really what it is. It's part of the Seven-Branch prayer. You know that. Rejoicing in the virtues of others. So that's the joyous piece. When you see somebody do something, this based on the practice behind it, when you see somebody do something, no matter what their status, stature in life is, no matter what they've done, again, whatever it is, if you see them do something, even if they're somebody, who... generally speaking, you would be surprised to see them do something virtuous. [laughs]

[00:30:32] So sometimes we might say, well, you know, everybody will do something virtuous from time to time by accident. So then we think to ourselves, they didn't really *mean* to do that. They're not actually a virtuous person. We draw the opposite conclusion. We see the virtue. We hold the wish... that it would just keep rolling like that, just keep going. It's the joy around... not just the virtue, but the joy around... the *effect* of virtue. Kind of like the *causes* of happiness are there. And so we rejoice. We rejoice on their behalf and we feel good about that. And they feel good about being a source of rejoicing, a cause of rejoicing.

[00:31:24] And all of that cannot happen without equanimity. Well, I think the truth is, it can happen a little bit as we learn to do these things. But the idea is that we create a conflagration of it. We want a wildfire... of equanimity, compassion, joy, loving kindness. And that's the antidote to the causes of samsara. Those four are the foundation of so many of the higher practices. The ones that you have to have so many prerequisites to do. And yet they also, they're so *easy* to understand, that sometimes we think I want something more advanced than that. There would be no vajrayana, I don't think, no mahayana if it weren't for those practices. So you can enter the door of that from any place, the basement, the roof, anywhere, and you're in it. ... I rest my case. [laughter]

Student 5 [00:34:55] So it's all just practice. It's training.

LMC [00:35:01] Yeah. One of the nice things about the Four Thoughts is that they are the most fundamental preliminary to every other practice. And there isn't any practice that you do that that doesn't have as a preliminary really, the Four Thoughts. If you don't appreciate having a human existence, if you don't understand those Four Thoughts, it's going to be difficult to go far in almost any practice. And so it's why we often call it the ordinary foundation. Ordinary, not in the sense that it's *just* ordinary, but ordinary in the sense that it's ubiquitous. It's just everywhere. That's also why we don't want to do it. We want to move on to the high practices. And then like the joke on the long retreat... is that they're into the most advanced practices, and the next two months is you do the Four Thoughts. it's like, what!?! There must be some mistake here. [laughter] That's not the ticket I bought.

Student 6 [00:38:08] So it's a recommendation to do all Four Thoughts every day?

LMC [00:38:13] Yeah. Well... first I think, rather than saying, yes do them all day long or every day or whatever, I think that... there's a little bit of a cultural thing here. Tibetans sometimes will say that the virtue in counting what you're doing, like counting prostrations or mantras, whatever it is, the virtue is actually *in* the counting. Many Tibetans will say that. It's actually in the counting. And of course, you have to do it correctly and all, but if you only do one, it's not as good as two. And three is even better and so on. And I think that many in the West get some benefit by virtue of... coming to a sense of understanding *why* you would do that thing any way at all. As opposed to it's just good to count something. You don't even understand it yet. And maybe you never do come to understand it because you get irritated by not understanding it and so you stop. There's all sorts of dead ends.

[00:39:29] So I think it's good to ask the question, why do I contemplate the Four Thoughts? And then you can answer the next question yourself. Should I do it every day? You can answer that question by doing it every day for a while and seeing, like... is this helpful? What am I getting here? My sense is, is that whatever you're doing, you should be getting *something* from it. Not every day necessarily. Not every minute, certainly, but... a certain sense of why you

would do that thing. And that you're doing it, and so you're having a sense of yes, that what's coming from it. I feel like that's so important. And it is a kind of a cultural thing.

[00:40:18] Generally speaking, we do better when we understand why we're doing something. And you can... kind of do it through brute force, like I just do 500 prostrations a day, let's say. I actually have no idea why I'm doing it. I think that if you did that long enough, you'd find the reason why you're doing it. Whether or not you live that long. [laughter] But I think generally the practices are like that. If you do them enough, as Bokar Rinpoche used to say, so inspirationally, for me it was because it never worked. And I look at him and say, clearly it worked for him. It's got to work for me too.

[00:41:01] But I think in a way it never has. It's like he would say, don't worry so much about what the practice means and what all of these things are. You do the practice and the truth will reveal itself. I think there is a truth in *that*... for sure. But you have to get to the place where the truth reveals itself. It isn't *just* automatic. And sometimes we need some help along the way. It's good to get some help so that we can feel like, oh, I see what it is. We need an occasional dose of... aha, I get it. [laughs] If you *never* get that, I think you're on a dead end. It's going to be really hard. You're either going to get it on your own or you're going to quit at some point. And the people who don't quit, I think they got it. I don't mean that they got enlightened necessarily. But they saw the connection between doing something and something that came from it. You can't just run the dry thing forever.

[00:42:11] So I think that, the Four Thoughts being... the most ubiquitous, ordinary foundation practice. I don't think there's anything more ubiquitous than the Four Thoughts. They're just everywhere. Then I think... it's *good* to do those things regularly, whether it's every day or not, I don't know. Could be. But in order for that to be a good thing to do, you need to know why you're doing it. And the nice thing about the Four Thoughts is... I think everybody in this room and mostly everyone who comes into this room ever... can understand what those Four Thoughts are about in a way which works for them. So they can feel like. I see what it is. When I was thirty years old, I had absolutely zero appreciation for the fact that I was a human being. Of course, I'm a human being. What else I'd be. *None* whatsoever of... well, could have been something else. And that cynicism melted... into the place of, yeah, it could have been something else. And then think about this! It was something else. [laughs] And during *that* time, things were not so good. [laughter]

[00:43:50] My own personal example is, that when our retreat was over, there was a guy who came and was showing us some things about the forest in the area where the retreat was. And he took us out in the forest and he was showing us something which was like... really, like it was *really* difficult to watch. I had no idea this was going to happen. But he had a couple of voles. You know, what a vole is. And so he had a couple of voles. And he had done this so often that he could hold them up in his hand and this hawk would come down and get them and literally eat them right there on his hand. And it was like, gasp! You know. It's just like, I don't want to see this, okay. I get... this goes on all the time in the woods, I'm still having a hard time with it.

[00:44:47] And so I don't know why I said that, but... I had a reason.

Student 7 [00:44:53] It's something to do it, I think, with your own personal example of having had a previous life.

LMC [00:45:11] That was it. Then I thought... my sense of characteristic for a vole is that... my own narrative around it is... this is an animal that somehow knows it will never make it to a natural death. That it will die a violent death *for certain*. And it's right. It will never make it. Snakes and birds, it's finished. It's lucky to get just a few steps into a life and it's gone.

Student 8 [00:45:48] That is a natural death for them.

LMC [00:45:51] Well, sort of, it's a natural death, but it never... if it was in a cage in your home as a pet... it would last a lot longer. And so that's what I ended up contemplating. As like, you were something before... the vole is what came to mind... a particular life. Yeah. That's a terrible life. Like *constantly* looking all the time. They barely spent any time eating but constantly foraging. But most of their energy is put into... is there a shadow in the sky? And you know, looking to see. And then sure enough... at some point, it's over. You can *feel* a sense of appreciation when you look at those things that I am born a human being. Now... my karma from past lives has brought me to the place of a human being. What can I do that's better than what I did before? What can I do?

[00:47:00] Because what I have today is not by virtue of what I did this morning or what I did last year, but what I did a *long* time ago. Like that thing of the teaching that the majority of the karma that ripens in this life is from previous lives. The first time I heard that, that didn't make any sense. How could that possibly be? And then you take the boundary off of things and you realize... it's obvious. It's a mathematical certainty. It couldn't be any other way. So how do you get discriminating wisdom into that?

[00:47:39] Discriminating wisdom is about distinguishing between what would be a good thing to do as opposed to not so good. And doing the thing that's good with a sense of understanding, even without the evidence, and the truth is, most of what we do, we do without any evidence for it... [laughs] it's good to be clear about that. That most of what we do, we do with no evidence. Without any evidence, we can see what would be good to do. That's the whole system of ethics in Buddhism. It's like, how do you develop discriminating wisdom... so that you do, with your body, speech and mind *now*... what will create the causes and conditions for something much better in the future. We don't have any way to kind of prove that in the moment. But we can see, by virtue of the microcosm that we work in now, that certain things work. It's as close as we can get to it.

[00:48:47] And then, of course, if you have confidence in the Buddha, which... no judgment about that if you don't... but I think those things come gradually, and then we can start to engage in, at least a hypothetical of it. I can see how my actions bring benefit and harm today. So I should therefore be able to see what would bring harm and good in the not too distant future. I find it easier to extrapolate from that than to rely upon... even the idea that there would be an unbounded perspective. In other words, if you can witness the good that comes from what you do, then why not do more of that? Do you really need to connect the uncountable dots between things to prove to yourself that that was good? I mean, most of us can figure that out in a microcosm rather than needing a whole big explanation and a lot of proof and things. As somebody once said to me, it's like if I needed proof, I never would have gone to Japan. Because I didn't see it. I didn't know that it was there. I took the evidence from my father who said, you need to get on this airplane and go to Japan... I'm talking about somebody else but... I think we do that all the time, function on the basis of an assumption that something's there when we have no direct personal evidence of it. ... Okay?

Student 9 [00:50:44] In the moment of doing good, I often experience this like quick little flush of... affirming my sense of self, like... oooohh, look at! Is there a quick antidote?

LMC [00:51:01] Actually, the antidote is... what you just did. The antidote is seeing it. The problem is not the sense of self that we have, so much as our attachment to it. And our extrapolating and elaborating... justifying ourselves and, you know, all of these things. The sense of the existence of our self. There's a lot of teachings that say, not only can you *not* stop that... with intention, the intention itself is just another extension of that sense of self. [laughter] So, it's much worse than you thought.

[00:52:05] Seeing... is, you know, throughout the entire path, every gradation of it has a sense of... awareness of something... even when it's bad, is good. So when I see, whoa! I did really good, now I all I need to do is just kind of parse that. First of all. Yes, that was good. Now, do you want to poison it with the self? No. So little by little, you see. I see it! I see the poison. The poison is transformed to good in the seeing. Before it has a chance to be ruined, you just see it. You're not going to escape having the experience of self. That's like way down the road. But it's not so far. You can have you the experience of no-self periodically. And then, you know, the pitfall is pretty much the same. We have the experience of no-self. It's authentic. We actually *do* have that experience. And then we see that we have the experience. And then we said, aha! that's me. [laughter] What you what are you doing now?

Student 9 [00:53:17] Gritting my teeth.

LMC [00:53:18] Oh, gritting! Not so good. The laughter was better. [more laughter] You got to laugh at it, because... it's just so natural to have that experience. One might actually say, I think there's some validity in this also... those individuals, in the history of the world, who had no sense of self... aren't here to report it. What happens when you live in the jungle and you hear a twig snap behind you? Do you just turn around and say, oh, there's a tiger about to eat me? That's okay, go ahead, eat me. If you don't [have] any sense of self, you're dead. At least you used to be. Like you can't survive that in a world of predators where you're kind of one of the early humans, you know, not very fast and not very smart and not very this and that. And the cat's got all the cards. So you're finished.

[00:54:39] And in a *certain* way, that's still, to some degree, holds true. You need to see... the mistake of... I'm solidifying a sense of who I am. And in the moment that you see it, you're not solidifying. And the next moment you see, oh! I'm not solidifying. Well, that's solidifying. [laughter] So... we can get into a logical trap in this thing where it just goes in a circle. Kind of like the vole running in the wheel... there's no benefit to it.

[00:55:16] You see it. My antidote is I see it, I laugh. Kind of like, yeah, I see you. I see what you're doing. It's okay. Run in the wheel all you want. And just let it go. And you know it's going to happen again. And the game is, can I see it? Can I see it? Can I see it? Every time you see... what's going on with your mind, whether it's virtuous, ugly, terrible, neutral... every time you *just* see it... it's virtue.

Student 10 [00:56:39] When you're feeling low, I guess it's the same, for instance... morning, early, and I was fussing with something in my mind. Errrr, you know, just fussing with it, fussing with it... and then all of a sudden, I was like, you're doing that thing now that you *do*. I just felt so sad. It made me feel kind of exhausted for a minute. And then I thought, so that's great. I saw it, but I don't want to do it again. [laughs] When does that... stop?

Student 11 [00:57:32] Compassion is a good response too. Having compassion.

LMC [00:57:37] Yeah. For yourselves. Yeah. It's potentially a kind of egotistical thing. Like if you really *indulged* in it... every time that something happened, that may not be so good. But generally speaking, there's no one more worthy of compassion than ourselves. ... Why not? You're holding the aspiration to benefit all beings. It doesn't always work. What are you going to do? Be angry with the other person for not being a suitable receptacle of my loving kindness? [laughter]

Student 12 [00:58:24] But aren't all these things related to the fact that we are human and we are bound in bodies at this level. And those bodies have their weaknesses and their survival skills, the things that they need. And laughter, if you can see it, laughter really is the best... antidote. You can't help being human. That's what you are. It's in your nature to do these things again and again and again. And until you can see them... and it doesn't... you see them and then you're doing it again. That's just part of your nature. And so to have compassion for yourself. It's the only way to deal.

LMC [00:59:09] Yeah. It's compassionate to notice, also, just to see... there's a kind of compassion. In a certain sense that's almost the definition of compassion. To see that, see that clearly.

Student 12 [00:59:27] It's funny that we are much more able to do that seeing... if we look at others. But when we look at ourselves, we are inclined not to.

LMC [00:59:39] That's true. Yeah. ... Okay? Now what?

Student 13 [01:01:39] We did the meditation where we were observing change, observing, observing, observing... witnessing change. Does that lead to insight practice? Should we go there?

LMC [01:02:06] What is insight practice?

Student 13 [01:02:08] That's a good question. I had a teaching long ago on insight practice. Looking at the looker. Looking for the looker.

LMC [01:02:22] Looking at the looker. Yeah. That's good.

Student 13 [01:02:30] And so when we were doing it this morning, I just was looking at all the impermanence. And, boy, it was, you know, I don't usually look that deeply at... you know, there's a twinge in my knee, there's something pressing in my eyes, in my throat, you know. I don't even look that closely at all of *those* kinds of things changing like I did this morning in that meditation. But then, I almost wanted to look at the looker. Look for the looker.

LMC [01:03:02] And... did you do that?

Student 13 [01:03:05] No, I stayed with the instructions.

LMC [01:03:07] Oh. Because the instructions said, don't do that?

Bill [01:03:12] The instruction always says, do *not* attain enlightenment.

Student 14 [01:03:17] I think this is what Bill was referring to [in omitted section]. It's like any of these practices can be used to point out mahamudra.

LMC [01:03:24] You know, every discipline has its own set of pitfalls... [laughs] that are unique to it. I often think of the practices that we call insight practice as being fraught with pitfalls. Actually, it, in *itself*, is not fraught with any pitfall at all. But... since those practices are, ostensibly, what you do in order to have insight into the nature of mind, and therefore, they're rather exalted practices, we tend to relate to them in a different way than the Four Thoughts, for example. ... Anything could be an insight practice, like what Bill was saying. *Anything* could be an insight practice. It really depends... and the farther you go in that direction, it more and more depends upon *exactly* where, and I'll just say, the meditator, is. Exactly where they are.

[01:05:07] So I don't know how to parse or distinguish practices so much, because personally, I'm kind of in a place with my own practice... and making more inroads into, kind of like, the practices that are not particularly exalted. It's been like that for a couple of years. And so I have trouble distinguishing a little bit. Because I think that if you've done practice, you can see... like there are insights to be had in any of the practices that we have. None of them are like space holders, or not worthy of doing somehow, you know. And I confess, a long time ago I did feel that way. I felt like, oh, I want to get to *this* practice. And one by one, you get to that practice, and somehow you feel like you've been betrayed. Like they said, there were jewels lying all over the ground and I haven't found one!

[01:06:22] And so it became clear like there's some reason behind those practices. And to some degree, I think I also kind of tricked myself in some ways. Like, the cultural issues don't matter. I felt that really strong... for a long period of time. That I could, like, ignore the cultural issues. But actually, whatever issue stands in the way, you can't ignore. It doesn't matter what it is. If you're hungry, you need to eat. You need to do something, whatever it is.

[01:07:03] So I think, for example, a precious human existence, can... from my own perspective, *best* be carried as a view. That is to say... if I was a vole, [laughs] when I was a vole, except I have no recollection of that, so... but if I was a vole... there could be an insight practice there... for a vole. Vole insight. I actually think that any being... at the right place, at the right time, with whatever mind that being has, it's possible that they could have deep insight from something. And if we look at our own lives, I think we'll all find like... I think I've had these insights and those things. And they didn't necessarily come from doing Buddhist practice. Or maybe they did, but I didn't notice them as useful at the time.

[01:08:26] I find it useful to take a practice like... what we've been talking about, a precious human existence. And in one sense, I don't have much relationship with it. I'm happy to be a human. I'm happy to be reasonably educated, to have enough to eat, you know, all the things that most of us have. I'm happy enough with that. But if I sit down to do the practice of... precious human existence, the word 'precious' is the thing that makes it different. Why is it precious? We don't say it's precious just to be a human. To merely be a human is not a precious human existence. It's a human existence, but it's not a *precious* human existence. In order for it to be a precious human existence, we have to have some other things. But again, I have to keep going back to the place of... I first have to have some appreciation for being a human at all. Otherwise, those other things are not clicking into place somehow. So it's that kind of exploration of... how does this practice work *for me*? Does it work this way for others and so on.

[01:09:56] So I never did that in the first 30 years. I just never did. I looked at those Four Thoughts and I had the same sense that most people had. I did those! Yeah, I get them. Easy to explain. Easy to know. Easy to all those things. But there's no blood in it. There's nothing living going through it. It's just kind of like a thought. It's a concept of some kind. So... replace the concept with the *view*... that precious means... that you embody... an appreciation for having a precious human existence. And then embellish it in a way which *demand*s that you have a different relationship with it. Like... the reason I have a precious human existence is because I had a mother who did X, Y and Z, or a father. And I was born into this place by virtue of *connections*, relationships with these kinds of people who I don't even know. But surely I had them and I'm surely surrounded by them, even though I only know them by name. I don't know who they are. So that we sort of extend ourselves out and have a sense of... I would have nothing today if it weren't for the... large number of benefactors who taught the Dharma. Who showed up. Who exemplified it. Who did this, who did that, and all of these things, these acts of kindness that they devoted their life to... helping other people. And somehow, I managed to walk through that radiance and have some warmth from it and something stuck. And so then I'm thinking, the way to make the precious human existence is to feel a sense of almost unbearable gratitude. ...

[01:12:08] So we have to *seed* these things in our stream of consciousness, otherwise they don't grow. They're like any other seed. So we find these things that work for you. And you plant those seeds by contemplating them. And then you nurture them by remembering them and, you know, elaborating on it. And I think that many people who have had good connections and deep connections with great teachers will say that's how it works. You don't just have devotion out of nothing. It doesn't fall out of the sky somehow. If it does, there's probably something slightly not quite right about it. You know, like, oh, I need to have devotion. So I look to myself like I have it somehow. But it really needs to be somehow authentic. It's like you can't make it. Like you can't make flowers in your backyard, but you can plant the seeds and nurture the seeds. That's what you get to do. It's not so easy to discover what the seeds are. Or how to plant them or how to nurture them. But we all know how to work that little by little and get good at it. And the result gradually comes from it. ... Grab the things that grab you!

[01:13:29] Today, we mentioned the thing Bokar Rinpoche was saying, well, the truth will reveal itself. Just engage in the practice. Truth will reveal itself. I heard Bokar Rinpoche say that probably three or four times. And the first two or three times it was like.... whew [made a motion of paper airplane flying over his head]. And then once, somehow, like the plane flew in to me. So, I mean, I just felt like I'd been crashed into. It was like, / see what it is. I thought he was just saying, don't worry about it. Everything will be okay. It was it was kind of like, I don't have time for this kind of thing.

Bill [01:14:12] Run along, Michael.

LMC [01:14:13] Yeah. [laughter] You know, when I think back about it, I realize... every time that he said that, the two or three or four times that I heard it, like... two or three of those times... they didn't do anything. You just do what you can with it and... in a certain sense, for all of us, it's like people on long retreat. When people get like, I'm going to leave a retreat now or something... the fundamental game is... that they need to hear... that the difference between those who stay and those who leave is that those who stay... get the goods. Those who don't, don't. And so it's not about... do you like it or not like it? It's about you stay. You continue. You work it. You'll *get* the goods. It doesn't mean you'll get enlightened. But you will get the benefit enough so that you

can say, *that* was really worth it, whether it was a day, a month, a year or three years, whatever, that was really worth doing that. You can't get that by leaving.

[01:15:48] So you have to just kind of keep at it until it happens. Till the flowers grow and you figure out how to nurture them and you have a garden. You have to. And that's the role of the sangha. Like nurture each other. Nurture each other. Pay attention. Don't assume everybody's okay. Don't assume they're not okay. Try to be mature and skillful, discriminating, if you will, in our mutual nurturing to carry on with it. Sometimes we do well and sometimes we don't do so good. So then we have to notice that too and just say, you know, we're doing the best we can. Yeah, it's okay. Go have a cup of coffee or tea or something. ... It is time. We'll dedicate the merit, take a break and then have our last session.

sangha [01:17:09] *dedicating the merit*