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*steady and consistent awareness, recognizing nature of mind, the practice of rejoicing, practice of 4 Immeasurables, dedicating the merit explained*

**LMC** [00:00:34] I was speaking with Eric Triebelhorn yesterday, the lama who will teach here tonight, and, of course, I couldn't resist asking, what are you going to say? What are you going to teach? And without a fraction of a second's hesitation, he said, I'm going to give very interesting answers to very interesting questions. [laughter] So there's your warm up. We're now going to have our usual Sunday after meditation discussion. And for those of you who are fresh here, which you only get once. After that, it's no longer fresh, you see. So you have something special to offer if you're willing to raise questions and participate, whether you feel like you have anything good to say or not. So there's no pressure there, but we just would like to invite you to participate. It's often hard if you're in a group that you don't know. So the content is really meant to be around our relationship with our meditation practice. And our practice of it and the issues and problems and things that come up during that practice. And... how can we use those methods, which are ancient, in order to help ourselves and to help others also? So that's it. The gong has rang.

**Student 1** [00:02:40] And somebody has the microphone. Actually, this does pertain exactly to the shamatha practice. I noticed during our practice how magnificently silent this room became. It was a stillness that even a drop of water would have disturbed. And then... I watched my mind get distracted by sound. And it wasn't the sounds in the room. It was external sounds. Suddenly all the airplanes began to fly out of Portland over our beautiful little meditation home. And somewhere, I remembered that all sounds are to be considered, and I might be wrong about this, but the sounds of the Buddha's voice or something like that, the sound of mantra. And I wonder if you speak to that a little bit.

**LMC** [00:04:18] I'm not entirely sure what the question is.

**Student 1** [00:04:23] The question is... we have our five senses... and sound is certainly one of them. But... when sound comes in as distraction, how are we supposed to hear it? How do we integrate sound into our practice? Maybe that's really the question.

**LMC** [00:05:07] That's a better question.

**Student 1** [00:05:12] Do you like that question? [laughter] I'm serious. Because I experience some sound, not always, but sometimes sound is a huge distraction.

**LMC** [00:05:25] Well, let's put it in the context of specifically the calm abiding practice. Where we can start with the idea, that we already know is true, which is to say... we are more or less continuously distracted by *something*. And there's no judgment there about it. Like that you *should* not be distracted. Or that you should have some particular relationship with sound. I don't know of any... thing to follow through on that, except for one simple thing... those things that we can be purely aware of with no added anything else... that's a profound practice. So when you hear the planes, what we think is, why can't they fly somewhere else? Why do they fly over while we're meditating? I mean, we have ridiculous considerations around things. And then we talk to ourselves about it.

[00:06:34] And this is, in a certain way, for most beings, this is the default. That's just where we go. We don't think... now I'm going to *think* about the sound of the plane. Now I'm going to *think* about the fact that that disturbs me or makes me happy or whatever. We are, generally, in a constant state of reactivity around it. And *that's* the issue. If it's not the plane, then it's yesterday's visit from grandmother or somebody. There's always something that's like triggering our reactivity.

[00:07:13] So when we sit down to meditate... the idea *first* is, could we do something different... as opposed to just what we always do? Except now we're sitting instead of standing or walking. And the point is, yeah, do something different. And the instruction is meant to give us the means by which we could do something different. And that *difference* is simply, in the context of calm abiding meditation, it's meant to be paying attention without... considerations and ideas and analysis and all. Just paying attention to the experience that we're having in this very moment. Whatever it is, without talking to ourselves, without labeling, without doing anything, just pay attention to it.

[00:08:09] And of course, anyone who's tried that will say, Oh, this is extraordinarily difficult to do. But actually, it's also extraordinarily *simple* to do. We are often completely aware of experiences that we're having. But we don't stay with that. We don't just sit there with the experience and watch it unfold. We have to get in there and we pedal and drive and steer and do all these things with it. And have some sense that that was useful. But when we look at it later, we see that we can't even remember what it was that happened. So there's a skill to be gained in calm abiding. And that is simply... bringing a clear, steady, consistent awareness to all of our experiences, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant... as the fundamental underpinning of shamatha.

[00:09:16] One of the... and there's many ways to make it interesting, since we tend to be bored, by putting aside our reactivity. Which is where we get excited. It's also where we hurt ourselves and others, incidentally, but... we tend to get bored with it. And so over the centuries, various things have been developed to make the practice slightly more entertaining, if not... slightly more risky.

[00:09:47] So one of them, for example, is to use your hand. So if I want to focus on my reaction to the airplane flying over, that's one thing. But that kind of runs out for a while, the airplane goes by on the sound's gone and we forget why we were even doing that conversation with ourselves. And the object of shamatha, again, not to forget is... *consistency*, like staying with it. A mind which is still but completely aware of what is going on *in* our experience. Not what's going on with the airplanes. When the airplane flies over, we have an experience. So what we want to do is we want to pay attention to the experience. The airplane is incidental. We could bow to it. Because without that airplane, there's no sound. Without the sound, there's no irritation. Without the irritation... and so on.

[00:10:43] So you can use an object like your breath with shamatha. You can also use your hand. My guess is most people haven't used their hand. But the hand's a wonderful thing. You can put your awareness on your hand... and without thinking about it, without doing anything... within three or four minutes, you'll be amazed at your own hand. Pretty much guaranteed. If you're not amazed within three or four minutes... then you must have died. [laughter] We'll try and take care of that.

[00:11:29] Our hand, in a certain way, is like our breath. Except that it's not essential like the breath. But we're very used to breathing. We're used to sometimes taking a deep breath and shallow breaths and so on. And we do *lots* of things with our hands. Our hand is part of how we connect with the world, pick things up and do things. So just looking at the hand and trying to keep it perfectly still and just looking at all the lines and shades of color and things in it. Gradually, over a period of a very short time, we can become deeply interested in that hand. And the hand, in many of the more advanced meditation practices, also becomes a critical piece of the practice. The hand is used in order to recognize certain things. So it's not a bad start to just use your hand, even if it's dirty. It doesn't really matter. And the palm in particular. To just turn it and look at it for two or three minutes. And then you could just let go of that and then do the meditation without having a particular object or settle back on the breath again. Go back and forth between them. ... Okay? That's about the airplane.

**Student 2** [00:14:00] So I don't know how to ask this in a question, but I'm going to try. Um, so... this morning and on other mornings, like when I'm sitting in shamatha, and sometimes I'll try to do like really brief moments of insight practice. Where I'm trying to.... just really look in ways that I don't normally look. And so one thing that I notice, which is not like a big new thing probably for most people, I mean, there's this observer mind, right? There's this observer voice. And the observer, like this morning, the observer... kind of watched me fall asleep into a dream, just for like a few seconds. And I'm pretty sure that observer woke me up, too. Because it was aware that I was... supposed to be meditating. I just find that really weird. Like I don't understand the difference between like, if it's all mind, it's all awareness, it seems like it would all be the same thing. Thoughts, experiences, sensations. But my observer, watching that, feels separate. And it feels really consistent. Like everything else, seems really impermanent. But that observer feels very solid and consistent. And I don't know what my question is exactly, but just... I guess, I don't know, I guess I'm wanting some explanation almost, of is... that observer somehow different from awareness? Does that question make any sense?

**LMC** [00:16:13] I was going to ask, was that a question or was it a statement? I mean, I think you're saying that your experience is that the observer is something separate.

**Student 2** [00:16:24] Well, that's what it feels like.

**LMC** [00:16:26] Yeah. But that's different than applying that feeling, making a conclusion out of it and then attaching it to the observer, right? I mean, that's an extra step. Which maybe, there's nothing wrong with... having the experience that the observer is somehow separate and engaged in something different than the other aspects of my experiences. There's nothing to be said about it in terms of like, it shouldn't be like that. Or it should be something else. We don't do that with the content of our minds. We're not so interested with the actual *content* of the mind, like the emotional states and all. We're interested in the *nature* of mind.

[00:17:18] So the nature of... the source of all of those experiences. And one of those experiences, out of the myriad of experiences, is often a sense of talking to ourselves. Which you could say, an observer. Call it whatever you want. And it'll be kind of colored or nuanced in some way that's specific to your experience. And then if we work with that enough, we can have the sense of its solidity. But that solidity actually itself then becomes a problem. If we... routinely, even without knowing that we're doing it, began to experience the *solidity* of that observer... that becomes an issue. We then kind of have a split inside. When actually, I think those who do a lot of meditation on the nature of that mind come to see that the observer is just one more thing that appears.

[00:18:34] The experience that the observer is observing or commenting on is just one more thing. Just the mind flows continually with experiences of all kinds... pleasant, unpleasant. Sometimes we discover that what we call unpleasant is actually pleasant. There are no limits to it. So just from a philosophical perspective, that is one of the underpinnings of a Buddhist understanding of the nature of mind, is that it cannot be... conceptually described. And the truth of it can definitely not be discovered through conceptual activity. Which doesn't mean that the conceptual activity is completely irrelevant or an impediment or some other thing. It's just another thing that we do. We conceptualize. And mostly, in our culture, we're just *really* good at it. I mean, fundamentally, that's where 99.9 percent of our training comes... in school, in work. We're not paid for announcing to our boss that those thoughts were just the manifestation of the nature of mind. So leave me alone. [laughter]

[00:20:01] It's fun to talk about the nature of mind because that's about all we can do with it. And then the rest just occurs spontaneously. But actually, to come to the place of recognizing the nature of mind, there are instructions for recognizing that nature of mind in a whole bunch of practices. Many, many of which you've done many times. But we tend to... not recognize the *freshness* of the instruction. The more profound the instruction is, the more we tend to memorize the words in the instruction. Then we were repeat it 'till we've got it really memorized and it rises automatically. ... That will not bring about the insight into the nature of mind. But... it's not an irrelevant start.

[00:21:18] If we can think of these things as being more ephemeral than fixed things, that's also helpful. So if the 'observer'... Is bugging us in some way, we then tend to move in the direction, exactly *not* the direction we really want to go in, but the direction that we *think* is the truth. That is to say, the observer is a separate entity somehow. It must be that! Because it doesn't feel like it's me. Or... even more kind of rudimentary.... I don't like it. So therefore, it must be something else. We do all sorts of tricks with ourselves.

[00:22:08] And we have that one very short liturgy called the Dorje Chang Thung-ma, which you're familiar with. That... in very terse ways, talks about how... *all* of the things that arise in our minds are just the natural manifestation, we call it the radiance of the mind. All of the thoughts, the feelings, the images, all of these things. And we tend to... solidify all of those things by various insidious means, I would say. [laughs] One, for example, "There's that thought again. It keeps coming every day." I can't tell you how many people come to see me and say, can you help me get rid of that thought? It comes every day and sometimes it's like, I'm fed up with some piece of music that arises all day long. It can be anything! I want to be rid of it.

[00:23:19] And the first question that we normally ask, that's really helpful and humorous, I mean, we always want to laugh at this... and that is... What is it the *it that* keeps bothering you? Well, *it*... I said wait a minute, don't go further now. Let's look at 'it'. And we can't find the it. It comes up when we're not looking. And then we hear the jingle in the background. Or the person that we feel hurt us recently, then we remember them. We don't want to remember them. We want to forget them. Wanting... Is one of the great fuel sources for the radiance of the mind. I want. I don't want. I want. I don't want. I want that. I don't want this. I want to change that. I don't want that person to come and see me. I want *that* person to come and see me. It's the endless series of wants that we fashion. And then we, you know, try to sit down and be still. But we've basically taken the lid off the can of worms. And now they start to crawl. And they start to do things.

[00:24:37] So recognizing the source of all of that activity... which is actually, you could say, every meditation practice, every teaching in Buddhism is about recognizing that source. No more or less. So if we say, but I've been working on it for so long. Well, yes, that is true. But... for an even *longer* time, you've been fashioning these things that now you're dealing with. They're coming. So you could rejoice! Because at some point, that's how you get... to that nature.

[00:25:20] Rejoicing is actually a practice, you know. So I think this is an interesting point to make. Rejoicing is a practice. It's not just a static thing. I'm so happy today. Like I had *nothing* to do with it. Oh, it's the weather. Really? That's like, how about an ant that's crawling on a volcano somewhere. That's pretty impressive. I mean, we continually talk to ourselves... and make truths... which are actually not what we want, from a Buddhist perspective, which is the direct perception. The direct connection. If I'm unhappy, I want to see my unhappiness... directly. Like right now, I want to see it. Show yourself.

[00:26:15] Many of the texts of great teachers in history actually did this sort of thing. They'd have a conversation with themselves. Here I am. I'm unhappy again. I see you, (really talking about themselves), I see you. I see what you're doing. I see how you make this happen. ... And I'm fed up with it. [laughs] They actually engage in a conversation and then somebody writes it down because they're famous. So you write it down. And then it goes down through history and we get this thing. I am so fed up... with the jealousy, the greed, the pride, all of these things, and I'm not having anything to do with you anymore. That's it! And sometimes it appears that works. Sometimes it appears... works. ...

[00:27:16] Once you figure out, kind of like, not the nature of mind, but the nature of the part of the mind that refuses to recognize itself. ... When we're confused about things, it's very helpful to recognize the confusion. The problem here is that if we recognize our confusion, the next thing we *want* to do is we want to change that confusion into something else. So we don't spend long enough then with the confusion. It needs to have an intimate relationship with us. We need to feel... not bad about the confusion. It's just another manifestation. So the many ways that one can deal with these things and come to recognize the source of our experiences... without blame and without praise for ourselves and others, just to recognize it simply as it is.

**Student 3** [00:30:10] Lama Michael, my question is not about shamatha, but about it is a question nevertheless.

**LMC** [00:30:18] Okay, you're forgiven. [laughter]

**Student 3** [00:30:19] So, I was reading a sutra yesterday and the scene happens to be the day of the Buddha's parinirvana. It's the morning. And Ananda, his attendant and his cousin, approaches him. Ananda approaches Buddha and he's crying. And, you know, the Buddha tells him, don't cry. He says, look, all formations are impermanent. They arise and they cease. But Ananda doesn't take to that message easily. And a number of other things are said. But... I started thinking about it and a few questions arose. First of all, Ananda couldn't have... I mean, this is an extraordinary being. This Ananda is the man who had perfect recall. And a lot of the sutras came from him. So he's quite accomplished. And he's having this problem.

**LMC** [00:31:46] What problem?

**Student 3** [00:31:47] He can't deal with the loss of his master. He tells the Buddha, you know, look, I lost my bearings, you know. And a number of other things he says. You know, he's very confused. But the Buddha doesn't seem to be crying. At least that's not the message that I got from that sutra, right. So very different play in that scene. You know, they're different... play between Ananda and the Buddha. And... my question is... Ananda couldn't have solved the problem on that day. And he should have been doing something different all along. And what struck me was, you know, we all have an inner circle, our own mandala, right. And we have people close to us... family and close friends with whom we have attachments. And my question is, how do you live... how do you foster relationships with those in your inner circle? With whom you have attachment, but you're also detached. So that you don't fall into the same situation that Ananda had.

**LMC** [00:33:31] Well, first of all... I think we always take these stories, whether we're reading someone else's interpretation or whether it's our interpretation of it, we always take them and we of course, see those stories through the light of our own mind. We're not seeing the story of Ananda through the Buddha's eyes or vice versa. We're seeing it through our eyes. And the reason that the story continues for so long and is maintained historically and repeated over and over is that there's something there that we cannot see. And yet we think we see it. But actually, there's something that we're not seeing. If it was... that reading the story it was completely clear... probably it wouldn't survive. Because it's really meant to contain a profound and perhaps esoteric kernel of truth, of awareness, of insight there that we may have to read over and over again and also ponder. Like, what does that mean exactly? And how do I bring that into my life and work with it? So, that's one thing, I think is that the stories that survive a long time usually have a base of something profound that is not immediately... you can't get it, right off.

[00:35:32] And sometimes I think we can go our whole lives and not get what is there. But it's meant to be... like in Christianity, all the parables and things are really... they're meant to bring something in front of us that inspires us to look at something in a way that we're not used to looking at it. So if we just look at it in the same old way and interpret the stories in the same way that we're used to living and reacting to things, then we probably find that... enh, I read that. It's not so great. [laughs] Do you follow that? It's not very helpful to say that. And so I said it because it's helpful to me to say it. ... Now, I forgot what the...

**Student 3** [00:36:31] So I mean, it's, you know, it's relating to those who are close to you, how do you manage that? How do you manage relating to those who are close to you... yet being detached?

**LMC** [00:36:45] That's easy. [laughter] Isn't it? That's easy. I mean, first of all, you asked that question because... you're *already* managing that. But through your own mind, you're thinking, and maybe it's true.... not doing such a great job.

**Student3** [00:37:06] Exactly. [laughter]

**LMC** [00:37:11] That's what we all are. It's like, I wish I had more relationships like this. And I wish I knew how to navigate this difficult situation over here. But the instructions for it are uncountable, in the tradition. Because our relationships with others *are* the basis of our path. Always. There is no other basis. That *is* the basis. So you can take any of a myriad of teachings and see the basis there. And the instruction for how to use the relationship in a way which is helpful for you and helpful for others also. So we never want to treat a relationship as... it's only

good for me. I use it for me. That always backfires. So the instructions always lead us... into a place which is helpful and easy to see.

[00:38:07] So let's take one quick example that we could actually talk about and meditate with for a week here, but probably no one else would stay. And that is a particular teaching, which is often said to contain *all* of the elements of the entire tradition of all of the Buddhas... in one practice. Which is actually very simple and very easy to understand. And that is the practice of the Four Immeasurables. So when we look at the Four Immeasurables, the Four Immeasurables are about four ways that we can develop relationships with others that, if we are careful about it, they always bear sweet fruit.

[00:39:12] The first one is just the wish that the beings are free of suffering, free of the causes of suffering. And secondly, that they are happy, content. Manifesting wisdom and other things. And that they have the means and the causes and conditions for manifesting that happiness and those things. So it's not fake. And our wish here is meant to be immeasurable. That we apply it to *every* sentient being. Anything that has a mind, in essence. If it has a mind, we are making the wish that they would have certain causes and conditions and be free of certain causes and conditions. And the underpinning of that teaching, of course, is... there's more to it, but the basic is that... we need to do this in a way which embodies equanimity... in relationship to others. So that we *value* other beings in a way which is not dependent upon whether or not we like them. Whether or not they do things for us or against us. We still hold this wish that they'll be free of the causes of suffering. That they'll have the causes of happiness. It will be immeasurable. And the immeasurable here actually is not the immeasurable happiness. It's the immeasurable beings. That there's not a *single* being for whom you don't hold this wish. ... So there you are.

**Student 3** [00:41:16] Well, so Lama Michael, when I do the Four Immeasurables, my sense and my connection with those whom I *don't* know... that improves. You know, so you actually go through the process of the neutral person and you go through the process of the enemy and there's some, you know, room for improvement that happens. But my question was, it doesn't reduce my attachment to those who are already near to me.

**LMC** [00:41:48] That's right. That's right! Excellent.

**Student 2** [00:41:51] Why?

**LMC** [00:41:51] Why it doesn't is because... we're not applying the Four Immeasurables to ourselves. If you apply the Four Immeasurables to yourself, which really you must do... otherwise, we have this kind of secret agenda. Which is that all beings are worthy of being free of the causes of suffering and to have all these wonderful things except for me. I'm still working on... even being worthy. We *have* to have that thing. This is not just about others. I am one of those others. And in addition to that, then there are all the people who I'm attached to. All the people who I don't like. And I'm happy I can just kind of do this from a distance for them. [laughs] And that's okay too. Do it from a distance. But these beings are the source of the entire... practice or set of practices that lead to full enlightenment. They *are* that. So we have to recognize first, as you just pointed out, we have to recognize, well... there is this teaching and my experience of attachment to others. Attachment to some. Aversion to some. I like some. I don't like some. Mostly, I'm indifferent. Which is actually held to be in the same category as liking and disliking. Indifference has its upside and downside too.

[00:43:35] Equanimity is the foundation of the Four Immeasurables. And often it's the first thing that's taught... is equanimity. Because it brings in bold relief, our attachments and aversion. Which, generally, are the fuel that... connects us with others. I like somebody. I don't like somebody. I want somebody, I want them to like me. I don't want them to like me. I wish they'd never come back. These are the causes of suffering. They are not the causes of happiness.

[00:44:24] So generally speaking, as ordinary sentient beings, we count these things as the cause of happiness. I *know* who I don't like. We count that as a source of happiness. Now I know who to avoid. When actually that person contains the key to your happiness. ... Equanimity applies not only... so we make a mistake there also sometimes, maybe more often than the other ones even... it's easy to feel good about ourselves and good about somebody who we have a... negative connection with, if we can generate the wish and really *feel* the wish that I wish they had the causes of happiness and they experience that. In a moment we can feel, I did it! For that person. ... Because we can do it for one person, every one of us is capable of doing it for all beings.

[00:45:35] And the place where we generally start is with our existing relationships. Like you're pointing out, those are the more difficult. ... We start with the existing relationships, but the most profound existing relationship that we have from the very beginning is me. *I*. I want to be happy. Of course, I hope everybody else is happy, but, you know, *I* want to be happy... first. It's not like... I don't *want* anyone else to be unhappy. But it's still important for me to be happy. So the focus here is generally not on ourselves. It's generally on others. Because that's where we uncover the stench. The really difficult stuff. That's what we uncover. And the equanimity is meant to be for *all* beings.

[00:46:42] So again, the easiest beings to feel equanimity for, for most of us are, just as a category of beings... the unknowns. I know there so many billions of people on this planet. And how many do I know? You know, I could count them one by one within one minute, probably, and have them all. But if I counted the rest of my life, it would still be a small drop in the bucket of total number of beings. So the issue here is... it's easy for me to feel compassion, kindness, all sorts of things... love, joy... for beings that I don't see. Or I drive by them in a car and I see kids throwing balls into a hoop and doing all sorts of things, and they're laughing. And I manifest joy for those beings. Those are so easy.

[00:47:40] The difficult ones, we know. And it's a simple but very difficult step... to begin to train ourselves... that when we meet a difficult situation, I'm just going to put it in the terms that we talk about it in the vajrayana and in the mahayana too... schools of Buddhism, when we meet a difficult situation, we learn to embrace it as a gift delivered to us. That's a *very* difficult thing to do. My teacher brought me a conflict. What kind of a teacher would do that? [laughter] You know, that's where we just want to go... immediately.

[00:48:40] But the practice, the instruction is... something negative comes your way... you must develop the habit of immediately turning... it's a gift. It's a gift I just don't recognize yet. Over and over and over and over. ... And the more difficult it is, the more we intend to generate joy in having received the gift. It's all counterintuitive. But I know that there's at least a dozen people in this room who have had the experience of working that and discovering the joy in doing it. It's like planting a seed somewhere and then later, forgetting that you planted it and later coming across it. In the spring, suddenly there is some fruit or vegetable growing. And then you remember, Oh, I planted that. Then you want to plant more of them.



[00:49:39] So this is like planting a seed. Somebody says something to me and it hurts. My inclination is to think that they are bad. They said something bad about me. They're the real bad ones. Actually, the practice is... not that they're bad or that they're good... it's a delivery. We have just been delivered a gift. And my ultimate enlightenment depends upon my embracing that gift as if it was so precious that I would not be able to continue... without it. [the ending bell sounded] Come in different packages, don't they?

[00:50:31] Just one really short thing. Because there's new people here, and so maybe just a word on what it is we're doing at this point in time. We are dedicating the virtue of having engaged in the practices of shamatha, of having put in front of ourselves, as a community, difficult questions and situations to explore openly and kindly with each other. And we have done that and made it interesting for ourselves to boot. And we have had some humor. We dedicate all of that to the benefit of all sentient beings. And that dedication then has a direction. So we all do good things on a regular basis. But what we say is, that most good things bear fruit once. They don't continue to bear fruit, necessarily. By virtue of dedicating... the value and the goodness of things that we have engaged in... to the benefit of others... that that same thing repeats itself over and over again. I might add... you actually don't have to believe that. Because it's not something to believe. It's an issue of more... that when you witness the chain of causes and conditions between these things, then the dedication becomes a kind of natural thing to do. And we see how it gives things a direction. So we read the liturgy on the dedication. That can help.

**sangha** [00:52:32] *dedicating the merit*