

## 2017\_09\_03\_4\_QA\_LMC.mp4

*shamatha is key to recognize and liberate our kleshas, committing to our practice, hope & fear as grasping and aversion, belief and doubt, owning our practice, no-self and karma*

**LMC** [00:01:52] So this is a time for questions and clarification... of this practice, anything that you'd like to go through again or add, we can do that now.

**Student 1** [00:02:14] I have a question about the... I can't remember the words you used earlier about... is it habitual reaction?

**LMC** [00:02:27] Habitual patterns?

**Student 1** [00:02:28] Yeah. So there's one in particular, at least for me... and I know with we all have our own... where if I'm pretty level emotionally, I can see it... and I might not always be effective, but I know it's happening. So if somebody is irritated or upset around me, even if it's not *at* me, I tend to kind of lose my focus and clarity. I kind of get afraid and scared. I guess the question I have is... when my emotions get too high, like if they get too intense, then I just... all of that focus and the ability to see that pattern goes totally out the window. So I'm curious about how to work with those really strong emotions to keep a more level calm mind? Because it's... I don't want to have to be hijacked by those.

**LMC** [00:03:39] Yeah. Well, the question really is apropos for just about every practice within the Buddhist traditions. We're really talking about what we call the kleshas. The kleshas are... our 'emotional sets', if you will. All of them can be boiled down to attachment and aversion. Or more kind of abstractly, hopes and fears. And so for most people, just to say that you're not alone with this thing, for most people, this actually is the core of the practice that they do. The great majority of people, even if they don't know that's what they're working on, that's what they're working on. And it's not like those things can be gotten rid of... or even that they *should* be gotten rid of.

[00:05:05] It's more an issue of... if you engage in the practice with the *intention* of working on those things, you can do that privately. You don't have to tell anybody else. You know, it's like it's your own thing. You understand the reaction that you have is yours. It doesn't belong to somebody else. Though, now that I mention that, [laughs] it *is* the case that many people, of course, I'm sure we've all had the experience of... blaming others for our emotional responses. "You make me do this. You made me think that. You made me do that thing." All of those things are the natural reactions of feeling, in a certain way, like a victim. Like just generally, in the world, not feeling empowered.

[00:05:58] And a big step can be made in the direction of liberating that. The word liberation is used a lot in the context of working with the kleshas. We have to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of the kleshas. And the kleshas are just our usual things. Our attachment aversion, our anger, our desire, our jealousy, our greed, our pride. All these things come together. And they get very powerful. Depending upon what our own history with it is, it may take very little to get them really powered up... or nothing, or *a lot* to get them powered up. But what's helpful, I think, is... recognize those kleshas. If we can use those, you'll recognize them in books, in various places, the word klesha. Then you'll remember like, Oh, that has to do with this!

[00:06:59] The kleshas drive us. I mean, fundamentally when we divide all of the world up into pieces... from a Buddhist perspective, it's often divided up according to the kleshas. So we *live* in our kleshas. We live in our attachments and our aversions and our pride and our joy and our hatred and all of these things that are swirling around all the time. That's where we live. It's not a great neighborhood. [laughter]

[00:07:40] But the *great* thing about even the practice of shamatha and calm abiding is that you can work on those things in the safety of your home, so to speak. I mean, I'm saying it tongue-in-cheek. But the truth is... my guess is, is that most of the people that we know... who have been engaging in these practices and have come to terms and worked with those kleshas... that they actually have done it more in private than outside. Because in private, we can allow the whole thing to just like flourish. You know, kind of like you build a big fire and you stand back and go, "Whoa, that's, I mean... hot!" You know... [laughs] but we don't have the same relationship with it. So, when you're at home alone and you understand that the instruction is... if you've identified a particular klesha, then you let that thing come. And you just work with it.

[00:08:43] So in the case of shamatha, you work with it by allowing it to be what it is. And remembering one very special instruction, which is... this is not you. This is *not* what you are. It's kind of like you, you step on a nail outside, you know, you wouldn't say, "Oh, I'm suddenly a nail!" You understand that the nail is the nail. And that's not who you are. You feel *impinged* upon by the nail, but you don't accidentally identify yourself as the nail. That's the mistake we make with the kleshas. We identify with them. And as soon as we really identified with them, which we do all the time, we see... that's the experience I'm having now, that I am that thing. I am jealous. I am proud. I am greedy. I am all these things. One by one. But actually, you're not *any* of those things. They're just experiences passing by.

[00:09:47] And in the context of calm abiding... calm abiding is *great* for this. To watch the experiences pass by. The totally innocuous, uninteresting ones and the big, powerful ones... they all just pass by. None of them hang out. They have to get fed to hang out. So if you say I'm not feeding you today, it's just about to leave. [laughs] But we *feed* them. We keep feeding them. You know, "You've made me angry again. You did this. You did that." We engage in these things even after people who are long since dead, we're still dragging them in and bringing them back to life and doing these things. But... the remedy is to practice recognizing them just as they are. And then... not feeding. There's no care and feeding of the kleshas, it's like you just need to recognize that thing. See it what it is. And then put it aside. Just let it be. And if it won't be put aside, rises up and it says, 'No, I'm here!' It's like... it's okay.

[00:10:53] You know, even Milarepa had this. You know Milarepa? Well, Milarepa was one of the most famous yogins in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. Maybe *the* most even, but close to it anyway. And he had a struggle with kleshas. Especially early on in his life, like *big* struggle. But he'd gotten himself into situations where he actually murdered people. So that brought on a *lot* of kleshas. Later on... he's attained like high realization. Not quite enlightened yet. And one evening he goes home to his cave [laughs] and he sees all these demons in the cave. And they've got his Dharma texts. And they're like reciting the text and laughing at them and making fun at them and, you know, burning them in the fire and doing all this stuff. And so he has a real, what I call, a 'klesha fest.'

[00:12:03] He gets really wound up in it. And he's saying like wrathful mantras at the demons. And the demons are like laughing at him. Like, "You can't touch us with all of that." And after some period of time, he realizes that actually all of his efforts to banish them are exactly what

feeds them. And so in *that* moment, he remembers the Dharma around this thing. And he says, "Okay. There's room enough. There's enough tea for everybody. There's plenty of space. You can have whatever you need. It's okay." And when he *actually* felt that was okay, they vanished. So it's one of those kind of mystical stories, but I think it's apropos to us. Because we understand that when we are *free* of those kleshas, it's because... we have not fed them. You know, we've just like not... empowered them. However, you want to talk about it, I think that's really the thing. And the practice of calm abiding actually holds a great key. Most simple, most direct.

[00:13:18] Sometimes, a little trick around this is... in the vajrayana, which we have not been practicing so much today... but in the vajrayana, one generally has a spiritual friend like a guru. And that person then... is empowered to deliver gifts. And the gifts are often emotional outrage, for example. And so... as a serious Dharma student, when the emotional outrage comes, we engage in the practice of gratitude. Gratitude that this has been delivered to me personally from someone who really cares about me. And then we have the tools to work on it. So everything is right there. But because *we're* not responsible for it and someone else delivered it as a teaching, really as a gift... then we can take it like that. It's helpful. Okay. Ready? [laughs]

**Student 1** [00:14:29] When she's mad at me and irritated with me, I won't tell my wife that that's a gift. [laughter] Maybe I should. ... So thank you.

**Student 2** [00:14:57] Lama Michael. I just had a quick question. This is something that's come up the last few days, I've kind of realized that, um, I've noticed that I have a tendency to train too much. Like if sometimes, somebody has like a tendency that's like oh, they have trouble kind of getting a practice going. I've noticed I tend to overdo it. Where like I tend to like almost make every moment like a practice. And it gets to the point where it's like almost like I've burned myself out. Or like, almost like, uh, to use a phrase from a Zen teaching we used to practice in... like, "We're storming the gates of heaven." You know, like it's enough to politely knock, you know. You don't need like ram them down with the battering ram. And I find that I just, you know, it's like, Oh, I'm practicing while I'm driving. I'm practicing when I'm at work, I'm practicing when I'm like, you know... And I feel, I don't know... it gets to the point where it's almost like a little bit ascetic.

**Student 3** [00:16:05] Isn't that a good thing in practice?

**LMC** [00:16:10] Yeah, I think it's good to take a break too. We have to assume that when we're engaged in practice that's trying, that's difficult... and we have some understanding of how it works, we have to assume that it's going to be difficult. It's not going to be easy. And sometimes it gets boring and tiresome. And so I think that if one takes a break, the important thing there is... not to beat yourself up. We'll do that for you.

**Student 2** [00:16:53] I mean, it's not so much boring and tiresome. It's more like... I drag stuff up that I'm not ready for when I haven't even really completed processing the *last* thing that came up in practice. Like, I sit there, I'll have something come up. I'll face some klesha. I'll break through it and I'm like, "Oh, cool, I had some great insight." And before I'm even really rested and done processing that, I'm kind of like, "Okay, I better get back into it and start like, you know..." And it's almost like, I'm inviting stuff up before I've even really fully digested the last thing, you know. And it becomes, you know, it kind of, yeah, it becomes a problem because I feel like I end up taking out, biting off more than I can chew. Because I don't really give myself enough time to like, actually chew.

**LMC** [00:17:38] Take smaller bites. [laughter] It's really... I mean, this is really just kind of ordinary stuff. I mean, it's ordinary stuff within the context of the profound Dharma, maybe, but it's still ordinary stuff. Most of us, for example, are not going to go and live in caves. Certainly not under the ascetic conditions that many people have done it. Most of us would die. In fact, some people have said, most who tried *did* die. You'll never hear about them because their bones were never found. So... I think that we each have a certain level... and a certain approach to these things. And in our practice of the Dharma gives us an authentic way to engage. But it does not answer all the questions about how much to do and how little to do and how to engage those things. It's important to hold both in our practice all the time, to hold the benefit of others as preeminent. But also, not to abuse ourselves in any way at all when we can't do it or we fail to do it. It's not helpful. If we abuse ourselves often enough, we genuinely begin to feel abused. And then we're in trouble. It's hard to get out of that.

**Student 4** [00:19:27] Lama Michael, I think you just answered this, so I figured I'd ask it in a different way. I've been reading a book. It's in the library about nonviolent communication, by Marshall Rosenberg, I think. And it talks about how we're in a culture where a lot of times we get people to do what we want by blaming them or, you know, criticizing them and making them feel bad. Pretty much bullying them into doing what we want. And also are used to being bullied into doing what people want us to do or what we think we should be doing. And so, when we're doing our meditation, it seems to me that it's important to have the meditation coming from a place where we want to be doing it. Not that we're just bullying ourselves into doing it because we think we should be doing this. ... Is that kind of sense of checking in and seeing whether we're willingly participating or whether we're just kind of guiltling ourselves in? Is that something that we should do frequently?

**LMC** [00:21:00] What's the difference?

**Student 4** [00:21:02] One, we're dragging ourselves in and telling ourselves that we're not a good enough meditator yet, so you should meditate some more. And the other one, you're pretty much saying, Hey, do you want to meditate more? You know, is that something that sounds good to you?

**LMC** [00:22:03] This is not necessarily straightforward. ... It can be that we really want to do something and that it's genuine, we really want to do it. But the fact that we really *want* to do something and that generally people would say that the thing we want to do is good, helpful somehow. And that we also feel that way. But that does not guarantee that we will do it. It also does not guarantee that we'll feel good about doing it. Right? So... we each have these kinds of things, like what you're talking about. Where there's a kind of a push and pull, if I understand you correctly. And the push and the pull doesn't always work. Doesn't always work out in the best way. So sometimes we have to try a lot of different approaches.

[00:23:16] So I'm recalling.... now, many years ago... maybe 20 years ago, Bokar Rinpoche was giving Mahamudra Retreats. And he hadn't done very many of them yet. And the commitment that he asked for from students was really quite a big commitment. Like to engage in a certain number, tens of thousands of practices each year before coming back. And those tens of thousands of practices added up to hundreds of hours to do. And because of Bokar Rinpoche, he was so inspiring that everybody wanted to do it. But not everybody could do it. And so some people... ended up not going to the seminar... when they were supposed to go. Because they felt ashamed that they had not finished the commitment. And it wasn't that they were being

bullied, by Bokar Rinpoche. But more that they just felt like *they* had made a commitment... in an environment that was very precious to them. But they just didn't have the connection to engage in this kind of massive amount of practice that Bokar Rinpoche had handed out.

[00:25:03] And so, I'm making an analogy here. So some of those people did not go to the retreat. And then they felt very ashamed that they hadn't gone to the retreat also. And so Bokar Rinpoche had to change the way that he designed the commitments so that people would be able to go. And when he first heard that some people were *not* going because they hadn't made the commitments, he wept. It was because, in his mind, everything that he did was about encouraging people to engage in the Dharma practice. Regardless of how much or how little they did, just to engage in as much as they could. And so he changed the way that he designed the commitment.

[00:26:04] Instead of making it a numbers game, where you need to do so many of this and so many of that... this practice and that practice.... instead, he had the student design the commitment. And that it was important that they designed the commitments so that they could *meet* the commitment. And that was the only thing that was required. Design the commitment so you can meet the commitment and have the sense of having met a commitment. And that worked! And that took about two or three years for that to just be figured out. So... nobody was really being bullied, but we bully ourselves! We don't need a third person to bully us. We're totally capable of doing that on our own. And so, it took a while to work out a method to do it. So I'm not sure that I'm even close to what you're talking about. Set me straight.

**Student 4** [00:27:10] The idea that some of us will probably bully ourselves *while* we're meditating. And that's likely to be a less effective strategy for long term success than to figure out to pay attention and to willingly engage.

**LMC** [00:27:26] That's right. You know, it's kind of like you go to the gas station and you say, fill my gas tank, right. And you can tell when your gas tank is filling because the numbers are going by on the device. It's measuring how much. There is no such system in the Dharma. No guarantee that your spiritual gas tank is full. [laughs] It's like... it just may never happen like that. In which case another method has to be found. Another way of saying that, I think, is another *understanding* needs to be found. Not necessarily another method, but a different understanding.

[00:28:13] So, Bokar Rinpoche, and Kalu Rinpoche also, were quite adept at finding that other method... if you were able to just like, *pay attention* to what they were saying. So, for example, it's common in the teachings on the bodhisattva path and also when it comes to the development of Bodhicitta, it's common to give the instruction that... to have *just* given rise to the sincere wish that your life would be of benefit to others... accumulates causes and conditions for profound insight. Just by virtue of that genuine wish being made. Done. Now, some of us who are *exceptionally* lazy... [laughs] that would be me... found that to be a really nice path. Because all I needed to do was to make that wish that my life would actually be of service to others. And that they would, through their practice, actually... accomplish the practices.

[00:29:36] So, I liked *that* method because I didn't have to live up to anything. And yet I found it rather easy to, at least a few times a day, make that wish for all sentient beings. And sometimes I could make it for people I didn't like. And sometimes I couldn't. But it was okay... because in the next moment I could do it three or four times for other people. And if I did that enough,

ultimately, I could do it for people that I didn't like. And I didn't have to count. And counting... did not work for me. So... the point is, is that there are so many different ways to plug in to this thing... that it's a shame, if you want to do it, to miss it. There *is* a method... that'll work. I never met anybody who literally can't do any of the methods.

[00:30:32] Many people just love counting. Like they'll do prostrations all day and all night. Eric Triebelhorn, which many of you know, is the most amazing practitioner around the practice of ngondro. He can do prostrations all day long from morning at all night, like day after day after day. Fantastic! But other people might sometimes would see it and feel depressed that they couldn't do it. Which is a big mistake! It's like... what works for him is not necessarily what works for somebody else. What works for somebody else, Eric probably couldn't do. But he was totally happy to do it the way that was *working* for him. So that's actually what we each need... is the method that will work for us. Once we have it, then you like hang on to it.

**Student 5** [00:31:45] I've got a question about the... we start with the refuge and bodhicitta and giving rise to being a real benefit to all beings.... that aspiration. And then... what went 'ding' today, when I was sitting, was when you said about no hope and no fear. And I go, well what's the difference between hope and aspiration? And then I'm wondering, is the aspiration... it's the motivation. And is it a contemplation? And then when I'm sitting... let it drop. And then that's without the hope... of even the aspiration that I'm trying to learn shamatha so that I can get past my own ignorance and be of *true* benefit to all beings. But so, is it... hold the aspiration and then let even the aspiration drop?

**LMC** [00:32:55] You know, a piece of the puzzle here that you're mentioning... is that we often do not get enough... of these very short little formulas, like abandon hope and fear. That's a very terse formula. There's not enough information there to draw these conclusions. And if you draw the conclusions, you kind of just almost... we're doing that... you're missing the thing. We do use those little short formulas often. And sometimes I find myself saying more about it. Such that people get bored listening to it. But... you want to get it right. And we can't always get it right with a single word.

[00:33:54] Abandon hope and fear. Really, I mean, we would say, "Well, what about our aspirations? I hope that I could be a benefit to sentient beings. So I'm supposed to drop that?" No, you're not supposed to drop that. The hope and fear here... is a common formula for a whole set of... points to be made, let's say. So, a common formula for... what does enlightenment look like? Could be something like, in very terse terms now, so that if this is all you hear, then you're likely to miss it. And that is a common way of answering the question, "What does full enlightenment look like?" It looks like the utter absence of hope and fear. Well... most of us would struggle the rest of our lives and not get anywhere with just that much information.

[00:34:59] So hope and fear, it might be that what we should do is reserve those two words... which are used, in some situations, to indicate... not the absence of the aspiration, but rather... when we have hope, we always have fear. This is like guaranteed. I hope that my practice will bring benefit to myself and others. But... I'm afraid it won't happen. There's always that link. So we can say, well, I'm not sure that's *always* true. Always true is not what's relevant. What's relevant here is that... we're addressing the singular issue of... it's common if we have a hope... "I hope I can go to India next year. Well, I'm not sure I have enough money. Now I'm afraid that I won't be able to go. But Bokar Rinpoche is going to give this empowerment. I really want to go.

Now I'm afraid I won't be able to go." So we're struggling with those things. That's the hope and fear... that we talk about when we say, abandon hope and fear.

[00:36:12] Hope and fear are like... twins. They're actually the *exact* same thing in two separate disguises. So we need to recognize *that*. Hope... in the aspiration, is actually, you know, kind of innocuous. I hope that I can benefit all sentient beings. That's a nice aspiration. Not a really big problem there.

**Student 5** [00:36:50] But Lama, Michael, it's like doing 110 prostrations with the idea that maybe *one* would be sincere. What's the aspiration if it's innocuous and doesn't matter?

**LMC** [00:37:13] it's innocuous in the sense that the hope to benefit others is not a downfall, by virtue of having hope and fear. Now... it's not so hard to see the problem there. That hope and fear are really just other words for grasping and aversion. You can think about them like, what's what's the subtle distinction there between hope and fear and subtle attraction and aversion, want and don't want? What's the subtle distinctions? That's interesting to look at. It doesn't really contradict the... formula that full enlightenment is *utterly* devoid of hope and fear.

[00:38:10] I remember once saying, it seems like we got a problem there, like conceptually or philosophically or something. And the answer to that is... this is an interesting one to ponder... was, the Buddha, now talking about *all* Buddhas, not just the historical Buddha, but a fully enlightened Buddha. If you look close at the characteristics that are described, you can see why it would be said... that no matter what a fully enlightened Buddha does, it will benefit all sentient beings. Not just one or two, it'll benefit *all* sentient beings. So, in order in order to grasp that one, we have to get out of the small mindedness of just conceptually understanding something. Because that statement, all by itself, demands... to be transcended conceptually. It doesn't hold the whole piece in bite sized chunks that we normally can digest. ... What do you think? ... I never believe that. I never have been able to believe that a Buddha, just by virtue of being a Buddha, that everything that they do will be beneficial to others. ... Does that make sense?

**Student 5** [00:39:59] The part that makes sense... I'm not in *your* head/ heart and whether you could ever believe that or not. From this side... when you said that... it was like goose-bumpy. It's like something... I got to slip past what my mind usually understands.

**LMC** [00:40:53] Yeah, it's okay. ... I think periodically we have to kind of shift our relationship with things. And one of the things that we need to shift from time to time... is the issue of belief. The issue of belief itself is sometimes a problem. Belief tends to close doors, not open them. And what our practice is about, generally as Buddhists, is to open doors. And when they're closed and they're closed with the lock and key of belief, sometimes that finishes the thing. You can't go any deeper than that. So that's why I say, the truth is... a long time ago when I first heard... a Buddha by definition, pretty much... accomplishes the benefit of others just by their presence. Whatever they do is appropriate for others. And I remember thinking, I just can't, I can't quite get that down. So what I meant to say is, it's okay. You can't get it down. Don't try and force it. Don't try and think that belief is actually a remedy to doubt.

[00:42:13] Doubt is sometimes a really good thing. Especially if we doubt, in the sense of not rejecting, but just not really understanding... and therefore not being able to kind of grasp what it is. It's a little tricky, but personally, I just have to confess... I have a deep doubt, a deep suspicion of belief. ... Even the most sacred stuff in the Dharma, I feel like, you know, it deserves to be tested. And the Buddha is quoted as saying that. Like, test these things. If they

work, great. If they don't, put it aside. The Dalai Lama, I've heard him say it at least a dozen times. If it works, great. If it doesn't, put it aside. He's not saying, reject it. He's not saying, disbelieve it. Not saying to like, you know, walk on the texts and do all sorts of negative stuff. It's just like, it's not working? Do something else. Come back to it. It's a kind of fundamental reasonableness to it that I find helpful.

[00:43:37] I think it's easy to hold a certain kind of view. Like if I say, I find it pretty easy to hold the view that... there is no such thing as a sentient being who does not deserve to be free of suffering and its causes. Such a being does not exist. I find that really easy. It's joyful to hold that view. And yet we look around and we see *lots* of suffering. And some of it we can identify the causes. And some of it we can't. I think it's helpful in embracing a large number of different kind of maladies that people suffer from. Some of the things that people suffer from, it looks like they're self-imposed. Like all they need to do is stop what they're doing and they'll be okay. But they can't. So one option is to hate them since they can't stop. [laughs] And another one would be to love them, since they can't stop. I'd far prefer the latter. Just in terms of personal enjoyment and a sense of goodness in one's life.

**Student 6** [00:45:41] When we were doing our last meditation this morning and we were self-regulating when we stopped and when we started. ... Oh, gosh. I just lost it.

**LMC** [00:46:00] Yeah. I know what that is.

**Student 6** [00:46:05] Just a second. I'll find it. Oh, so... what was happening for me was I'd be meditating and then I'd get distracted. And in my head, I was remembering, never stop a meditation on a distraction. But then it became like, okay, well, maybe I'll just stop right now because you've got to take a break anyway. And then I'd start back up again. So I found that was happening. But then I got caught myself and tried to bring myself back before I took my break. So maybe you could speak to that a little bit.

**LMC** [00:47:21] It is true... that it's best not to end a meditation session when distracted. Better first let the distractions go and then end. I mean, it just creates the right habit, right. [laughs] There's nothing more than that. It's helpful to create the habit. So that when I feel like I'm getting close to the end of the meditation session, I don't invoke the habit of becoming distracted. And it's just that simple. So we have to be careful to not turn it into a kind of... transcendent injunction... against stopping when one is distracted. I mean... it's okay. But if you make a habit out of it, then of course, then it becomes an issue.

[00:48:14] Habits are made by first one and then two and three. One does not do it. And it's important that no matter what practice we are doing... that we understand, that at some point along the way, after following instructions and engaging in the practices as best as we can for some period of time, there comes a time when we have to own that practice. We have to take responsibility for how we use it and what we do with it. And... so the business of ending or not ending it exactly the time when we're distracted or not distracted becomes a personal thing. If that's a *really* important thing to you to not end at that point, then you know what to do about it. Engage in it slightly differently. But otherwise, it's a really good piece of advice... to not end a practice at the moment of a distraction. First, let go of the distraction. Place of mind on the object of your meditating on. And then let it go and finish. Simple.

**Student 6** [00:49:25] Just bringing your mind back, and then you can let it go?



**LMC** [00:49:33] Yeah. It's better. It's not like that's going to eliminate all our kleshas [laughter] by doing that. And it's just, you know, of 20 different things that are worthwhile doing in a certain way... occasionally, you run a different experiment.

**Student 6** [00:49:54] Thank you.

**LMC** [00:50:33] I think it's maybe worthwhile just mentioning that the idea here... is actually much broader than what we might imagine. So for example, if you learn to ride a bicycle, you might ride that bicycle back and forth to work. You might ride it for recreational purposes. Perhaps you'll race with that bicycle. But in some way or another, we might say, that bicycle is part of that person's life, but we wouldn't really say that it *is* their life... in most cases. In the Dharma, we are meant to come to the place of the experience of... it *is* my life. This is what I do. No matter what else I do, this is the underpinnings of all the things that I do. That's the idea. It's not just something to do. It's the foundation of all the things that we do. And that comes about by virtue of really working with the material for a long time. ... And as often as possible, a kind of integrating the insights from the practice into our everyday conversations and our relationships with each other. This make sense?

**Student 7** [00:53:13] I know that you engage in a practice that isn't really a Buddhist practice, but maybe it is... called the 'rule of two'. And I'm wondering if, apropos of [her] question, that you start your practice with a very specific intention on the kind of ending... like you might do in shamatha. I'm going to do 21 breaths and then I'm going to end my practice at that point. That might be what you would call 'the rule of two'. Would that work?

**LMC** [00:53:56] I'm not sure what 'work' means here.

**Student 7** [00:53:58] Well, [her] talking about distraction in the practice. And a lot of times you're discursive mind is what takes you away from the practice. It's not something you intend. But if you make a focus of, okay... first, I'm going to begin my practice... and it's going to be 21 breaths, until I can actually *get* to 21. And I know oftentimes you fall off of that horse! But you get back on until you've completely accomplished 21 breaths with focus. And that ends that set for the practice. That being first, I made the objective to do the practice. And then I succeeded in doing the practice. And there were distractions along the way, but I *succeeded* in doing the 21 breaths. Would that be the rule of two?

**LMC** [00:55:05] I have no idea. I don't think I can address that.

**Student 7** [00:55:11] Well, I'm just talking about beginnings and endings in practice. I mean, for me, practice has to be very tiny bites. I cannot do... say... okay, every day I'm going to get up at eight o'clock and I'm going to do practice for an hour and it's going to be this kind of content. And oh, first, I'll contemplate. I'll read something. I'll contemplate. I'll meditate. That's too big for me. But sometimes I can get up and say... okay, just now I'm going to lie in bed. I'm going to do 21 breaths. That's all I'm going to do. It has a beginning and it has an ending. [laughs] You're looking at me like, I'm crazy. ... Or am I making you crazy?

**LMC** [00:56:10] I'm not sure either one of those is happening, but... so I'm not sure what you want from that. That was a statement. I mean, if you do practice in the morning and you count your breath, you do shamatha... I think, you know, that's good.

**Student 7** [00:56:30] Well, thank you.

**LMC** [00:56:31] It's virtuous! Especially if you hold it as cause of benefit for others.

**Student 7** [00:56:38] Well, I do that differently and at a different time during the day. I don't necessarily do that as my first thing. Well, benefit of others goes on all day.

**LMC** [00:56:48] You know that's the foundation of these practices is... to really plant and nurture a sense of the benefit of all beings. So that whatever I do, even if I just take a bite of food, that there's something that I'm doing with that to encourage a sense of... working for the benefit of others. ... That's the idea behind even just shamatha. We want to put that in our own mind.

**Student 7** [00:57:18] That's good enough, just benefit of others.

**LMC** [00:57:21] Even more than a stable mind, is that aspiration. In the mahayana tradition of Buddhism... even *more* than a stable mind is the ability to regularly, in a somewhat stable way, may include and integrate that wish to benefit all beings. ... It's key. It's foundational.

**Student 7** [00:57:42] And then what about if doing those things, you forget to dedicate the merit?

**LMC** [00:57:50] Well, then you forget to dedicate the merit. I mean, that's what we were talking about earlier in the bullying. You know, we don't want to bully ourselves. So it's my experience that mostly people do bully themselves. And there are others. There are other people in the world who do that, too. But individually, we're our own worst enemies, often with these things.

**Student 7** [00:58:18] So if you forget you just forget.

**LMC** [00:58:20] You just forget. You sit down, you say, I'm going to follow my breath, 21 breaths and you get to three, and that's the last thing you remember. You don't even know when it happened. What's the benefit of accusing yourself of being slovenly and doing all these other... what do you get from that? You get to feel bad. I mean, personally, that doesn't seem like a prize. [laughter] You know, why do it? Start over. Do it again tomorrow. Change your practice. Do something. Do something else.

[00:58:55] We will not integrate our practice into all aspects of our life... if we don't put the time and energy into it. And we won't put the time and energy into it... if we don't find it an inspiration to do in the first place. Those pieces all have to kind of be there. Not because we're not up to the task, but it's really kind of like different keys fit different locks. You need to find the right one. And I know that's not what most of the Tibetan teachers have said. But it looks to me... and working with people, that the people who have a practice that inspires them, do better than those who feel like they're obligated to do something.

**Student 7** [00:59:46] Well, I gave up numbers a very long time ago and I've never gone back on that. But unlike the other lady that was talking about practicing too much and having a sort of ongoing in her day, it just arises for me... at different points in the day. And different things inspire it. And so it isn't what you would call a disciplined practice. It's... just what arises in the course of my day.

**LMC** [01:00:19] You could say... okay, I'm going to do this today once or twice or three times, whatever you're going to do. And you could say, and I'm going to try and do that much twice.

That's all. Not even a commitment. Just try to do it twice. If you do it twice, great. Then you rejoice in having done it twice. And maybe you do it twice again tomorrow. But whatever can be done there, whatever can be planted and nurtured there... is worthy of being planted and nurtured. We don't need to divide it up into who's better, who's worse? Was that enough for me to be a good person or not enough to be a good person? These are the things that we betray ourselves with. That's my feeling about it. ... You betray yourself and feel bad about your practice, you will stop practicing.

**Student 7** [01:01:22] Well, so far I haven't stopped. Thank you, Michael.

**Student 8** [01:02:10] I got a little question that's... a little different direction. Sometimes we hear talk about... karma moving. We hear talk about this moment having come about by... informed by, various past karma, including past this particular life. Or karma... influencing future lives. And so we talk kind of freely about reincarnation or coming back as this or that or the other thing. But we also hear once in a while talk about... no self. I think there's 20 minutes left. [laughter] I don't know if that's enough to go into what no self is. But I've been wondering for some weeks now about this issue. And I've heard some...

**LMC** [01:03:32] Did you do that yourself? [laughter]

**Student 8** [01:03:34] Yeah. You know, all by myself! Yeah. I've read various logical arguments about how the self gets argued right out of the equation. If you look, you can't find it, etc. If that's so, how, how do our actions... go anywhere... like past this life? Or maybe not even past this life. But just like... where does it all go? That's too vague. Excuse me. Just that! So if there's no self, what is reborn? What shows up again in another form?

**LMC** [01:04:27] That one! [laughs] If no self, what is reborn? Hmm. I think you're looking in the wrong place. I mean, it's almost ubiquitous throughout Buddhist teachings and practice that there's a belief... and I think it's so ubiquitous that you kind of have to take it as a belief. That there is no self. And probably it's like that because of a number of things. One is that in order to *get* the thing really on the nose, you have to be able to understand some fairly sophisticated, though I would say, faulty... old time, Greek syllogistic logic. Whereby they claim to prove that there is no self.

[01:05:45] On the other hand, of course, most of us have a strong experience of being a self. So, it's very difficult to eradicate that experience by virtue of logic and philosophical things. We still come back to a place of, "Well, what about me?" We just can't get away from it. And we can't get away from it, not because we're not sophisticated enough in our speech and logic and all of that, but because we generally just have that experience.

[01:06:25] The thing that's far easier, I think, to grasp with this... is the general overall proposition of utterly *fantastic* interconnectedness. Interdependence of all things. Those interdependent things, then we can at least ponder. Experiment a little bit mentally with. And I would put it as a question. Does the interdependence, which seems so clear in the world at large... you know, just generally... you can see how wars come about. You can track the interdependence of those things. You can see how they end. You can track the interdependence of that. Changing relationships that people have, we can track that also. And have a fairly good understanding of what brought about this, and how that came to that, and so on. But we can't cross the boundary between life and death... so easily.

[01:07:37] In order for that to happen, we need to reach into the bag of belief systems, almost without exception. But in a certain way, the Buddhist tradition doesn't require us to have that belief. All they require is no boundary to the interdependence. No boundary means... beyond the boundary of this life. But it doesn't explain how that goes. If we can imagine two possibilities that together kind of resolve this thing, but they don't prove it... I don't think you can find a proof for it, a *compelling* argument even... that in this world, as we sit right here today, the things that we do, think and say... determine, from our own side, how our mind is today. How it is tomorrow. What we will do and say in certain circumstances tomorrow. All these things from just where we are today moving forward. We carry those habitual patterns forward. Like we were talking about earlier.

[01:08:59] But your question, as I understand it, is... "Okay, that all makes sense. But how about between the end of this life and another life?" Trungpa is probably the best person to go to for this. Because... a respected teacher, and scholar also, says... that that transmission doesn't actually happen... in that way. In other words, if I die today, the things that I said today, that might affect what would happen to me tomorrow... it's like it's chopped there at the end of this life. Not in the sense that there *isn't* anything after it. But rather in the sense that there are things after it. And we can see all of those things, kind of from a surface perspective, but we can't see the actual connections between.

[01:10:18] So, when I have this conversation with friends, who actually don't want to go anywhere with it, [laughs] it always has to go into the realm of... what if? What if this? What if that? Everybody can relate to interdependence. You don't have to be a Buddhist. You can be a complete cynic. You can still relate to interdependence. Most of us can relate to it to *such* a degree... that even if we can't see the interdependence between things, we find it easy to assume that there *is* an interdependence. We just don't see it. Because almost always... we can see it. And so when we can't see it, it's easy to just make that inference. Must be there. ... No reason not to think it's there. So it comes down to that place of, Well, have it your way... one way or the other.

[01:11:22] So if you just go that far with it, that... in the context of this life, I can see that what I think, have thought, what I have said and done... these things create a series of connections with others. Series of connections with my experiences of the material world and the non-material world and so on. And I can readily grasp that those interdependencies actually are the things that play into my habitual patterns. So are they the sole creator of the habitual patterns? You don't have to go there. All you have to do is kind of go up to the doorstep of it and you can see, "Well, there *might* be something that is not interdependent, but I can't *find* something that is not interdependent." That's as far as, personally, I can go with it.

[01:12:27] I think it comes to an interesting conclusion when we say that... "I can kind of half way go with this... that our experience in this life, all the things that happen to us, all of our habitual patterns, our relationships with others... that the great majority of those things are put into motion... before this life. Such that we draw the conclusion, and this is a kind of standard Buddhist conclusion... that what we do in this life has relatively little impact in the future. As opposed to the impact of what we have done before. So from a logical perspective, if it's true... that the things that I do and think and say bear their fruit later in this life *and* in the next life, then it's not a very big step to imagine that the effect... of previous lives is *huge* in this life, and relatively small for what I have done in this life. But it *will* catch up. So that always seems to me like that's a very interesting proposition. And it's as good a conclusion, not perfect, [laughs] but

as good a conclusion as *any* of the conclusions in this realm of, you know, endless series of lives and things. So.

**Student 8** [01:14:17] I find that one very inspiring and helpful as a perspective. And it doesn't feel like a conclusion. Actually, feels like a working hypothesis. Like, hmm, that's helpful. And yet I still feel like, well, if... this little constellation of... interdependence that I recognize as myself, and all of my influences and all of my little exchanges with the world... and other people in the physical world and history and blah blah blah... but if I see that as a... provisional assortment, you know, like I'm thinking about the five skandhas of form, perception, cognition, whatever, you know, that just happened to come together and coalesce for this life... they don't seem to be very steady to me. They seem to be moving around a lot. And so, within the bound... I'm kind of taking off, I'm finding encouragement in what you've just said. And I'm thinking on the other side of the boundary between this life and a supposed next life... it's going to be similarly haphazard. Or maybe not haphazard. There might be some precise geometry to it, but undecipherable. But you know, the five skandhas that come together, like could mix up with this person's over there or that person. You never know what's going to end up on the other side if it's all interdependent. What is it that ends up over there? And yet there's some sense of continuity, you know. Like our whole lives, there's some sense of continuity. But I'm not a five-year-old anymore. So... but still, what you've just said is helpful. Mysterious.

**LMC** [01:16:26] The piece here for me is, as I've heard, as you probably have heard, all the arguments... to refute the existence of self. There's a lot of arguments that have been put together, primarily by Buddhists, [laughs] to refute even the *possibility* that there is such a thing as a self. All of those arguments to me seem specious. Not a single one feels compelling. I think part of the problem is that I studied logic in college. It's like the logic that we use as Buddhists is not compelling. Unfortunately, that doesn't actually solve the problem. Because the experiences that we have as a self, that is... I experience *myself*. I don't experience yourself. We experience *ourselves*. And I think most of us would say that's as close as I can get. I can't experience somebody else. Somebody else's *self*. I do experience other people. And I experience my 'self' in the sense of a self. I experience that. So no logic can get rid of that sense.

[01:17:51] And yet it's said, that through certain practices, that can be dropped. Sense of self. So I find that more intriguing... than the logical pieces. Because the logical pieces are just logical pieces. Whereas... we grow up and we grow old. And we can pretty much recall a sense of self, going back to when we were children. No logic puts that to bed, kind of. Just like, it's still there. I still have that. I *still* have that sense now. I'm not sure that there's anything wrong with having that sense of a self from a Buddhist perspective.

[01:18:37] I think from a Buddhist perspective, the question is, what are you doing with it? So it comes down to... where are things like ethics and things like the six perfections and so on? Those things reside in our actions. How we act. What we do with this thing that we imagine, or experience, as a self. I think it even goes back to just the basic shamatha. The real issue is... what do you experience? And can you put your awareness on that experience? And just sit there on that experience as if the experience was a stool, and you're sitting on it. And there's a hurricane... swirling around you and you just sit there... quietly... still. And in that milieu is the answer to what is self. I think that's the idea.

**sangha** [01:20:40] *dedicating the merit*