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interconnectedness and 4 Immeasurables, working with gift from guru, story of crying bodhisattva, practice of 'lifting' someone each day, view compared to belief (which can be problematic), confidence as the fruit

LMC [00:01:27] So for those of you who are not already initiated into what's coming, [laughter] this is our time to just have an open discussion about the meditation practices, the Dharma, teachings in general... anything that you'd like to raise as a question or comment or looking for clarification, whatever subject is... okay.

Student 1 [00:02:08] With the recent news between the rhetoric of President Trump and North Korea, I started to think, 'Oh, I think I'm actually getting scared now.' And so, you know, being almost 70, I'm contemplating, you know, impermanence and death. And I thought, Gee, I hope it doesn't come sooner than I was expecting. But I started considering that. And then when you talked about interdependence this morning, I was thinking, Okay. Can I really take in that idea of my connection with these two individuals? And how can I work with that? So if I have a question, that's where it is.

LMC [00:03:11] Thank you for starting out with an easy one for. [laughter] ... Well, in one sense, you have no choice. I mean, you have no choice as to working with the interconnectedness. Within that context, there are, of course, many, many options. So it's worth exploring them. Just like it's worth exploring anything that we're face to face with and cannot walk away from. ... You still have the choice of walking *into* it.

[00:04:48] Of the many approaches that one can take, I think the first really important one to consider is the study of the contemplation of, the meditation upon, interdependence. Which is often stated as the foundation of all of the Buddhist teachings. Like no exception. The single most important thing... interdependence. Even when it comes to... is it more important than loving kindness? ... Nice to explore that. ... What happens if I put aside loving kindness because I feel like I could match the hatred. Or I could match the disagreement. Or I could match the, kind of... insanity of it. But what's helpful?

[00:05:48] So what's helpful to each one of us is often what's helpful to everybody. And when we say that we need to look on all beings as deserving to be free of suffering and its causes. There are cases where we feel like that's difficult to actually embrace. Not so sure that everyone deserves to be free of suffering and its causes. But if we explore that, even in a superficial way, we have to include ourselves in that. And no one would like to be in another category other than... deserving to be free of suffering and its causes. I mean, who would that be? Who that even be in history, picking the most... villainous individuals that we could pick? We have quite a few to pick from. [laughs] Then who... of those would actually feel like they don't deserve to be free?

[00:06:57] And the truth is, I think there are some who feel like they don't deserve to be free. But the problem there is that they probably *came* to that place by virtue of recognizing the terrible things that they had done. Because those who have not done terrible things will feel like they deserve to be free of causes of suffering. So then it's fairly easy to step into the place of... why would I wish them otherwise? Because if I wish them... suffering equal to what they've caused...

then we're just wishing for a magnification, which is incalculable... that they will do more bad things.

[00:07:48] So the place where people are harmonious and working together and caring for each other... working with the Four Immeasurables of loving kindness and joy and compassion, equanimity. That place, people don't want to do negative things. So they may *do* them. But they don't *want* to do them. And there's a big difference there. So a starting place could be... just the wish that they be free of those causes of suffering. And that they manifest the freedom by virtue of holding that same wish for others. Instead of the wish of getting even.

[00:08:32] So I remember Kalu Rinpoche once answered this question when, of course people ask, regularly, any great teacher... like how do you deal with these really, like 'undealable' situations? And he said, Well, those things happen. Anywhere in the world at any time, they've happened everywhere. They'll continue to happen as long as there is samsara. So that's the basic... byline, you could say. As long as samsara is there, then there will be confusion. There will be suffering. There will be hatred. There will be all of these things. And there will be some mixture also of the Four Immeasurables, except they probably won't be immeasurable. That is to say, I hope that my kids are okay. I hope that my mother is okay. I hope my wife or husband is okay. I hope the neighbors are okay. It's very kind of discreet. It's not unbounded. But once you see the relationship between the pieces of interdependence and where it leads... then the desire to manifest the Four Immeasurables, in an *unbounded* way, is really not so hard to have the aspiration for it.

[00:09:54] So then Kalu Rinpoche would say, and it's so important, it is so critical, in the long run.... and when he talked about the long run, he's talking about millennia of lifetimes and the causes of and conditions kind of manifesting through that large period... then you really *want* to be a cause for unbounded goodness. And when people pushed him on that, he would say, as it is said in many famous texts, that it's better to die... than to abandon that principle. For two reasons.

[00:10:44] One is, probably, if you're at that place, you're going to die anyway. And there may be suffering that you cannot avoid. So to make it work by... throwing fuel on the negative approach, more hatred, more anger and more disagreement and all... only becomes a cause that backfires on the person who does that. So once you see *that* you don't want to do that. If it's the end of your life, you want to be able to have a sense that you manifested more loving kindness, compassion [and] caring than you received yourself. And so there can be no regret. Whatever else is there, you've maintained your bodhicitta, your wish to maintain it, your wish to magnify it and whatever comes from that... *has* to be better than what was. That's the best that one can do.

[00:11:50] And if you then, also make the wish, literally on your dying breath, that you would once again be introduced to the wish to benefit all sentient beings... to free beings from suffering and its causes... then if there is any truth at all to karma and interdependence, then that will bear its fruit in your stream of consciousness at some time in the future. So no reason for regret.

Student 1 [00:12:27] Okay. So... as I am contemplating these two individuals and my interdependence with them... I mean, I can kind of invoke this idea that there are levels of confusion, which often is *very* helpful to me, and even in this instance, it's helpful to me. But I think I'm wanting some kind of a... recipe here.

LMC [00:13:09] Recipe? You would be good at that.

Student 1 [00:13:11] Yeah. I like recipes. [laughter] You know, just like... some visualizations, some thoughts, some wish, some... something that I could like, when I get totally freaked out... what do I grab onto?

LMC [00:13:39] How many do you want?

Student 1 [00:13:44] I don't know. I can handle a few.

LMC [00:13:48] We can handle a few of your recipes too. [laughter] So first of all, let's go for the heroic. I mean, sometimes anything less than that doesn't work. And we have a feeling of, I already did that. *That* didn't work. So the heroic, in my opinion, is the... confidence that comes from repetition over and over again of certain kinds of things that can lead you to the place of... looking at your current relationship with these two beings and... reciting to yourself a little bit, my connection with these two beings, and all like it, are a gift... from the lineage. A gift from the guru. So you don't need to say a gift to humanity, which you'd have trouble holding.

[00:15:05] But... this is one of the most profound visions or attitudes to hold in very difficult times from the standpoint of the entire mahayana path. That very difficult situations are to be considered a gift from the guru. A gift from the lineage. And of course, we don't need to turn it into a kind of sappy thing where we really think that some great being decided, we really need this. And so they gave it to us. And now we're going to deal with it. But that's okay, too... if one can do that. All that's really necessary... and helpful to do in our daily lives continually as things come up, so let's just use let's just use Donald Trump and.... what is he called?

[00:16:05] Can't say his name? So maybe that's a good thing. You know, you can't hate who you don't even know the name of the person. [laughter] So it's, you know, the mantra doesn't work. [laughs] So, just to hold that view, every time that we get a new experience, we just imagine that... through the kindness of the guru *and* my connection, the interconnectedness thing is *huge*.... so through the interconnectedness, I receive this as a gift. So there's no requirement for anything there. It's just a gift. So what are you going to do with the gift? No formula, no recipe. You know, you just kind of buy the vegetables and stir fry them. And in the process, you have the right to experiment. I don't have to *love* this person. Maybe that's a little too much. But I can at least have the sense that... suffering is ubiquitous. It's everywhere.

[00:17:18] There's the story of the crying bodhisattva from way back. And the crying bodhisattva would walk around to the villages and see people enjoying themselves. And realize that what they were doing in their enjoyment was actually planting and nurturing the causes of suffering. And so he would cry. And of course, it wasn't a great thing to do! Because it bewildered other people. Caused them also to be sad. Even when they didn't know what to be sad about.

[00:17:57] So I think... in terms of the gift, you have to have a plan. Like, what am I going to do with that gift? Well, one thing is... try to do something, just like... [flaps his lips]. Try to do something every day. I'd like to say every hour, but let's just start with every day, something every day that makes somebody smile. Like, real time! Not like... this would make somebody smile, so I'll hold this for you. No, actually, you have to like, say something, do something, and then they smile. Something cracks, something changes. You can do it in the marketplace. You can do it on the street. And you can walk out here and walk down the street and you see somebody you haven't seen and you say, you look like you're having a nice day. But you say it

from the place of... my job is... make somebody... lifted slightly. And then you see it and you can just feel, okay, there's one. I mean, you have a practice and you understand what the practice is for. Not so difficult.

[00:19:14] And as you do that over and over, it becomes easier and easier... to do that. And if somebody doesn't kind of lift, by virtue of what you said, then you'll have another chance just around the block. And little by little then... you wouldn't do that if you didn't have this sense of fear and trepidation because of things that are going on in the world. So then you can take that as the gift. So the gift is resulting in my engaging in these things in a different way. So will the world end? Of course. Will my life end? Of course. Will it be pleasant? Probably not. Right? You know... [laughs] but you just be unstoppable. Because if it *is* going to end, that's what will bring that about. The end of suffering. The end of warring attitudes, you know, probably you and I aren't going to be the cause of that. But if *nobody* is the cause of it, then it doesn't go away. So to take responsibility for it and just do something, something, something.

[00:20:30] It's like that teaching of the, you know, with a... I can't remember the details of it, but there was this person who was told, you know, it's like, you need to just do lots of good things... all the time. And it was somebody who felt and probably did actually, do mostly negative things. And so the game that was given to the person, the 'gift' was... you have a jar. And you have white rocks and black rocks. And as you do positive things, you put one of the white rocks in, and when you put negative things then you put a black rock in. And over time, that's your kind of continuous report card. And so that affected the person. First seeing like, whoa, you know, 20 black rocks. Not one white one. Not so good. And then, of course, the teachings on interdependence, like this is not going to work so well for you in the future. Gradually then changing until, I think there was also the part of the game where you can take a black rock out at some point. So it gradually changed to a jar full of white rocks. Which, at that point of course, didn't need a report card. Because the report card was the sense of mental clarity and joy. ... So the gift... now coming to fruition. Okay? That's one. [laughs]

Student 2 [00:22:36] Along that vein, Michael, I really do want to believe that people are good. And I just can't anymore. So would you speak some more about this subject?

LMC [00:22:53] Well... that's no big thing.

Student 2 [00:23:02] It's different for me, I didn't...

LMC [00:23:05] The reason that's a big thing is because you're... *believing* it. You know, the belief is a problem. The belief in goodness is also a problem. So, often, when we believe in goodness and then we discover that it's not all so good... we have a sense of betrayal around it. And that kind of, you know, dents our bodhicitta. [laughed] Like we just T-boned someone in our car. So we to actually have a sense of the *view*, the power of the view. And the view here could be that we might hold the view, *not* the belief, the view, because the view fits in the interconnectedness. The issue is, what happens, by virtue of what you do with your mind? It's not an issue of some objective thing. Like people are good or people are bad. People are all those things. We've all been all those things. So we should know that that's what it is. [laughs] But the *view*... produces a different result. Because it's not driven by a belief. Shouldn't be.

[00:24:16] The belief is, actually... I think you could make a case... that it's detrimental. It's detrimental. Belief is, in a way, solidifying a particular view. You know what I mean? As opposed to... all beings, for sure, would like to be free of suffering. So that's good. Whatever their

suffering is, just by definition, if they suffer, if they hurt, they would like to be free of it. And if they wouldn't like to be free from it, there's a deeper hurt driving *that* than was even there before. ... It's pathological in some other way... and bringing about more pain for themselves and others. So here, we just have the sense of the view. I can see that all the people that I know would like to be free of suffering and its causes. They would like to feel joyful... happy. They might not yet know the joy of equanimity. But if they did, they would like to have it.

[00:25:31] That's really the starting point then, so you have a view... that you manufacture yourself. We manufacture all of our views and beliefs. The difference here is that you see what you doing. And seeing what you're doing is a *prerequisite* to freedom. If you don't see it... by definition, you're in bondage. To get out of that, we generate the view. We hold the view. We don't tell ourselves, 'Well, this view is *the truth*.' We hold it because it opens an eye. It opens a vision. It opens a possibility. It provides us with opportunities. And we don't need to fool ourselves that this is the absolute truth. No, this is totally relative. Only relative. But if you want to *witness* the absolute truth, you're going to have to come to these things. We never start with the absolute and end up accomplishing the relative. It's the other way around. Fortunately, the relative is easier to accomplish. [laughs] So, if we can... work with it... and we can start by just denting... the negativity of it. Just some small thing. ...

[00:27:05] One of the things we have to not be... like personally heroic, also. Like I *should* be. The heroic move. I should be. I should be able to at least hold this wish for other beings. ... That's what the book says, I should be able to do this. That's a problem. As soon as the word 'should' is there, it's like we've just been shot in the leg, you know. It's kind of like we bring ourselves down with that. It's not part of this tradition. It's part of being an American. 'Should' is a big deal. It's not part of this tradition. The 'should.' The aspiration to accomplish the Dharma, the aspiration to hold positive thoughts about others and even about myself, *that's* a piece of the tradition. But the guilt part is not part of it. That's an add-on. That we add to it. And we all know, when we do that, it compromises the vision.

[00:28:14] So, we're not looking at something simple here, that's really easy to do. Otherwise, there wouldn't be so much talk about how to manifest the vision and hold the vision. There's a lot of teachings on that. Not because it's easy. Because that's difficult. But, so is shooting on ourselves and constantly feeling a sense of guilt that we're not accomplishing something. That's even more difficult and detrimental. And often, because it's cultural based, we don't see it. Or we hold it to be a self-apparent truth.

[00:28:57] So... the baseline is, can you see it? Seeing it... is the game, really. If you can see it... in the moment that you see it, you are free of it. Of course, it's hard to *stabilize* the seeing. [laughs] So as soon as we lose that... now we're back into the place, I'm not sure that I can do this. Even when you just did it. It's a coming back, coming back, coming back. Nurturing our sense of connection. I mean, this is where we can kind of see when we contemplate interdependence, we can see the brilliance of that. That first of all, even just from a kind of ordinary, low level science perspective... interdependence is obvious. I don't win when I hate somebody. Even if they *totally* deserve to be hated. I don't win. I lose. So, when I recognize that, then I see the interdependence. So what do I do about that?

[00:30:10] Well, what you do about is kind of obvious. Can you do it? That's another thing. But if you can just sneak in something positive between the lines of hatred and dislike and all these other things... it's kind of like a wedge. Because when you sneak it in and have the wish for the benefit of somebody, you immediately feel that. It's like everything else. If I hate somebody, I

feel it. If I turn around and think, 'Yeah, that's not so good.' I feel that. And if I managed to make a change in that, I feel that too. And all of those feel that, feel that, feel that, adds up to interdependence. We are the masters of interdependence. Now, but we have to do is see that. ... What do you think? ... Are we okay or want to continue? Go ahead.

Student 2 [00:31:18] That's helpful. But... I'm really way beyond caring what people think and guilt and all that. I really don't care what people think about what I think. Or what people think about me. I really don't care. And I don't really think about what I should or shouldn't do. That's not an issue. I think I just am broken hearted at what I experience in this society. Just absolutely broken hearted. And that just eats at me. That just eats at me. Maybe I spent my whole life being naive.

[00:32:04] But I just, you know, down the bottom, yes, there is the view that everyone has buddhanature and has that potential. But it's getting harder and harder and harder to see signs of that. And I'm not talking about people in this room today or anything like that. I just mean, you know, what's happened to me in the last few years. It just eats away at me mentally because of the... unbridled evil and greed and stupidity and hate that I experience personally. And I just have such a hard time... believing that I'm supposed to live in this society. It just hurts.

LMC [00:33:05] There's that belief thing again.

Student 2 [00:33:11] When you know. ... So if I see... if I work more in terms of view and less in terms of belief.

LMC [00:33:26] It's helpful

Student 2 [00:33:27] I hear that. I hear that and I'll take that to heart. But... what I experience just isn't good. It just isn't good.

LMC [00:33:48] We could all say that we have times... and maybe long times and maybe a whole lifetime, where what we experience feels like, it's not good. But at this point in time, right where we are today... at some point, we will launch the next place. We will be in the next place. We will make some change that is helpful... or not. And we have the tools to do something that improves, not just undermines, not just continues. It doesn't mean that we know how to use it. And sometimes we have a lot of magical thinking... about how things should be, could be, or how easy it might be to do something, or how easy it is to be negative about something. But there is a starting point that we get... over and over again. It's not just one point. It's not just one failure. It's not just one win. It's like it comes over and over again... continuously get it.

[00:34:55] But we are *very* good at developing habitual patterns. The analogy that sticks with me, because I can always remember the first and only time that I rode a roller coaster. [laughter] And how exciting it was to get into that car and go up. And then at a certain point it dawning on you what was in front. [laughter] And then abject fear. And for me, the firm decision, if I *lived* through this, I'll never do this again. And I didn't. But the point is, the car comes into the place and you get out. And there is the opportunity to do something else. You will do something else, just like we all do... every day, actually every second. We do something that we have never done before.

[00:36:16] So the question for us is, always, we generally don't state the question, we generally don't answer the question, but it is, 'What are you going to do now?' What are you going to do

now? And when you mentioned something... about not caring about what other people think and say and do and all of that... I think that it's important to recognize where the opportunities are. We can get caught in a place where... everywhere we look looks to us like no opportunity. Dead end of some kind. ... That becomes our default place, our default experience. At some point, it will occur. So just speaking from a Buddhist perspective, and I think it's a perspective in this case that I share... is that at some point, something different will be done. That you will do something different. That Donald [ref: Trump] will do something different. That everyone does something different. And something moves.

[00:37:38] And maybe it's not skillful. And so things maybe get more suffering. And other times it is skillful. And sometimes we don't recognize that the better feeling we have actually is coming from what *we did* inside. From the inside out. We don't recognize that we did that. So we, once again, have the sense of... it was done to me. Even though it's pleasant, you know. We can feel good by virtue of what people do *to* us, as well as feeling negative about it. But the value from, I think a human perspective, is to recognize our *own* goodness in there. *I* am doing this. This is positive. And to actually witness that. Not to tell others about it, necessarily.

[00:38:33] But by the same token, I want to make an explicit... sense of an opportunity. And that is, we are never with... short of being completely enlightened, we are never with... all sentient beings. We are with ourselves. And we are with small groups that we relate with. We are never with all sentient beings. So we say, great enlightened beings are. They're present, with all of them. Our job is to add more to the roster. Because there isn't any other approach that finally leads to well-being. All you got to do is look in the world and you can see... that's what it is. We separate ourselves from all others. And it does not lead to happiness. It generally leads to judgments about each other and all. And we already know where the judgments go. Some kind of prison. Whether it's an explicit, you know, steel cell somewhere or whether it's just our mind. In the steel trap of our own mind. ... You're here, because... are you not looking for something?

Student 2 [00:40:18] Yes. [laughter]

Student 3 [00:40:31] So just taking off of that, I was aware when [she] was talking that... last night, I was in the car with my husband, and he started ranting about politics and whatnot. And as you were talking, you were talking about *seeing*. So I was really aware when he took the conversation in that direction, how tense I became. And how anxious I became. And sitting here, I realized that that's happening a lot. And I'm actually feeling really anxious a lot. And I never know when someone's going to bring up politics, because it's totally triggering. I feel completely overwhelmed most of the time when people bring it up. And I feel angry and I have all this complexity of emotions. So... you're talking about seeing and then doing something different. So what I would love is a little recipe on those moments when people just bring things up and I'm triggered into this state of anxiety. It's really getting bad, actually. Like, I actually don't even know what to do with the anxiety anymore. And it's becoming chronic. Because it's happening so much. And I'm so worried all the time... like I've never been in my entire life. So anyway, tonglen? What kind of practice would you suggest for moments of anxiety like that or skillful means?

LMC [00:42:17] Well, you mentioned tonglen. So... what about it? [laughs]

Student 3 [00:42:28] Maybe do that for myself?

LMC [00:42:29] Oh, yeah! Don't you do it for yourself? huh?

Student 3 [00:42:35] I do, yeah. But that just came out like, I literally was not doing that last night, obviously. I just thought of it this moment that maybe that's something I could apply. But maybe you have other ideas or techniques or practices that I could apply.

LMC [00:42:51] Oh yeah, sure. And your actually identifying the most difficult piece. I mean, doing it for yourself is *really* difficult. ... It's interesting, I think... you know, from my own side, I find it interesting to ponder, to contemplate... all of the reasons that we all have to be despondent. It's a fairly long list of what an outsider might say, are totally reasonable causes of despondency. So then the question is, are we *stuck* there? Like we fell into concrete that was setting up and didn't get out in time., or what? ...

[00:44:20] You know, it's almost... I would say it's 100 percent the case, that... the contemplation of interdependence leads very quickly to the place of... an understanding and a seeing of interdependence. Because it's so obvious! It doesn't require enormous intellect or insight or anything. It doesn't require an education. We can all see interdependence functioning. And when we see it functioning, we then have an opportunity to add a different seed into it. It's just always there. But, perhaps... we recognize that we might do that... sort of after we've gone over the falls. And so, we sort of cast a seed into the water, but we don't actually have any confidence at all that that will bear any fruit. And in many situations, the confidence itself *is* the fruit. So when we don't have confidence, we really have planted the seed of no recognition of what's going on. When it's in front of us all the time. And we want it, of course.

[00:45:47] Oftentimes, we can see the long chain of events that leads us to a place of despair. And that long chain of events can feel like, well I mean, just obvious, it can feel like... *hopeless*. How am I going to work with that? I cannot imagine how I would work with that. ... I think that at that time, we often rely upon others. And so, I would make a case also for... the value of healthy meetings of healthy people. And by '*healthy*' here, I think we could define it in many ways... but just as a shot in the dark, how about just a healthy group of people who are willing to talk about and explore these things from the perspective that we've been talking about.

[00:46:51] From some of the things that I sometimes hear... are kind of surprising. Nobody's actually said this, but it sometimes *feels* like this... that maybe we're in like the absolute *worst place ever* in history. As if... we were under the thumb of Mussolini or Hitler or Stalin or something like that. And that we were just totally stuck. And then it's kind of interesting... because personally, I don't believe that. But... it's still pretty easy to see... that the suffering comes from the inside out. And as long as we can see *that*, then we're actually right on the drift to go out of it. To slide out of it. Because we see that it's not fixed. It's not a single thing. It's a conglomeration of a whole bunch of things together. And our view of those things leads us to despondency, to... you know, happiness or not happiness.

[00:48:10] Many times I think we also feel like it's not *correct*... to have a sense of joy. Like we are somehow... ourselves...becoming slightly *evil* by virtue of having a sense of joy, you know. It's an American thing. [laughter] You don't deserve it. Don't go there. This is not an issue of... I did good things and so now I get my ice cream cone. It's really about if I can see and experience positive things and *feel* a sense of joy from my own side. When I see somebody else, it's more likely that the interchange is going to bring joy to them. Or *insight* to them, which will also manifest in joy. It's far more likely. But if I'm in a dark cloud, I can't do that. So we're more likely to... kind of heal ourselves by putting ourselves in this sphere of people who are willing and able to engage at that level. Like, this is actually not darkness.

[00:49:26] So when we say... this is a gift from the guru, what it really means is... the gift is disguised as something else. It's actually light. It's not dark. ... You just need to unwrap it. ... And we all know how to unwrap it. All of the instructions for doing it are in every practice that we engage in. You need to unwrap it. I mean, what do we do in shamatha, like this morning? What's the main thing we're doing? Is we're just allowing the mind to rest and see. Not to fix. Not to analyze. Not to do anything with. The very best practice of shamatha is just to see. And having seen... to do nothing with it. Just the seeing itself is the thing.

[00:50:19] We naturally do the right thing when we see. When we see clearly, we do the right thing. It's kind of like... it's raining outside, so you take your umbrella. It's just almost that simple. This is not great insight. [laughs] This is just... simple. You sit still. You see what the mind generates. You just see it. You don't need to judge it good, bad or anything. You just see it. Develop that skill... and the rest will follow naturally from the truth of interdependence. ... When we get too far down, we find it very difficult to float back up. So sometimes, I would say it's true... we might not be interested in what the *world* feels about us. But we do have some hopeful prospect in the context of our spiritual community... that we may not find somewhere else. And the value of that is, is that if that works, then it tends to be contagious. ... Number two. [laughter] So we should generate the thankfulness for the merit before we lose it.

sangha [00:51:52] *dedicating the merit*