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busyness and its antidotes of shamatha with refuge and bodhicitta

[00:04:58] So, first of all, welcome to all of you and especially those of you who are here for the first time. Our meditation practice this evening is what we call calm abiding, or a more technical term shamatha. This particular practice is important because... we tend to have very busy minds. ... Busyness driven by many things. Sometimes positive excitement. And other times, kind of dark depression... and everything in between. And the busyness becomes... a very large problem because most of the time, we *believe* in it. ... The irritations... and the many rambling thoughts in our minds... at times, lead us to a place of despair. And so naturally, we would like to do something about it. And the practice of calm abiding... along *with*... what we call refuge and bodhicitta... are very strong antidotes... to this busyness. So we begin first... reciting the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer... which are... meant to be antidotes... to our fixations.

[00:08:15] So one of the points we raised this morning I'd like to raise this evening again... is that we cannot alone, each of us, by ourselves, no matter how brilliant we are... we cannot subdue this busyness, this darkness, this exhaustion... and all the other ways that we might characterize it... it is not within our power... to subdue it by ourselves. ... So, many centuries ago, a different approach was developed. Whereby, if we can... get some *help* in this process, we might be able to... work with it. So the first part of that puzzle is to recognize... that we cannot do it alone... because it is the '*self*' itself. It is the '*me*' who wants to overcome it. But I am the one who maintains it. Feeds it. ... And the angry dog bites me anyway. So in order to... circumvent that little difficulty... that looks, on the surface, to be impossible to resolve, for who, other than myself, could possibly be of help? And so it's helpful to consider two things.

[00:10:59] One is... that if we *could* find someone who could be helpful, that would be marvelous and might provide us with the... mental space, if you will... to allow the mind to settle peacefully. Calmly, as in calm abiding. And even to enjoy the presence of that self. So we... make a request. As the beginning, the request is to... someone who might be a spiritual friend, if you will. Someone who is on the path with us. Perhaps someone who... is the progenitor or the... one who gave us the path or showed us the path. So one method is to go to them and ask for help. Especially if it's someone who has worked on these things for a long time. Then they will understand why it is you need help. And they may, possibly, be capable of showing you the way out. So that's one method... in essence.

[00:13:17] A second method for working with this... inexorable, seemingly permanent and... undefeatable, sense of self... is to explore a proposition. And the proposition is that... the source of clarity, sanity... and happiness... is not actually what we do for ourselves, but what we do for others. ... And one of the most extraordinary things that we can do for others... that we rarely give any credibility to at all... is to fill our own minds... with the wish... for the benefit, happiness and joy of others. And imagine that that benefit overflows... and has an effect on all beings.

[00:15:14] So here we have two very important things. One is... relying upon another... to find our way out of the woods of self-centeredness. ... And to recognize, for ourselves and others, that the cause of happiness is... loving kindness, compassion, joy... a sense of equanimity and relationship to all others. And when we make *that* discovery, then we can benefit others just by virtue of filling our own minds, our own hearts... with that joy and with that loving kindness... and compassion and equanimity. In other words, we fill our *own* minds with that. But we understand,

that due to the truth of interconnectedness... all of those wonderful attributes... naturally flow out and affect others.

[00:16:45] So in this way then, we begin our session this evening with the recitation of refuge and bodhicitta. Refuge here is refuge in the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha. ... So we imagine that we are indeed taking refuge *in* the Buddha. Whether it is the historical figure or some more recent individual, our teachers in the Dharma... are examples and so on... and take the place of the Buddha. And secondly, the bodhicitta prayer, which we just discussed as being the root of... awakening in the mahayana tradition. ... To fill our minds and hearts... with kindness and compassion, joy and equanimity. In the context of the bodhicitta prayer and aspiration, we do this in order to bring great benefit to all sentient beings. So as we recite this prayer, it's important, to not just say the words but to... imagine that as you make the wishes, the aspirations... that they spontaneously occur. Effortlessly. ... Following that recitation, then we'll have a few words... for the instructions for the practice.

sangha [00:19:03] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayers*

[00:20:59] Having engaged in the recitation of refuge and bodhicitta, which should be done, which is helpful to do... before every meditation session... we now begin the practice of calm abiding. ... Calm abiding is... often considered a... method, or series of methods, by which... we allow the mind... to rest naturally, peacefully... in a calm, stable, still state. Undisturbed... by whatever conflicts... we might be engaged in... or be aware of. By whatever excitement we might be engaged in or aware of. ... By whatever activities... we are possessed by. ... Calm abiding is meant to be an antidote. ... To deliver, by virtue of the training in calm abiding, to deliver... a stillness, a presence... that may not otherwise be possible to experience.

[00:23:21] So in essence, you can use... almost any object... for your calm abiding. Some inanimate object like a stick or a stone, a statue. Some design in the floor in front of you. ... A sense of well-being or a sense of... even despair. Calm abiding *can* be the antidote... to all the obstacles... of launching oneself... *well* into the path... of overcoming all the causes of suffering. ... Usually we start... with something simple, like our breath. Of course, if one suffers from... breathing problems... asthma or something else... then it is difficult. But practicing calm abiding... we will not be able to... completely avoid our difficulties anyway. So whether the object we use for our breath is easy or difficult... doesn't matter so much.

[00:25:38] Sometimes we think that the *object* of calm abiding is to... train our minds to be very still. ... But that is not always the case, and not necessarily... the main reason for practicing calm abiding. Maybe we're plagued... by certain repeating thoughts. I should say, *apparently* repeating thoughts. Perhaps we're plagued by jealousy... an extreme sense of pride... anger... and so on. ... Calm abiding *could* be an antidote. But even more important than the calm abiding as an antidote... is the calm abiding... of just developing the skill to be able to see. To be able to see the despair. To be able to see the fear... the pride... the jealousy, the greed and so on. Just to be able to see it without even any *intention*... of applying an antidote. Just to be able to see it... in the place of stillness... is an enormous thing.

[00:28:13] So while you sit quietly... you could, for example, place your awareness upon the movement of your breath. ... Following the breath, like you... follow the movement of air in and out of your body. ... Just following the breath. ... In the moment of practicing calm abiding there needs not be a reason... a purpose. In fact, a reason and a purpose may be an obstacle. Better, just... *do it*. ...And along the way, if you feel a little tense, physically... a little bit challenged by

the discomfort of sitting... or the discomfort of mental processes and so on, you can just take a short break, right on your cushion. By moving your body a little bit, back and forth... relaxing with intention, letting go of the meditation for a few moments or minutes. And then... when you are ready, just settling back... into that shamatha, that calm abiding again... as often as you need to do that. You may find it helpful.

[00:30:31] period of meditation

sangha *[00:50:14] dedicating the merit*