

2017_10_29_pm1_Shamatha_LMC.mp4

practicing to be still, stabile and relaxed, benefits of short sessions, method for taking breaks

[00:06:05] So, first of all, good evening to all of you. So our usual program this evening is to have a period of shamatha, or calm abiding, with some very brief instructions. Especially for those who are not familiar with the practice. From the perspective of understanding the practice of calm abiding, it's very easy. Easy to understand what we're trying to do. Which is to settle the mind... in stillness. Not stirring ourselves up in some way. Just to remain still in the body and still in the mind. ... But the paradox of the practice is that... the more effort we make to remain still... we find that it may not be so difficult on the outside, keeping our bodies still, keeping our speech still. But keeping the minds still... is not so easy. And sometimes, even the most... experienced individuals find... that stabilizing the mind and body in stillness is... quite difficult.

[00:09:01] So this evening, as we begin, we will first turn our minds, as usual, to refuge... in the awakened mind, or the Buddha, however, you want to think of it. Refuge in our... understanding of the teachings. And refuge in the community of practitioners that we call the sangha. And especially those individuals that we call the exalted sangha... who reside all over the planet. And in general, such a community has been here since the time of the Buddha. So we'll begin by reciting the short refuge prayer.

sangha [00:10:20] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:12:17] Whether we are... quite adept at the practice of shamatha... or new to it, we understand that engaging in the practice... periodically... a few times a day, even for very short sessions, is very helpful. And we can quickly come to a place of confidence... that this clear and simple practice is indeed highly beneficial. So having turned our minds from all of our worldly things... we come to rest our awareness... in the place of the wish... embodied in refuge, that we would be... free of all causes of suffering. And accomplish all the causes of happiness.

[00:14:09] Even before we have a sense of what these things are, even before we're clear about the suffering, or clear about the happiness... we have our own ideas, our own sense... we have some understanding of why we feel good and why we don't feel good. The practice involves resting our awareness, usually, on some object. Again, usually, external. Could be a small statue of the Buddha or a large one. Could be a coin or a stick. ... The idea is to pick something. Almost anything. Could be one of the cushions on the floor. Could be the wood grain in the floor, creating some design. So, if you can pick something that you can look at... possibly see it. And to place your awareness on that thing without any commentary about its nature. Without any commentary about your interest, or lack of it, in that thing. In other words, place your awareness upon it and relax.

[00:16:32] Relax, which is a word we all understand... but no matter how deep our understanding is, we often find it difficult... to *do* that thing, to relax. ... You cannot fail in the practice of shamatha. Just approaching it with the aspiration to do it... is already success.

[00:17:39] Best performed with the eyes open. But if you find that difficult and tiring, then it's okay to do it with the eyes closed. ... When your mind is distracted and drifts away from the object, you have decided to use... and this is a *key point*... at some point, without any effort at all, you'll recognize that you've been distracted. And in that very moment, you are face to face

with a great opportunity and also some risk. The risk is... that if you give in to the distraction, you are likely to have that distraction over and over again.

[00:19:23] On the other hand, recognizing the distraction as it arises... if you just immediately bring your awareness back... to whatever the object of your awareness, your attention was... then you will probably have more and more success. So, of course, it's imperative that we encourage ourselves, and others... to *continuously* bring your awareness back to the object of your attention. So with just that much instruction, we will continue now... still... quiet... for the next 15 or 20 minutes.

[00:35:23] period of meditation

[00:35:23] For a few moments, just let go of your formal practice. Relax. Perhaps stretch the body a little bit. ... When you take a short break like this, it's helpful to step outside your meditation for a moment. ... And just let things be as they are. ... And then when you already... remind yourself to relax the mind and the body. And even if the... prescribed relaxation does not occur in the way in which you thought it should... it's okay. You just do your best. And then settle back into the meditation, placing your awareness... upon your experience. As the experience unfolds... on its own... without you forcing a change... just allow the mind to rest on the experience. Like when you sit by a river and watch the water flow by. ... In the same way you rest your awareness on that... constant flow of experiences, thoughts and feelings. And when you see you're distracted, immediately, bring the mind back to your meditation. And in this way, it will gradually improve. So we'll continue a little more.

[00:39:39] period of meditation

sangha *[00:49:37] dedicating the merit*