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experiencing fresh, disciplined and/or sloppy practice, more on the 8 worldlies, view of all being gift from guru, how intention to benefit others benefits self

LMC [00:01:28] So our usual schedule after we have a session of meditation is to gather together like we are and to have an open conversation about... anything in particular or general... about the practices, about Buddhism, about your individual confidence or lack thereof... whatever is on your mind.

student 1 [00:02:14] I find it kind of funny that when we're sitting... and I have the object, and just 'sitting chill'... and when you when you give that reminder about sometimes just let everything go. Let meditation go. Let the focus go. Sometimes that seems like the *freshest* meditation that I get. When I let go of the idea of meditating... it seems that that's the very fresh experience of just sitting and knowing. Of course, brief. But it's kind of funny! That when I let go the meditating, *There's* the fresh meditating. You have any comments?

LMC [00:03:23] Would you like a comment? [laughter]

student 1 [00:03:29] Well, not like a one to ten.

LMC [00:03:31] Fresh comment or an old one?

student 1 [00:03:36] But just that aspect of it has me question... well, just what *is* meditating?

LMC [00:03:47] Yeah. This isn't the first time you've had that experience. ... This happens to us, you know, regularly, just in our lives and things. We try to do something and then when we give up, something happens. So I think, in one way, this is no different than all the other things that we might do. But... it has an importance... when we have that experience in the context of our meditation. Because it's... palpably fresh. It's not something that we did yesterday. This seems like a little improvement over yesterday. It feels wholly different, right? It's like... something new, kind of. That is really a piece of what we... paradoxically, strive for. [laughs] We strive for the very thing which is, not always, but often, undermined by the striving.

[00:05:13] But it's also not simple. It's interesting, just to kind of... explore that. Because if you don't strive, you don't have the opportunity to stop striving. [laughter] It sounds crazy, but it's also... some truth in that, right. So we learn something. There's nothing lost there. We learn that, for example... that the way we think these things work is not necessarily how they *actually* work. So sometimes... we can *seed* that fresh experience by changing our approach and getting out of the way. Even when we don't know that we're in the way. And sometimes we can get out of the way by... doing something really quite different. And then, of course, when we do it, we discover that actually didn't work. So I think there's a way in which... you have to keep going with it. But you cannot predict where it's going to end up. Or at what point some insight will occur or won't occur. So the path, as we know it, in all of the instructions and the texts talk about it, you can't put them aside and decide that they're not worth it. Because, by virtue of looking at those things, these experiences happen that you're talking about. ... Anyway, we could go all night talking on that, but I think you can look at that as a moment of good fortune and then continue.... Okay?

student 2 [00:07:50] This is sort of tagging on to [her] experience. I am basically undisciplined. Or maybe I shouldn't say undisciplined. But I mean I at least sit down to meditate. But sometimes when I'm doing shamatha, I'll start out and say, I'm going to follow my breath. I'm going to watch my breath. And I'll do that. And then sound enters the picture and I get distracted enough by sound that I'm aware of it. And then I make a conscious decision that I will now follow sound as my point of reference for shamatha. And then, sometimes after that, I will go back to breath... just because. I feel like I started out on breath, I should try to finish up on breath. So am I just playing games or is this a valid way to approach shamatha? Kind of like [her] thing.

LMC [00:09:01] What's the game you're talking about?

student 2 [00:09:07] Maybe game's not the right word. But I'm... moving from one thing to another. And I was following the breath and then sound interrupted and then I decided to follow sound. Am I just entertaining myself with various forms of shamatha without the discipline of sticking to one? Is it better to stick to one? Or given my kind of innate nature of doing things like that, is that a reasonable way to engage with shamatha? Now, is that clear?

LMC [00:09:54] I'm not sure what you mean by your innate nature. Just to be a stickler.

student 2 [00:10:07] Come on, you know better than anybody, what my *innate* nature is. [burst of laughter]

LMC [00:10:14] I've heard a lot about it.

student 2 [00:10:18] Okay. Everything that you've heard in all of its diversity is my innate nature. Let's say a massive swallow and push and wave of diversity is my innate nature. Now, does that make sense?

LMC [00:10:35] Oh, I'm not sure it needs to. Really, I think what you're talking about... is the exploration, that anyone who is engaging in these practices with some intention around it... and some hope and some fear and all these things mixed together... there's an exploration that naturally occurs, whether you want to do that or not. I like what [she] says, like I was doing something and then... I decided to let go of something. And then letting go of it, maybe depending on the particular session, maybe you feel like that was a mistake to let go of it. And on the other hand, you might feel like that was what needed to happen.

[00:11:39] I personally have never witnessed that somebody moves through the process of learning to meditate, going deeper into the meditation without... going deeper and then going shallow and without falling off and then crawling back on. I mean, we're dealing with something here, that in our own culture is fairly rare. And the result is that we normally have *lots* of questions about it. I think we should have lots of questions. The questions... seem to provide the space for things to open up. You need to be incredibly disciplined, and incredibly sloppy. And not more or less, and not to dishonor the sloppy particularly, but that's what we do. We feel like, oh, I've just gotten too slovenly around my practice.

[00:12:46] And maybe that's true, but who can say what the next thing will be? It might be that an insight, that you're not looking for, occurs. Because what most of us could probably say is that... if I had 50 insights over 20 years, the majority of those insights did not occur on a predictable basis. And the *really* good ones, probably even more so, did not occur on a predictable basis. Nor were they reproducible by any means. And we can say all sorts of things

about all of that. But I think that in totality, it's what you *do* if you are determined... to get what is promised... by virtue of engaging in the practices. It doesn't come exactly by a formula. And yet if you ignore all the formulas, it doesn't come by that either, for sure.

[00:14:01] Someone who is brand new, who's received no instructions at all... it's usually better to be kind of strict about it. You know, just follow it exactly as is said. And the teacher should probably be very careful and not go in all sorts of directions around it and all... but just the most helpful thing, if possible. The most helpful thing for that moment, for that day, for that session. But in the *long run*... most of those things, I think, end up like a pile of rubble. You know, like you... just have a lot of leftover stuff. Things that you experienced. Omelets you made and dropped the egg shells on the floor and stepped on them and can't find where they are. There's like all sorts of things happening.

[00:15:07] It's helpful to honor our intention to accomplish the practices. It's helpful to think about... *why* are we doing it? And I always think that's a good question to ask ourselves. Why are we doing this? Especially at a time when we aren't sure. So that we can ask ourselves more questions.

student 3 [00:16:01] I guess I first just want to say to [2nd Student] that your description of shamatha is the only method I've found in which I have like... felt successful in practice. It was kind of... because if I try to implement some kind of formula or stick with something for the entire practice, I get tense, my posture gets bad. I tense up my jaw. I just get tense. So the only way for me to actually rest naturally is to just do what you were talking about. Which is rest wherever the awareness is. So all of a sudden I hear the sound of one of the heaters, you know, that's where that's where I rest. If something catches my eye, like a cup or something, that's where I rest. Because if I... say I'm going to rest on that *one* thing... and that's it, everything else becomes distractions. But when I just let... wherever I come to rest, be the object, there is no distraction, I guess.

[00:17:21] But I have a question about Black Dharma practice. It's a phrase I heard just today, in a book I'm reading. It basically describes the idea that when one practices Dharma with the eight worldly concerns in mind, it taints all practice. I really kind of felt thunderstruck by how accurately that described my practice for most of this summer. That phrase fit very well for my current view of the intention behind my practice for quite a few months now. And I guess I was just curious about that idea and... how to work with that, without feeling like I need to blame myself. It's really easy to really take a huge dump on myself and say, you wasted your whole summer... without even knowing it.

LMC [00:19:15] Yeah. So are you sorry that you spent the summer doing that or what?

student 3 [00:19:22] I mean, yeah, I wish I hadn't! Because, you know, that's a whole summer's worth of... what I thought were good intentions down the drain.

LMC [00:19:38] Why do you say, 'what you *thought* were good intentions'?

student 3 [00:19:41] Good because in the moment I was convinced that my intentions *were* good. Or I had managed to convince myself, or something like that.

LMC [00:20:03] Well, why do you think they weren't good? Do you know that they weren't good?

student 3 [00:20:07] Because the results were not well-being or increased compassion or increased understanding or loving kindness or any of the things that we talk about here, that *should*... increase to some degree when practice is done with right intention.

LMC [00:20:34] Well, all of that is true, of course. But you can have the *best* intention... and completely blow it. And if you had that this summer, I think you could rightfully say, that was maybe the most important summer in my life. If it was a linear system, where you engage in certain things in the beginning and there's more or less guarantee about what will come out the other end, then that would be another matter. But actually, the guarantee is pretty much the opposite. It's not just random. It's pretty much that we will make a *lot* of mistakes. For a very long time. So what did you learn about black? ...

student 3 [00:22:04] I think... that... when I... It's what occurs, or what comes... it's the result of... letting 'I' centered thoughts... or the 'I' voice tell me what's good for my practice. Tell me what's good for me. Tell me what I should do. Tell me how I should go about things.

LMC [00:23:01] And what about that?

student 3 [00:23:29] I think what happened was... I... listened to myself too much. ... I took counsel from the enemy. [laughter]

LMC [00:24:13] It's important to see those things. It's not important to judge them. ... If you see them clearly, then you see what's going on. Sometimes... it's helpful to talk to ourselves about them. And other times it's not. The exploration, I think it's inevitable. If you don't have the exploration, then you don't get anywhere. Nothing happens. We just stop. So then, instead of saying, what you did last summer... next summer, you'll say from this point forward, I didn't do anything. I kind of just came to a halt. Couldn't move. So that happens too.

[00:25:14] These things are all an inevitable piece of the process. I'm hesitant to even say it, an inevitable piece of the path. Though I think it would be fair to say that. I think it's also the inevitable piece of learning what worldly life is about. And I don't mean just worldly life in the sense that we all know what worldly life is about. That is to say, we have good and bad relationships. We get a job. It's a great job. And then we lose the job. Just the turmoil of the world that we swim around in. And from time to time think we really own it and can take responsibility for it. And then we discover, actually, it doesn't work that way. And usually, in my experience, every time I have that experience, I felt like... now I've got it. Now I've got it. It was never true. It still isn't. [laughter]

student 3 [00:26:23] That's disappointing.

LMC [00:26:26] It's *not* disappointing. So... I'm not disappointed. So you don't need to be disappointed on my behalf. [laughter] But I appreciate your goodwill.

[00:26:43] Those... eight worldly mistakes are not taught in order to... guilt trip us. Or to feel bad about doing certain things. And to avoid certain things that we feel might be good, but we're worried because it seems to have a *tinge* of worldliness about it somehow. So I don't want to do that. And there's no easy way to inoculate ourselves against the downside of all that worldly stuff. Even at the point where... we can see ourselves, *once* again... we have double crossed ourselves. [laughs] And what to speak of our friends and family and everybody else, too. It is so... kind of ubiquitous. Not just in our culture, but in our mindstreams, our way of relating to

ourselves and to others. This is why when, if you notice those eight, they're almost all involved... where they really are *nasty*... is where they meet with our relationships with other human beings. If it weren't for that, we could just go somewhere and slit our wrists and get it over with.

[00:28:10] But even that, from our perspective, won't work. In fact, it's even worse because we'll come back with less understanding of why the misery is there. So while we actually are going deeper into the misery of it, it's good to notice... I see how it is that I go into this. I'm *seduced* by these things, and gradually they look good. And then they're not good. And then they look good and then they're not good. And we just go back and forth and back and forth. It's not too far from the truth to say... that we actually have to do that. So it appears.

[00:29:02] So *if* that's the case, if I were to say to you, you *have* to do that. And one of the ways that you can do that... that might be helpful, is to note that you are actually going through that. It's not... maybe I will, maybe I won't. Maybe this won't last this long, or maybe this is correct. No, it's actually going to be a lot of confusion.

[00:29:28] So there's a way to go through it that's really helpful, which is gradually... think about the downside of... our grasping. How many kinds of grasping do we have? On any given day, how many times do we want and search out something which is marginal, if not outright negative? Like too many hot fudge sundaes. [laughs] Everybody has eaten too much bad food at one time or another to not know the meaning of being hopelessly seduced by the hot fudge sundae. Well, actually the first one wasn't so bad. [laughs] And... that's how you *get* to the truth of the thing. You have to do that. And so you're doing it.

[00:30:32] You could switch your... understanding of it, too. It *appears* that born as a human being, not just in this culture, so it's good not to make *that* mistake, but anywhere that I am, I am probably going to be drawn into things which are wholly unhealthy by my own definition, which maybe is quite forgiving of unhealthy things. You're going to encounter them. The fuel here, in the Dharma, is recognizing that... we create our own suffering. You have to get that out of those things. If you don't get those things, then you'll never do what you *need* to do in order to create your own happiness. Or, what to speak of anyone else's happiness? You have to.

[00:31:37] So... this is kind of in the more, let's say, profound vajrayana stuff. We often carry the view that whatever... negative or positive thing that comes to me, I will view it as a gift from my teacher. Because I admire my teacher, I love my teacher... it's like all good things have come that way. So therefore, I can think to myself, whatever comes my way is a gift. A gift given to me by somebody who *knows* I can work with this. And so we grasp it. Not in the sense of grasping after it, hopefully, but just we do not run from it. And I think, for many people, that works quite well. It's kind of a heroic process. I will take it. I will work with it. I will do something good with it.

[00:32:42] So one last small thing I think is really helpful here also. ... We spend a lot of time in our meditation... learning the meditations, talking about the meditations, all sorts of... thinking about these things. ... And a lot of it... is based upon an understanding, which is not altogether wrong, that the more that we can see our own foibles in our practice, the better off we are. In other words, part of... the chain of circumstances that we would call happiness... comes from... working on difficult things, which could be the cause of unhappiness.

[00:33:49] But there's another piece here. I remember a long time ago hearing from a Dharma friend who had done a lot more retreat than me, a lot more Dharma than me. He said something that caused us to have an argument. Not a fatal argument, but a good, hot argument. [laughs]

And his remark was, I don't remember the exact words, but the meaning was that... going somewhere and meditating alone... was not an act of kindness. And at the time, that really, really irritated me. And so we had a real argument about it. And it's an ongoing argument. But not so long ago it occurred to me... that the problem here was that... we have a sense, an understanding that... exploring the causes of our *own* unhappiness, exploring my own grasping and aversion and fear and hope, all these things, clearly... lead to a lot of trouble.

[00:35:19] But it seemed, for a very long time, like the antidote... to all of that, was to go deeper into the personal understanding. And at some point, I remember thinking... the issue here is... that in my own life, it looks to me like... all of my happiness *and* misery have come from relationships with other people. Pretty much 50-50. [laughs] And... recognizing that and seeing that so many of our practices, I don't want to say all, but it's really a big chunk... are about working for the benefit of others. Not just physically, you know, like going to a soup kitchen and all, that's fine. But also just *mentally*... holding the benefit of others in my own mind. Starting with people I know. Starting with people I know are really sick or really confused, or having a really hard time somehow, and just continuously making wishes that they... overcome whatever obstacles are there. It became clear... that, for me, my own *personal* happiness comes by virtue of working with others. Much more so than working with my own confusion. The confusion often evaporates in the context of holding the benefit of others as primary. ... So between you and me, I think that's more than enough. Thank you very much.

student 4 [00:37:50] So... are you saying then that personal retreat is not necessarily a worthwhile cause?

LMC [00:37:59] Oh, I was hoping you would ask that. [laughter] Because what comes to mind... for many of us, and in our tradition, is the image of Milarepa. So, Milarepa, if I take the original comment by my friend and colleague... Milarepa would appear to be one of the most unkind beings in existence. And that just didn't seem right. So I think that the antidote to that misunderstanding is to *understand!* And we could just use Milarepa for a moment.

[00:38:57] To understand that... the practices, the meditations that people like Milarepa and Kalu Rinpoche and like uncountable others, the Dilgo Khyentses and the Bokar Rinpoches and the Karmapas and all. These people pray *day and night* for the benefit of others. So... it's hard for it to be lost on us... when we see them, they're almost always joyful. And they are not always experiencing *particularly* positive circumstances. And yet, they almost always appear joyful. And so the dots there, I want to connect, are... it's *not* that they... put their attention on the benefit of others as an *antidote* to their own suffering. That won't work. What works is, when we *actually* feel more concerned for others than we do for ourselves. So I think therein lies one of the big pieces.

[00:40:23] You work for the benefit of others in your *own* mind. And of course, you do things outwardly, to the best of your ability. But the *intention*... is critical. Intention is critical. It should lead to a kind of softness... is my personal opinion. A kind of soft... kindness. And I don't mean that in the way of saying, it's feminine or masculine or anything, it's just like genuine. Like really caring about others. And we all know you can *get* there by practicing it. You see somebody who's unhappy. The first thing to do is... think about how unhappy I've been, and how unhappy they've been and how many people in the world are unhappy. Not because of anything other than confusion. And out of confusion, they often put in place the *very* things that caused their unhappiness. And their intention is to bring about their own happiness. But it doesn't work. Well, sometimes it does temporarily.

[00:41:41] But I think the really deep joy that we see... Thrangu Rinpoche's comes to mind again, since not too many weeks ago, I saw a video that had been recorded about three weeks ago. And what we all know about Thrangu Rinpoche is... he is perpetually joyful. *perpetually* joyful. He's like a Cheshire cat with teeth, you know, and the smile and everything. And it just never goes away. And so he was in some kind of situation and it's *still* there, and he's... I don't know how old he is. He must have passed away a dozen times in the last five years and returned. It just is amazing. And when you see that... you just have this sense of, that's what I want to do. I just want to do that. And if you did the practices, just like shamatha... and you did practice every day for *all* beings, your shamatha would probably be a lot better. And the confusion would be less. And the sense of joy would rise. I think we're all just always really close to it. We're just kind of on the edge... of getting it. And occasionally, we *do* get it. And then we get seduced by... I need that. I want that. I have to have this. Have to have that. ... Okay?

Bill [00:43:49] What were the more persuasive comments your friend made in arguing that long retreat was not kind? Were there any?

LMC [00:44:02] Well, the key there was 'persuasive'. None of them. [laughter] That was part of the argument. But it was partly because I'd just been on a retreat like for a year. Traveling around, you know, on a pilgrimage up in Ladakh and around there. It just was very difficult to think that... being on a long retreat, and living in seclusion and all was actually... not kind. But that was because *I* felt the kindness of that. So it seemed like... if I was going to agree with that, I was agreeing that the people that I was meeting and enjoying their company, that they were unkind. And it's just not possible to make that move. Nonetheless... I think it's an interesting thing to ponder. Is it kind?

Bill [00:45:23] What was the argument?

LMC [00:45:27] The argument was... so this person was teaching the Dharma to a group of people. And those people, so I was not actually there, so just what I understood from others was that... people were asking that question, in the context of some teaching. Like, what is the benefit to others from one's own practice? It seems like your own practice is your own benefit and not somebody else's. And if you hold their benefit in mind, like, that's okay, but... it's like, how do they get benefit from that? Which is an approach that I can remember having pretty firmly myself early on. So that's what it was.

student 5 [00:46:22] Was this person saying that doing a long retreat, or any retreat, was an unkindness to oneself? Was that...?

LMC [00:46:35] No. It was an issue of... if your intention was to benefit others... there's so many ways that you could benefit others. Going off and doing some long personal retreat in a cave did not seem like an act of kindness. ... And I think it's an interesting thing to ponder. So where *is* the kindness if it's not an act of kindness?

Bill [00:47:21] I'm not buying the idea that it's not kind to go on long retreat.

LMC [00:47:26] I'm not buying it either.

student 5 [00:48:15] So what I'm curious about is what did he think, or she think, was going to be kind? If going on long retreat was unkind to others, what was kind?

LMC [00:48:33] Well, I wasn't there. You know, it's like, so...

student 5 [00:48:37] But you have to see what that must have looked like to that person, you know. Didn't that person offer what his or her view of kindness would be? I mean, I would like to have heard *that*, you know.

LMC [00:48:55] Yeah. But you can't.

student 5 [00:49:01] I just can't even come up with one idea of it... of what the kind of thinking, or she's thinking, of soup, bread lines or, uh, collecting dimes, the March of Dimes or something like that.

LMC [00:49:17] Let me give... I mean, I don't have an answer to all of that because I wasn't there.

student 5 [00:49:22] Yeah. But weren't you engaged with this person in a conversation about this?

LMC [00:49:27] Not at that time. This was more like other people just, you know, kind of reporting it. So... I think it's a great question. I'm like, Bill, I don't buy it.

student 5 [00:49:42] I don't either, but I want to know what the 'kind' part is.

LMC [00:49:46] From time to time... in pastimes, I borrowed it. [laughs]

student 5 [00:49:52] You borrowed it? That perspective?

LMC [00:49:54] Well, not in the sense of a belief, but more in a sense of an exploration. So we have here this amazing example of Milarepa. So... I tend to not *trust* things that have been written a long time ago, and taken as quotes today, when we know that actually they weren't quotes in the beginning. So it's like there's a lot of space there. But... I have wondered, what is the kindness exactly? And one of the things that has been helpful is... understanding that Milarepa's practice, his meditation practice... was almost entirely imbued... with a sense of working for the benefit of others. So out of that... comes something.

[00:50:58] One of the things that comes out of it... are extraordinary tales. Stories that I've personally found really useful. Useful stories. I don't think they would be useful if I just thought they were *just* stories. That nobody ever did any of those things. But it's fun to think about it. I think that actually... from meeting certain teachers in this world, primarily spending a little time with them, it *feels* to me like... some of those people *do* that kind of thing. When you're around them, you *feel* joy. And when you are unhappy for a long time and then you go to see them. And you think they'll fix it, but when you just walk into the room where they are, you can't remember exactly what was wrong. It's so palpable... on occasion. And so that seems more relevant somehow than this other story.

[00:52:07] But I do think the stories are fascinating and interesting. And they're interesting in a certain way like... trying on the clothes. Trying on the clothes. Put on the 'clothing' of the practices that those people are doing and see how it feels. Try it. So if what they do is, day and night... recite passages about the importance of kindness to others, then just try that. Just try it.

See. Do you get anything there? What is it exactly? I think it's not so hard to give it a shot. And then you get this little sense of... maybe I should look into this a little more... and see. That's my personal sense of it. I think it is true ...that we are most happy when we are not trying to get something for ourselves, but able and willing to give things to others. ... Okay?

sangha [00:53:35] *dedicating the merit*