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discovery and recognition of nature of mind, aspire to continuously engage in bodhicitta practice, shamatha with breath and working with distractions, working with recognizing experience as it unfolds

[00:02:48] So, first of all, good evening to all of you. And welcome, especially to those of you who are here for the first time. Our schedule this evening is from now until around 8:30, but we will have a break in between. And the first half will be concerned with some brief instruction and some meditation practice. And then, following the break, we'll come back and have an open discussion... on whatever you are interested in, within the context of Buddhist meditation practice or so far, it has been *safe* to say... or anything else. We'll see.

[00:04:28] In all of the... myriad of... Buddhist traditions and practices... there are a great many approaches to the practice of meditation. And in this particular tradition that we're a part of... with some intention, we hold all of those various traditions... as equally valuable. All of them holding the potential... for complete awakening... as it is described in *this* tradition. Which can be summarized... as the discovery and recognition of the nature of mind itself. Which we hold to be... true of all sentient beings, that we are endowed with that awakening mind. And the fundamental distinction between... the great majority of us who are confused... fundamentally are still, at the core, awakened. So the distinction between the confused ones and the awakened ones... is not something essential or fundamental. All of the great traditions engage... in essence... hold as valuable, the awakening of that essential nature.

[00:07:21] And so, as we begin our practice, what nearly all of the traditions do is, we first... acknowledge... that fundamental essence that each of us is endowed with, that awakened mind. ... And so we start each of our practices with the... you might call it a ceremony or a celebration, though it's quite short... we turn our minds from all of our worldly concerns. Our material concerns, our concerns for our health, our concerns for our sanity... in a world which sometimes seems short on that particular commodity. ... We turn our minds to refuge... in that awakened mind, which we call the Buddha. It's very simple. And there is a short recitation that we do three times. And during that recitation, we're meant to... acknowledge these key points. And during the recitation, as we acknowledged key points... it is especially possible... that we might recognize that... nature of mind. Every meditation practice, every recitation, every moment that we engage... in any practice which is worthy of the tradition... we might, at any moment, at any time, recognize that nature of mind. So as we recite it, to hold that possibility... even, if you will, that probability... in our minds... can be extraordinarily helpful. So we'll begin by reciting this liturgy together three times.

sangha [00:10:36] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer.*

[00:12:26] When we engage in a... meditation practice... and we could call... what we just did, a short meditation practice. So when we engage in one of these and it comes to an end... there could be a natural settling of the mind, just at that point. Kind of like finishing a thought. And remaining still before we begin another one. ... And then before the mind becomes... disturbed once again with all the concerns that we have in this world, and in our own individual lives, before... that tide comes in... we remind ourselves of the bodhicitta practice. Which is part of the recitation that we just did. But the recitation is not critical.

[00:14:18] We can remind ourselves... of our core intention, as practitioners in this tradition... we will give rise, as continuously as possible, the wish... that we would *visit* our... ability to engage in loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings. Experiencing and expressing... joy, for all of the positive, helpful things that all beings engage in. ... And we hold tightly to the wish... that there *not* be a single sentient being... left when we are done. Not a single left with their angst... and whatever pain they might experience... their confusion. And all the things that they might do to exacerbate the confusion. We hold the wish that they would be free of all of those things. And as we did in the prayer at the beginning, make the wish that all of them might attain complete freedom... from all the various kinds of suffering... that we naturally experience. And we imagine that it is done. ... And again... we just let go of that... meditation, of that wish even, of all things. And just relax a bit and soak... in our... aspiration.

[00:17:10] short period of meditation

[00:17:55] And as the mind settles... we might encounter the... meditation, any of a number of meditations that we might wish to engage in, or find ourselves engaging in, even spontaneously. ... So we might come to the place of the mind settling naturally undisturbed. ... And we call that meditation *zhinay*, or calm abiding. ... If you have never done *zhinay* before, then... you could begin, maybe should begin... with the understanding that it is so simple... that it will be difficult... to acknowledge the extraordinary benefit that comes from it.

[00:19:25] Any time that we... are inclined, or able... or just spontaneously... do it, letting go of all of our extraneous thoughts, mental phenomena of all kind, and just allowing the mind to settle... it's an extraordinary... moment. Over time, if you engage in that practice over and over, you *will* discover... that it is rare for anyone... to engage in that practice even for a few moments. One might think that in a world which is so full of turmoil... resting the mind... undisturbed, for even just a few moments would be what everyone *wants* to do. But quite the opposite is true. ... So when we settle... naturally... resting the body and letting go of all of our concerns... even if we only do it for 10 seconds... it might be that it's more helpful than almost anything else that we might do in this life.

[00:21:48] So we can take a few minutes and practice this... meditation called *zhinay*, calm abiding. First, begin by placing your awareness on the movement of your breath. While there are many variations... one of them is to just rest your awareness on the movement of your breath without any effort... to modify its natural rhythm. Without any effort even to remain... single pointed on that breath. Without any thought... of how precious that breath is. Since without it, we cannot live. Of all the things that we could think about... a function of *zhinay* is to put aside all of them. And just rest the mind on the coming and going of the breath. ... So let's try that for a few minutes and... when you are distracted and you come to recognize that you are distracted... bring your mind back to the meditation. Letting go of all the... other things that you might be thinking about. ... Being able to do that is a profound skill. A skill that will benefit, not only yourselves. but every person that you come in contact with. So the practice of *zhinay* can be a profound gift... to oneself and everyone you come in contact with.

[00:24:37] period of meditation

[00:34:27] Now, as you are... engaging in this practice... you will probably notice that... from time to time, you are distracted. ... The distraction is *not* part of the meditation. You're thinking about things you did earlier today or planned to do tomorrow. This is what we call a distraction. In the

context of your meditation practice, we want... to either eliminate those distractions, or find a way... to make some positive use of them.

[00:35:49] In the first case... if you recognize that you've been distracted, which is generally speaking, fairly easy to do... the helpful, appropriate response is to just bring the mind back to the meditation. Without any... further ado, without any further conversation about it... just place the mind back on the breath and continue. So let's take a couple of minutes and do that one.

[00:36:30] short period of meditation

[00:38:04] Now, perhaps you, at least... recognize how that works. Mind is busy and you become distracted. You forget you're making an effort... to engage in the practice of calm abiding. In that moment when you recognize... that you've been distracted, then you bring the mind back. You place the mind on your meditation and continue. But there are also other things that you can engage in, which can be very helpful. Something worth trying.

[00:38:55] And one of them is... based upon... what may seem obvious... but upon close examination, is actually quite profound. And that is our ability, as human beings, to recognize our own experience. And not only to recognize an experience as an experience... but to be able to follow the experience as it unfolds... as if you were a passive observer of yourself. So in this case... during the meditation... you *intentionally* bring your awareness to... an experience which is unfolding, whatever it is. You intentionally place your awareness... upon that experience. When you do that, it's especially important... to make *no* effort whatsoever... to alter the experience. So it may alter on its own, but it's important that you not... alter it intentionally. And in that way, you just place your awareness on the experience... as it's unfolding... for a couple of minutes.

[00:40:52] short period of meditation

[00:43:07] After you've done this for a while... then, as before... with *intention*... allow your mind to settle free... of distractions. ... And in that way, finish your meditation.

[00:43:43] short period of meditation

[00:44:55] Now we dedicate the virtue of our practice.

sangha [00:45:04] *dedicating the merit*