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4 Immeasurables defined, working with beliefs when no evidence for or against e.g., reincarnation, **Carrying Practice**: with unbounded view of reincarnation (Union Square), working with obstacles of hope and fear

LMC [00:01:22] So just a few words for those of you who are not familiar with what we do after the meditation now, is we just have an open discussion. So, any question you have about the meditation practice that any of us have said in the last 10 or 20 years, that you would like to have explained... or to complain about them. Really, it's about the meditation and how things are going. It's really not possible to become really good at meditation without having a source of support. It's really important. So we try to give a little bit of that in these open discussions. And then it's up to you to make your connection with other teachers or other members of the community to... pick up some pointers and things and to give some. ... So I think the way we say this is, *the ball's in your court*. Swing. [laughs]

Student 1 [00:03:25] You have often said that... well, actually, you haven't often said it, but recently said that the Four Immeasurables were the core of every practice. And I was wondering if you could say something about that.

LMC [00:04:01] I think it's helpful to start at a slightly different place. A teaching that I heard a long time ago, maybe as much as 30 years, was that... any of the teachings of the Dharma... if you look at them close enough and your meditation is mature enough, you will recognize that the entire body of the Dharma is contained within every small piece of the Dharma. And I remember way back then that that was sort of a fascinating proposition. But, it also had certain elements about it, that... were empowering. In that if that were true, then any practice that I felt drawn to, I could imagine that it contained all of the elements that were necessary in order to contain complete enlightenment, in order to come to that place. And so, in one way, when [you're] raising the issue of the Four Immeasurables, it's really just another example of taking... a small body of the teaching and elaborating it forward. And it's been my experience that actually those small bodies of teaching *can* be elaborated into pretty much the whole system.

[00:05:55] And so the Four Immeasurables, I don't want to get into a detailed description of them, but just to say what they are... the Four Immeasurables are comprised of four principles. The first one... they're actually not always given in the exact same order, so I will start... with the more common approach. Which is the Four Immeasurables are comprised of immeasurable loving kindness. That is to say, as a meditation practice, it's a practice of generating love and kindness for others and compassion for those who are suffering. Then we make the wish that those beings will be *freed*, not only of the experience of suffering, but the causes of suffering. And the same in the loving kindness. To be free of suffering there, that they will be free of... the suffering that comes to them through a myriad of causes. And that they will also experience loving kindness for others.

[00:07:07] The third one is joy. And the joy is meant to be a joy that we have. There are a number of ways again to describe this, but I'll give you maybe one of my favorites. Which is, that when you see somebody do something, or somebody says something. And that thing that they have done or they said, appears to be something which is actually virtuous. Whether accidentally or intentional... something that will be helpful for them, for that person and helpful for others who contact that person. In other words, it's a beneficial, virtuous seed to just be

planted in the world, you might say. And seeing that and recognizing the virtue of it, then we naturally feel a sense of joy at that happening. And the practice then, is to... build that, elaborate it.

[00:08:15] So the fourth one is equanimity. And this is the real meaning of immeasurable. It's not immeasurable... grand, *huge* loving kindness or joy. It's that it is visited upon uncountable beings. So that's the immeasurables piece, is that it's for *all* beings without measure, without discrimination of any kind. And so from that, we get immeasurable equanimity, which is the fourth one. The equanimity, by definition, is for all beings. The equanimity takes the previous three and turns them into something truly grand. So in essence, that's what I think we're looking at.

Student 1 [00:09:20] They've also connected to Chenrezig?

LMC [00:09:26] Well, without getting into the details of that... if it seems that every particle contains every particle, then the question whether or not they're connected to Chenrezig has the obvious answer of, yes, of course it does. But you will say that with zhinay also, with calm abiding, with compassion practice, with mind training practice, like all of those things contain those elements. And sometimes we look too far to find the important kernel of truth, when actually we were already working with it. So I think that's one of the benefits of thinking that all of the practices contain the pieces that are of importance in all the other practices.

It's a nice way to approach all of the other practices. [00:10:27] Just to come at it from a kind of... good feeling model, which, as you know, I'm not particularly fond of [laughs] but nonetheless, there it is. That... if we are engaging in practice and we find that something is very difficult for us to do, but we also know that this other practice we find easy to do, then we have a certain sense of connection, a thread between them... that we can't know all of these things easily. And authentically, we would say that takes multiple lifetimes to do that. Of course, I'm always cynical enough to say, well, how do we know which lifetime we're in? Maybe we already have all those things. [laughs] But that aside, I think yeah, it's an example... of finding the core truth in all the aspects of the body of teaching. ... Okay? Say yes.

Student 2 [00:11:50] So I have a roommate who, over the holidays, had an interesting question. And I'm pretty sure it's a common one that a lot of people have. And of course, I had my own answer to the question. But I thought maybe you could say a bit about ... their question was, essentially, how enlightenment and ignorance can exist side by side in the same person? And so I thought, I figured, that's a fairly common question a lot of people have. And that's probably fun to explain. So I thought maybe you could say a few words on that.

LMC [00:12:23] Fun. Oh really! Do it. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:12:27] Well, you wanted the ball thrown, so I'm sending you one.

LMC [00:13:18] How is it you characterized... enlightenment and ignorance. What is ignorance?

Student 2 [00:13:23] Enlightenment and ignorance or enlightenment and confusion or buddhanature and confusion? The kleshas, asana, things like that... can exist within the same person. Potential for good and bad.

LMC [00:13:41] Well, obviously there's I mean, one of the key teachings is that... not only do we all have the *potential* to attain enlightenment, we all have... an awakened mind. And the stories that I like the most, personally, are not the ones that talk about how you're going to take a mind, which is less than awakened and you're going to somehow do something to it so that it really wakes up. And the story that, again, is my favorite, is when the Buddha goes through a town, of course, 2000 years ago... and some man comes out and asks him why it is... that the Buddha is enlightened, and that he isn't. What's the difference between the two? And the Buddha says there isn't any difference. There just... isn't any difference. And if there is a difference, it's not *in*... the nature of that mind or in *you!* The difference is that... I recognize... that awakened mind. Which is already the natural inheritance of any human being or any living thing. And you don't recognize it. And that basically is the line between awakening and ignorance. Not recognizing it. Then we're ignorant of that awakened mind, right. That's basically what it is. And then we engage in our life from that perspective... doing things which often cause ourselves and others harm. Because we don't recognize... not only our *own* primordially pure nature, but we also then, of course, even *more*, don't recognize it in others. ... Okay? You got a better one? [laughs] Hey, I'm open to it.

Student 3 [00:16:07] Something I've always appreciated about our traditions is that it seems like instead of just accepting something as fact or as true, we're encouraged to investigate it, and practice it, and see for ourselves... what effect it has in our life. But, something for me that has been a little more challenging is the idea of reincarnation. And... like trying to *believe* in that without having any experience, seemingly, myself of that. And what to do with that... prerogative to kind of believe in it without having known that I've practiced it or having that experience.

LMC [00:16:58] So what was the question exactly?

Student 3 [00:17:00] I guess the question is, can you provide any guidance on... understanding, or the role of reincarnation in our tradition. Within, I guess... I wouldn't say blind belief, but I don't know how to accept that as a belief without having tried it out myself. Or known that I've tried it out myself. Does that make any sense?

LMC [00:17:27] Yeah, sure. I'm on your side. [laughs] I think it's a great question to ponder. In my own... experience, I would say that most of the last 20 or 30 years... I felt very skeptical... about, not necessarily about... the *teachings* on it, but about the thing itself. When we talk about reincarnation, we're talking about something that even many Tibetan teachers, if they heard us talk about it, they'd say, we have it all wrong... that's not correct. So it's troublesome in a lot of ways. But it becomes kind of clear if you can put aside the belief issue. Do I have to believe it? And if so, how do I get there? Just how much of my personal integrity do I have to betray in order to *believe* that thing. When you find yourself engaging in that question, you're really... I think you've discovered that actually the approach is not correct.

[00:19:11] A very close friend of mine from a long time ago, once he went to a retreat that we were doing. And afterwards he was saying that he didn't believe it. And I said, I actually don't believe it either. Which was kind of shocking at the time, I think, for him. But fundamentally... it looks to me like... the ideal position would not to have any belief at all. But that implies that we actually, for most of it, it means we have to disbelieve as opposed to believe. In other words, what do we have when we don't have certainty? Then living with uncertainty is difficult. So we generally fill that space in with some kind of belief. But if you look at it close, you might come to the conclusion... that you actually have no idea.

[00:20:12] Like, is that a functional concept or functional view to hold that we experience multiple lifetimes? And pretty much all of the great teachers will say, yes. The problem becomes gnarly when it comes down to more specific things. You will not get... proof. By virtue of... especially as confused beings that we are, we don't have access to that. We can't remember. We can't project it. We can't see it happen with others. All the normal tools that we use in order to confirm and verify things don't apply. So we come to a place where, I think a more helpful beginning point... is to look at it and say it could be. And maybe it isn't. But it's probably true, in either case, that *whatever* level of understanding I have is not correct. This friend of mine said, I don't see any evidence that shows that this sort of thing happens. But on the other hand, the issue was, well, you don't have any evidence against it either. They're exactly on a par with each other. So well, what are you going to do with that? And his response was, I'm going to disbelieve it. I said, well, that's... in my world, you know, this is a one, and that's a one. It's like, you haven't gone anywhere. Pretending that you've gone somewhere, it actually just isn't there.

[00:22:00] And if we don't... add baggage to the idea. And we just keep pondering it and wondering about it. And being careful about what we read... and some really nice books on it that don't demand that we believe something blindly, that explore the issue a bit... we can come to a conclusion. So I'll just give you *my* conclusion. Which is... that if I had to choose between an unbounded... period, an unbounded, in other words, no boundary to the period of experience. So my experience, I don't know when it began. So I say it has no beginning. The end of my experience, normally, culturally, we would say, when you're dead. You're dead, your experience is over. But actually, we have no evidence for that. We *think* we do because the corpse doesn't appear to be responding to anything. But that actually doesn't mean that whatever animated that corpse at some point isn't currently experiencing something. Like, we have to come back to this place of... I still don't know what this is.

[00:23:26] If we can't *do* that, there's another little piece which is worth pondering. In the mystical tradition... if you cannot hold open the possibility that your experience has no beginning and no end, and that the body is only one piece of it... passing through in one lifetime, then you fundamentally, I think, bar yourself from... the more deep experiences that you might encounter. So... there is a reason why not to deny it. And I think that the reason to not deny it is the same reason to not believe it. Both of those concretize and solidify things.

Student 3 [00:24:17] Thank you. Would you say that's kind of related to holding the unbounded view? Is that what's meant by it?

LMC [00:24:24] Yeah. Normally, we encounter the unbounded view... it's usually done like in this example. We start with some kind of an example and then we follow it through. But the unbounded view is the basis of all of the deepest teachings. If we talk about our life span as being the time in which we experience things as a human being... we've really reduced the potential dramatically. And with no evidence for or against it. So in order to go deep into some of the teachings, it's really critical to not carry the *baggage* of... I will say from my side, either belief or disbelief. They're both baggage.

Student 4 [00:29:47] I know there is no proof, but when we take the Dalai Lamas and we take the Karmapas, we take the tulkus... and then we take, all over the place... or in India where people... talk about reincarnation as a matter of fact. And they go like, you Europeans, you don't? How come? So what I'm trying to say, as a student of Karl Marx, I'm probably not inclined to believe something and to have faith, right... but, I based my understanding on evidence. And

his holiness, the Dalai Lama is for me an evidence of... continuity of this stream of consciousness. Or am I mistaken?

LMC [00:31:10] Even the most authoritative teachers in our tradition... that I have known... no one has ever said to me, you really should believe this! I've never heard that. And it's a good thing. Because that would have caused a bit of a riff. It's like... I've never met anyone who said, 'you need to believe this'... where I thought that that was any kind of reason why I should need to believe it. It's like we look for these things and explore these things. That's really helpful, I think to do. In the most practical terms, I can say from my own side, I actually don't care... whether it is true or not true or somewhere in between. Or not an issue of truth, but an issue of something else. I can imagine so many different things. But... I also, mostly believe... that this is not an objective... thing. It's not an objective thing. There's certainly, as far as I can say, there isn't any *objective*... evidence that's compelling to me. And there's a lot of evidence, but it's just not compelling. I'll tell you what's compelling, though.

[00:32:46] As a... human being in the Western culture... the likelihood that you would just naturally believe in reincarnation is pretty small. Pretty small. That, of course, is no evidence... one way or the other. It's just the fact, I think... pretty small. But what's interesting is the *practice* aspect. Because *that's* actually what we're about. As practicing Buddhists, we can ask the question also, do you have a mind? And that's a fascinating thing to run around in. But you run around in that, you just end up as confused as you were before you started. So the practices are far more interesting. And when it comes to the *practice* of reincarnation, of course, there are *deep* practices... meditation practices for that. But aside from that, there are other practices that we can engage in that are really interesting and helpful. So I'm going to tell you a personal experience.

[00:34:02] There was a lama, whose name I won't mention, but he was quite renowned as a kind of crazy guy. Which is to say... highly intelligent. [laughs] And I, somehow by circumstances, ended up spending a couple of weeks with him walking around San Francisco, mostly. And standing in the Union Square one day we were talking about these things. And we talked about quite a few things which I'm not going to go into. But the one that was *really* interesting was, he said, Why don't take you one week, because your meditation is reasonably okay... and you imagine that... reincarnation is true. You imagined that reincarnation is true. You just hold it as a view. Kind of like, you know, you comb your hair (I don't, but some people do) they comb their hair and then they look in the mirror to see if everything is just right. Why don't you use it like a mirror? What difference would it make in your life? And he wasn't saying that it wouldn't make a difference. I think actually he was saying this will make a *gigantic* difference!

[00:35:22] You hold the view... *definitely* of reincarnation... for one or two weeks. Everyone that you meet, you think... I have met this person before. Because *if* it's true, it's universal, looks like. Easy to imagine, it's universal. If it's there at all, everybody has it. It's not like some people have it and some people don't. That seems more difficult. So you take the easy one. You have it. And by extension, every sentient being, not just humans, but every sentient being has been your mother, your father, you know, if you're an aunt, your fellow aunt... all these things. And you approach every person with that in mind. Start with whatever you want. Since you are a human being, start with a human being.

[00:36:20] So you walk into the supermarket and you look around and you see people and you think these people have been my parents. Even though I've never seen them in this life before. Then you approach them. You talk to them. And you talk through the voice of... I'm speaking

to... my mother from other lives who does not know me. And of course, I'm kind. So I'm not going to tell her that she's my mother. Because then probably they'll have to remove me from the store or something. And so I just have a conversation. And I hold that it's a very private understanding. Is it true? I don't care. It doesn't matter.

[00:37:03] Because at the end of the day, the final instruction was... at the end of a week, having done one week where you definitely do *not* have that. In other words, everyone you meet... you have never met before and will never meet again in any circumstance whatsoever, as opposed to... you've met over and over and over. At the end of two weeks. Look at the two pieces. Those two ways of relating to the world and just ask yourself the question... which would you rather have, if you could only have one? *That* was a fascinating turning point. So he wasn't saying, believe it! Really, the instruction was, do not abandon the view. *Always* inquire into this. That was, for me, a great turning point in this whole discussion. Which I think is still interesting in most ways, but in another way, for me, is totally settled. Not by belief, but by just experience of the grandiosity of relating to every being as someone that you already have an intimate connection with from long ago, over and over again. And there's another aspect to it. It's fun. It's enjoyable. You feel connected.

Student 4 [00:38:37] For logical reasons, for ethical reasons it makes sense. But I do not believe in it. I truly don't believe in... I try not to believe in anything, right.

LMC [00:39:05] You disbelieve it?

Student 4 [00:39:08] Several times or I would... but... I just go by partial evidence or... evidence, not proof. You know, different... circumstantial evidence, sometimes even. But when I see his Holiness and he's 14 etc... there is something. And... I don't make any personification. I know that it's not the ego which goes through. I think it's not the ego which goes through, but something... it makes sense. The continuity, the principle of continuity makes more sense than principle of discontinuity. Like that, I am born, and then I go into nothingness? Makes less sense than I was never born, the stream was never born and will never disappear. The same way as the whole thing around us, right. But I don't believe. Yeah, that's true. Thank you anyway.

Student 5 [00:40:49] I have a question about the practice. I've been coming here for a couple of years. And until very recently, it was very difficult for me to relate to this loving kindness, compassion, or like all those practices. And it's not like, I don't have feelings. I do have feelings. [laughs] But it was very difficult somehow, you know, like my relation to that, it's more like superficial. Yeah, it was very superficial. That's how I feel. And... recently, like a series of life events happened. And I am kind of forced to... open myself. What I'm trying to say is that... why I am saying 'open myself up' is because I kind of, you know, I have come to this glimpse of realization that... I have a lot of fear. And especially like a fear of being hurt. So, in order for me to protect myself not to be hurt, I put a lot of barriers around me. But those barriers are not really working anymore. [laughs] So it's like good-for-nothing-barriers at this point. [laughter]

[00:43:22] And you know, like I was really protecting myself from this and that. So that, you know, like, I don't get hurt or I don't go into this uncomfortable area. But that's not working anymore. But then... I needed to open myself up. But at the same time, when that is happening, I also started feeling more! And kind of like, a little bit easier to relate [to] this feeling of compassion or loving kindness. And my question is so, you know, like somebody, maybe like

me, to practice not on a superficial way, but a little bit in deeper level... is this... 'opening up' a prerequisite? You know what I'm trying to say?

LMC [00:44:45] Yeah. I think so. ... Is that it?

Student 5 [00:44:50] Yes.

LMC [00:44:52] So... I don't have... and maybe you don't have a question.

Student 5 [00:44:58] That's my question.

LMC [00:44:59] The question... can we rephrase it, once?

Student 5 [00:45:03] Okay. So... to practice deeply... is it required for us to opening up, opening ourselves more?

LMC [00:45:20] Yeah.

Student 5 [00:45:20] Maybe if you have some kind of barriers... in my case, I have so many... I had at least, or I still have, but so many layers of barriers. But you know...

LMC [00:45:35] You experience those?

Student 5 [00:45:37] Yes. Yeah, I started seeing it.

LMC [00:45:39] I see. Yeah.

Student 5 [00:45:40] Yeah. And so... but, you know, once I started, kind of like I needed to remove the barrier, or I am forced to remove that barrier, I started feeling a little bit more close to this practice, you know. Or like Chenrezig or like feeling the compassion. Like people are talking about of compassion all the time! But until very recently, it was just a *word* for me. I really did not feel, you know, like truly in my heart, compassion, you know. Like now I kind of started feeling like people in my circumstances, whatever it is, you know, like, I started feeling their pain or difficulty and things like this. More like, you know, not like them / me. But, you know, like together... kind of feeling.

LMC [00:46:47] So when you have that experience, what do you do? You have the experience of feeling the pain of another or others. Then what do you do in that place?

Student 5 [00:47:10] Like last time, when on Wednesday, when I was here for Chenrezig practice and we were reciting mantra, you know, like I was thinking about those people who are in... who may be or who are in the same position like I am. So that, you know, like we can, kind of, you know, feel better or a pain will go away. ... That's what I did.

LMC [00:47:47] Yeah, I'm not I'm not clear on what it is we're looking for here, exactly.

off-mic [00:47:52] Is it a prerequisite that you open... in order to have contact with these teachings?

Student 5 [00:48:05] Yes, that's my question.

LMC [00:48:09] So you feel like it *is* a prerequisite?

Student 5 [00:48:11] I feel like it. Yeah.

LMC [00:48:15] And you have not met the prerequisite? [laughs]

Student 5 [00:48:19] No.

LMC [00:48:21] Really? You know, the fundamental obstacle, from a kind of formal teaching perspective, the fundamental obstacle always comes down to... hope and fear. Those are... from the *confused* perspective, what drive us to *all* the things that we do, including the good things. It's like we're continually hoping for something and fearing we won't get it. It's almost part of our nature. Of course, it's not really the inherent part of our nature... because that's enlightenment. But the obstacle can always be, kind of, starting with hope and fear and *finding* it in ourselves. Like, where's the hope? Where's the fear? What am I afraid of? And finding that fear... we don't need an antidote for it. So, if you can... avoid trying to eliminate the fear, but just being present with it. In other words, just seeing it.

[00:49:47] It's kind of like this is a very beautiful yellow rose. I don't need to do anything to it to make it more beautiful. In fact, anything I could do to it would make it less beautiful. So in the same way, the *deep* perspective... so we're doing a lot of this deep stuff tonight, but... the deep perspective is... you see your own hope and you see your own fear. You see what you want... and the fear that you won't get it. Or you see what you fear and the hope that it won't happen to you. It's like these things are always doing that. The antidote... is not to eliminate the fear. The fear is not the problem. The problem is the attachment to be rid of it. Once we give that up, that fear is powerless. It gets all of its power, not from anywhere other than us... who experience it and who want to be rid of it. So... when you have that fear, a really excellent practice is... you put your awareness on that experience. Just simple.

Student 5 [00:51:10] What experience? [LMC laughs]

LMC [00:51:15] The experience of the fear... or the hope. They're the same. They're just opposite sides of the same coin... hope and fear. There *is* no fear without hope. They feed off each other. They feed into each other. So they're really just the same thing. We don't know that. We want our hope to manifest. And we want the fear to get out. [laughs] But it's the same thing! So the push and pull doesn't work. And yet... if you can *stop*... and just look at the fear. Literally, like you stop, you do your meditation, you *feel* the fear. Whether you put that name on it or not, you have an experience. Even better... is just having an experience. And I'm just looking at that experience.

[00:52:14] The experience will disappear, of course. They all do. ... And so, while you're putting your awareness on that fear, on the *experience*... the experience of something we call fear, gradually you'll come to the place of realizing... huh, it's not there. So, it's not permanently gone. But it also... when it comes again, it's not the same fear. It's another fear.

[00:52:50] So the one that comes and plagues us... we never had before and it never comes again. It just keeps being reinvented. *We* keep reinventing it by saying, "There's that fear again. I have this problem again. I'm having to open myself again." When actually... you probably already did. ... And then, another feeling came. And then it felt like you were closed, not open.

[00:53:20] The very best meditation, which will bear fruit in all of the meditations, I think we could say, is to just put your awareness on that experience. With no hope. So that's not easy. But in time... the fear piece is that we're afraid of something, you know. It's kind of like snakes and insects. We're afraid of them. But we also know there are people who have no fear of them. They pick up snakes. They pick up insects. They do all sorts of things and they don't have any fear at all. They're just fine. We can have that relationship with *our* experience by just continually putting our... awareness on it. In essence, in a kind of corny way, make friends with it. It's not the enemy. It's just hope and fear. ... And it'll be there until we can just be present with it. It's not going to go somewhere else. Because there isn't anything there to go anywhere else. It gets reinvented on a more or less continuous basis. And you can witness that. Because you know how to meditate, you can witness that.

[00:54:47] And you don't have to be like some fantastic meditator, you can just look and see. Just like if I give you a compliment and then I could say, you look very well tonight. And so then I could say... now that gives you a feeling, doesn't it? You have some *feeling* from that. Look at that feeling. Just look at it. And then, you know, when that feeling is gone, there's another one there. There's some other feeling there. Just look at that feeling. And gradually, you come to the hope and the fear.

[00:55:26] Primarily, I think fear is our biggest issue, we *think*... but that's because we haven't encountered the hope yet. [laughs] Hope is just as big as fear, because it's the same thing. So you can put your awareness on it and just settle with it. You don't have to like it or dislike it or anything. But we already know from experience... what arises in the mind... can be fearful, can be attractive, pleasant, unpleasant. But by the time we've been sitting for five minutes... the things that we were first looking at are *all* gone. And they've been replaced by substitutes... who show up. [laughs] So, you just need to look at these things and then you recognize... they have no power. The power is not coming from them. The power is coming from me. I visit my fear on it and they become powerful. Because I don't want the fear, the aversion is the manifestation of the empowerment. ... You have all the means already. Does that sound too magical? [laughter]

Student 5 [00:56:44] Yeah. Yeah.

LMC [00:56:47] Okay. All right.

Student 5 [00:56:51] But I will practice that way then. Yeah.

LMC [00:56:57] And you're going to report in, right?

Student 5 [00:56:58] Yes. In a month. [laughs]

sangha [00:57:20] *dedicating the merit*