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*taking refuge as antidote from habitual distractions, importance of relaxation and confidence, shamatha trick of very short segments, distractions are just experiences*

**LMC** [00:03:59] Good morning. It's nice to see all of you on this... unlikely... clear weather day. [laughter]. It's unlikely that... this many people would come for an alternative day... alternative to all the other things that one might do... has done, will do. This day... this beginning of the new year... has for a longtime... been a tradition at our center. Coming to the end of one year and beginning another. While the dates that we use are... not *exactly* the same... as the ones that are used... in the culture from which the tradition that we study came from. But what is common... apparently for human beings in general, is that we... make time... periodically... like at Christmas and Thanksgiving and New Year's and you can make a long list... during which we try to do something that is special. That might be helpful for ourselves and others. ... And so here we are again. Nothing particularly *important*... about the position of this planet whirling around the sun. What is important is that... we will spend the next couple of days... engaging in practices... that could be *enormously* useful... to each one of us. And by extension, of course... if we benefit from our efforts... then that benefit is naturally kind of *organically* shared... by everyone we meet. Everyone we have a word with.

[00:10:58] Our purpose, today... specifically... is what we call the practice of zhinay, which is a calm abiding... a method by which we can sit carefully... sit mindfully. Put aside or... at least *relax*... into our distractions. But in the process of going over... the practice of zhinay, we will, also... engage in, a few teachings, and along the way in the afternoon, a discussion... about the value, the reasons... for engaging in certain practices, and for holding... certain views. Teachings which are... critical... to our *successful* practice. Teachings which are critical... for our successful practice, even when... we don't know what success would look like.

[00:12:37] So we begin, first of all... to put aside all of our usual... thoughts about where we are... perhaps thinking already, about what we'll do this afternoon... recalling what we did yesterday, and last night. In other words... perhaps unskillfully... encouraging ourselves... to be utterly carried away... by our hoped for experiences, today and later, and our *fears*... that those experiences will *not* materialize in the manner in which we hope... or expect.

[00:13:43] So our first antidote... to *encouraging* our mind... to remain in a distracted state, and I think encourage is actually the appropriate phrase, word. The first antidote... is to turn our attention... and take *refuge* from all of the... habitual patterns that we engage in routinely... mostly without even noticing that we're doing it. The ritual is to... literally turn away from all of that... and because, it's not easy for us to *just* turn away, we have to turn away *to* something, or we find it quite difficult to just leave everything behind. Like someone said, if you walk off into the desert, nobody goes without a sandwich. You can't... *just* leave... so easily.

[00:15:09] So we turn our minds to the Buddha. And the Buddha, then also... is not so straightforward at first. ... Because our inclination is to look outside ourselves, when we go for refuge to the Buddha. Perhaps we look at a statue. Perhaps we recall the... word or we... recall the name of Shakyamuni Buddha. ... But we also need to look... at the most important Buddha, that we have, which is our own nature... which is... the awakened mind *itself*.

[00:16:05] So again, so that... those who have heard it before will not forget... and those who have *not* heard it before will have something to ponder. In the time of the Buddha, it is said... when he was walking through a village in India... a man went up to him and asked him... what the difference was... between the Buddha and this man himself. The story is the Buddha replied... "There is no difference. ... We are both endowed with the awakened nature. If there is a difference, it is not a difference in that nature, but a difference in... recognition. I recognize that awakened nature. You do not."

[00:17:15] And that then, is our... introduction to... what the day is about. What the week is about. What our *life* is about... if we... decide, determine, commit... to *engage* in these practices, it is to come to the place of fully recognizing... that awakened nature. And having *recognized* it... *living* in that space. So we'll begin this morning then by turning our minds to refuge and reciting the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer three times together.

**sangha** [00:18:11] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:20:18] Now if there is... a most important instruction... that will be important... not only today, but... for the duration of your *life*... making an effort, more or less continuously to fine tune... *soak*... in your practice. If there is one thing that is more important than everything else... and there *is*... [laughs] that thing is relaxation.

[00:21:20] It is almost always the case, even when we have been... studying... and practicing for *decades*... when things are not going well, it is almost always the case... that when we stop and look... we are *not* relaxing. We are... *struggling*. ... In some way, or *another*, we are trying to do something *other* than what we *are* doing. ... Neither of which... the thing that we're trying to do, or the thing that we're trying to avoid... is important. Because we have turned our... meditation practice... into a platform... for struggle. So from the very beginning... start... with relaxation.

[00:22:39] Some of us need it more than others, but everyone... requires relaxation. In order for... our meditation practice to bear fruit... perhaps, paradoxically... we *must* get out of the way. I think that, we have all tried... to *banish* our... distractions... our conflicted emotions. ... Kind of like running them out of town. The problem is that... that which is... running out of town, is the very thing... that we're trying to relax. So there is no *substitute*. We can talk about it from many angles. ... Abandon your ambition... whatever it is. ... Bring your mind to the experience... of its *natural* stillness. Which occurs most *obviously*, again, when we're relaxed.

[00:24:54] The experience, not the *idea*... not the experience that the intellect... proposes. Just the *experience*... raw and simple... of stillness. ... The mind still. The body still. ... Gentle. ... Best case... when the mind moves... just notice the movement. ... No antidote required.

[00:26:07] *period of meditation*

[00:37:20] So let's... take just a minute... and relax a little more. Move your body if that's... helpful.

[00:37:37] *short period of meditation*

[00:39:41] Sometimes, when we... *think* of the practice of calm abiding, we think of it as a beginner's practice. ... If you have found it *easy*... to rest your awareness, without distraction for periods of time... then it's *okay*. You can call it a beginner's practice. But if that has not been

your experience... and best not *fool* yourself... the mind which... cannot recognize its own stillness... or, its own movement... is *not* a mind which will easily *accomplish* the Dharma.

[00:40:55] Zhinay is *very* important... critically important. So along the way... we need to discover and work with... a number of what... you might think of as... *tricks*. ... There is a way in which... it's fair to say, we are all quite capable... of relaxing... being present... with the mind still. ... Even though it is, for most of us the experience... that we cannot do that. But as time goes by... years and decades... we may come to recognize that, actually... the *issue* is... we're still in the *learning mode*... and we're trying to *act as if*... we've accomplished it.

[00:42:43] So one of the tricks... is to take your... time period for the practice of calm abiding, whatever the period is that you have given yourself... and divide it by ten. ... If you're trying to... accomplish calm abiding... in 10-minute segments... you're probably not going to be able to do it. But if you cut it back to... one minute. Or even divide that one down to... ten seconds. Almost *anyone* can place their awareness... on the stillness of the mind. And the awareness and the stillness... kind of blend together, and then we have a moment... of complete relaxation and stillness. ... *Easy* to recognize. ... And critical to have that experience. ... Because, it's easy to know... that if you can relax the mind... and rest in a state of utter stillness... for even *one* second... you already know then, that you can do two seconds. And if you can do two, you can do three... and so on until you have three minutes, 30 minutes... 3three hours. What's *important* is... confidence. The confidence that... it *can* be done.

[00:44:58] If you practice calm abiding for a year... and I ask you, "Have you been able to... rest the mind in stillness for... two or three minutes?" And you say honestly, "No." Then... you're following the wrong instructions, somehow. And you will lose your confidence. And when you lose your confidence... there's no hope. ... And the confidence that *matters*... is the confidence that you know what it looks like. So that when you see it... it's clear. It *must* be clear. That's it!

[00:46:16] Sometimes people say, "I can't say that to myself, because it feels like I'm arrogant." That's okay. That might be true. Especially, if you brag about it to your friends. But if you just... notice... hmm, I sat there still and relaxed... and occasionally... the mind moved, which is our way of saying... thoughts and feelings are occurring, but I wasn't distracted by them. ... You *must* be able to recognize, on your own, honestly... where you *are*... and you can get some help for that, but... you are the final decision maker.

[00:47:38] So let's go back to the zhinay for a few minutes before our break. This calm abiding. Settle your body... in the sense of... relaxing... remaining in good posture... vertical... and then try this... relax your awareness. ... And probably there are... thoughts, feelings... emotions occurring... and you are *aware* of them. ... Do not call them... distractions. Neither are they the enemy. ... Look at the... content of your... distractions... without *any*... consideration for using your *intellect* to see them. For they are *utterly*... those thoughts and feelings... inaccessible... to the intellect. ... We want to see the *experience*. ... The conceptual analysis... will not help us.

[00:50:35] It's kind of like an *itch*. ... When you have an itch... usually, you're not interested in the conceptual analysis. You are interested in... the *itch*. ... So the thought here, or the experience, the feeling... we want to see that experience... not with the eye, but in the manner of *recognizing* the experience. I recognize my own... *anger*, my own *greed*, my own *jealousy*, whatever it is. And you just allow your awareness... to *rest* on that experience. If you bring the *intellect* to that experience... the experience will disappear. And you will be left with... the dry intellect. We're all very good at that. ... So, my assumption is, you didn't come here for that. Rest your

awareness... on the experiences that arise... while you are still... in body, and still in mind. ... And as the mind moves... thoughts and feelings arise... and we remain aware of them. ... If a *judgment* arises... think of that as just... the mind moving... naturally.

[00:52:31] *short period of meditation*

[00:53:50] When we come to the end of the session... what is *important*... from another perspective, that we will... cover as the day goes by... it is not only... an issue of being a good citizen... to dedicate... the value of your meditation... to the benefit of others. ... That dedication is actually critical to accomplishing your *own* benefit, also. As long as you... inadvertently, dedicate... the benefit of your meditation to *yourself*... you will find yourself... *stuck*. ... So we always finish *each* session... by dedicating the merit, the value... of having made our effort... as best as we can. With that, we close the session, so.... thank you.

**sangha** [00:55:22] *dedicating the merit*