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*appreciating being born human (1st of 4 Thoughts), our first objective is to free self and others, **Carrying Practice:** with view of precious human body and impermanence, study is fine but practice is all about experience, practicing impermanence by resting mind on continuous flow of experiences*

[00:01:51] So, again... we will recite the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer. And just a couple of points... reminders. It is not uncommon... I think for any human being, no matter what... age or race or culture they're in... it's not uncommon... to learn these things as recitations... and to recite them... without... breathing any *life* into them. So the mere recitation of profound instructions... doesn't *get* us much. It's kind of like having a... beautiful, fast car and no gasoline. So, like an eight-year-old, you can sit in front of the wheel... and imagine that you're going somewhere, but you are *not*. So there are many enhancements... many methods for... breathing *life* into the practices. And another path, which is sometimes... *not* so fruitful... is to learn all of those enhancements. Memorize them.

[00:03:58] But our... most *useful* approach... are those things which actually bring us to direct experience. The mere ability to name the experiences... and point to them... again, *not* so useful. So many of the little enhancements are in lists. The list of the four these and the six that's, and the so on. And I'm intentionally avoiding those today because you all have access to them, one way or the other. And sometimes... people will say, I'm one of those people... who will say, that sometimes, we stumble upon a *single* instruction which is very useful to us personally. For some reason... it's kind of like the shoe *fits*. In that case, sometimes it's useful... to use just that... and not try to bring *all* of these things into your practice. So I'll give an example.

[00:05:22] One of the enhancements... *I'm* calling it an enhancement... you will not find it anywhere in a list of enhancements. One of the enhancements is... to nurture... in your mind... a sense of *appreciation*... for having been born... a *human being* who also has encountered the Dharma. So merely being born a human being... is actually not necessarily so great. As we know, there are many human beings who live kind of cursed lives... and have *terrible* experiences. Some of them commit suicide. They suffer from depression. All sorts of things. One of the ways... that is helpful, is to plant this seed in yourself and nurture it... that it is an extraordinary opportunity... to be born a human being... not a chicken, not a snake, not a bug, not all sorts of things. And this is not about the *truth* of... not being a bug... some of us maybe have bug minds, [laughter]. bug like minds. If you see something to eat, you eat it. And later you're sorry... and the next day, you don't learn also... so. It is a *classic* instruction... to give rise to a *very* strong appreciation for having been born... a human being. And... what follows from that is a whole series of instructions about how *not* to waste the opportunity.

[00:07:30] But first, before we can take *advantage* of the opportunity, we have to acknowledge that we actually have an opportunity... to have been born... a human being. And... on *top* of that, to have encountered the Dharma. And if you want to add *more* to it, you could say... and also to be *interested* in the Dharma. Merely encountering it... is not sufficient.

[00:08:16] If we take... having been born a human being and we're *feeling*... like it is... an extraordinary opportunity... then it's interesting and maybe helpful... to just remind ourselves... that our objective, as a human being, first and foremost is... to free ourselves from all the causes of suffering... that we know we *can* experience... and all of us, to some degree, *have*

experienced them. How do we free ourselves from that? ... And the answer to that is basically the entire path of the Dharma. It's all *about* freeing ourselves from the causes of suffering and embracing the causes of... happiness and joy. And we'll get to it later, but you can see... at least the *tip* of the iceberg... is that this is the *basis* for the entire ethical traditions within the Dharma. The ethical traditions are Meant to *free* us from the causes of suffering... and to land us in the causes of joy and happiness. And by extension... because when we are successful at that... we want to *share* it... then what are the methods for making it *effective* for others?

[00:10:00] So, we pick some small piece like that now. It's helpful, rather than a looong list of things that we can't quite put the pieces together. They don't form a *picture* in the puzzle, but more like just a lot of little pieces of things. Better to have a few big pieces that make sense... than all the little pieces. Which is not a reason to not study more. Those things are helpful, but when we sit down to practice... it's *entirely* about experience. Not about our conceptual understanding of things. So when you think about... having the good *fortune* of having been born a human being... and elaborating that a little bit, we think... not only am I a human being, but... my body is intact, at least to some extent, a useful extent. *My mind is capable of embracing the Dharma, at least to an extent, which is useful*, maybe to an extraordinary extent. And all of us, we don't need college educations to understand... that things are impermanent. So what is... functional and useful today may be utterly not functional tomorrow.

[00:11:48] Those who are growing older... have special *access* to that truth. ... Unfortunately... we often don't think of it as a blessing. We think of it as an unfortunate case of degradation. ... Can you imagine being forced to live forever? ... In your current body? ... Impermanence is just a *fact*. We're all old enough to... embrace that. And understand, that there is absolutely nothing that remains the same, even for the shortest measurable moment. Given that, and understanding that, and *holding* that perspective allows us to... meet all sorts of circumstances. ... The pleasant ones and the unpleasant ones. And have a view of their continuous... change occurring all the time.

[00:13:18] So as you enter the meditation... *beginning* with the refuge... before you even recite the Refuge Prayer, before you turn your mind to refuge in the Buddha, *remind* yourself... that what you're about to do... is *possible* because... you were born human being. Because you *are* a human being. Because you have the intelligence of a human being. Because you're able to do things that other beings are not necessarily able to do. So that good fortune should not be wasted. Of course, we want to make the most of it. So first we do that. Remind ourselves... of something we actually, rarely even notice. I have two legs, two arms, I have a head. I have a body. I have some... education. I have some abilities. We normally take all of that just *totally* for granted. So start by *not* taking it for granted. Step into that... place with a *strong* sense of appreciation. And then... from *that* place, we will recite the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer together three times.

sangha [00:14:49] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:16:34] It's helpful as... intelligent beings... to first ask ourselves, for example... How do I practice impermanence? ... Isn't it just a *fact*? What is there to practice? What is there to practice is... that, generally speaking, we are not *aware* of impermanence. We're aware of impermanence when... we're eight years old and our ice cream cone fell on the ground. Generally speaking... we're not aware of it. But we *each* are... in our own minds... an unimpeded... *fountain* of impermanence. How long does a random *thought* rest in your mind... before it's gone? We *barely* notice it coming... and may not even notice that it's gone. And we

may not notice that as one is gone, another is already there. Practicing impermanence... which you probably won't find in a book somewhere... even on meditation, 'How To Practice Impermanence', but your own *mind*, if you rest your awareness... on the flow of those thoughts... you experience impermanence continuously... without any *need* to label it. ... And *no way* to stop it.

[00:19:00] Now a very important... piece of this... is the following instruction. If you rest your awareness... on the experiences which are continually unfolding... this *is* the job of the mind. *Continuous* unfolding of experience. ... If you rest your awareness on any of those experiences... you become aware of the *appearance* of that experience. Not the shape and form and color kind of appearance... though it could be that. But *just* the appearance of an experience, in other words, noticing, I'm having an experience!

[00:20:07] *That* appearance... as we all know... does not survive impermanence. It shortly disappears. And that disappearing... of the appearance... is what we call the emptiness. ... So, we hear so many things about the emptiness... it can become very confusing. ... But *one* thing's for sure. An experience arises... like an appearance. And that experience... gradually or quickly, like a bubble popping... vanishes... and that is the emptiness. ... The *emptiness*... we think of as... the *source* of the experience. Which is to say... we cannot see where the experience came from. ... Nor do we see where it went. So out of the emptiness, the experience occurs. And into that *same* place... it dissolves. Day and night, 24 hours a day... experiences arise, whether we're awake or asleep... out of the *empty* aspect of the mind. And into that same place... they dissolve... again. We do not control *ever*... that unfolding. It is not part of the Dharma, as far as I know... that we are going to be able to control... that unfolding. What we *do* in our practice of the Dharma is *develop*... an extraordinarily healthy relationship... with the unfolding of those experiences. ... We overcome the causes of suffering... and we plant the causes of happiness.

[00:22:29] So in this session, the last before lunch... you might wish to take this up. Rest your awareness once again... in this case, preferably, to try at least... rest your awareness... on an experience. ... The *most*... helpful... thing to rest your awareness on... is an experience, if you can. The most helpful... *experience*... to rest your awareness on... is a *conflicted* experience. ... Like anger... hatred... love... also, often conflicted we know... passion, of any kind... desire... *fear*. ... Fear... *really* big one. You rest your awareness on fear. Understanding where it came from and *where* it will go. And you just keep your awareness there... and you will see it go. You'll see it come. You'll see it go. You'll see it come. And gradually... the *understanding*... of the quality of empty appearances... will rise. So do your best for the next 15 minutes or so.

[00:24:26] *period of meditation*
sangha [00:41:02] *dedicating the merit*