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*learning to place attention on experience separate from conceptual, how bodhicitta makes shamatha effective, experiencing union of appearance and emptiness, getting 'more' from strong emotional experiences, the role of and practice of 4 Immeasurables, **Carrying Practice:** w/4 Immeasurables 24/7, **Carrying Practice:** seeing the emptiness in the 'light show' with movies, **Carrying Practice:** using our daily gifts to practice transforming anger*

LMC [00:02:48] So we have a period now... for an hour, hour and a half, something like that, for just, really, *ideally* an open conversation. If you have questions, or... things you'd like brought up to talk about... specifically about what we talked about this morning, but in general, the Dharma. This is an opportunity to just ask the question or... put something on the table for consideration.

student 1 [00:03:49] Just a simple question to get started. Warm up. [laughter] I'm curious about the... placing attention on an *experience*, which is something... it's not *fixed!* It's a thing that... moves through time. So, do you just take a chunk of the experience and rerun the loop over and over again? Or how do you, how do you focus on the experience itself?

LMC [00:04:18] That's a good question. It's much more difficult, right? Putting your awareness on an experience... unlike, if you put a rock on the table, it generally, doesn't walk away. [laughter] Yeah, if it does, there's another issue we have to deal with. [more laughter] Normally it doesn't. And so we have something that's really *stable*, but... the other side of it is, is that... stability is not the nature of our normal experience. We're constantly *searching* for stability... but rarely finding anything except kind of a facsimile of it. And when we put our awareness on an experience, like a feeling... it's not like the rock. And oftentimes... this is where we go to look. We put our awareness there... when we say there, we have to be careful. We're not looking for a *place* in space and time for that thing. Feelings... we might identify them with... oh my left arm hurts... somehow. But... but even *that* can move... to another location. So, it's a *different* process.

[00:06:10] And it's even more different if... the feeling that we're putting it on is a *conflicted* emotion of some kind. Like we have some anger... or some disappointment or something and it's connected to somebody and they're here too. Then it's much more difficult. However... I think that you could make a case... that it takes a lot of energy. ... I actually don't like the word energy in this... or power... or... strong intention, maybe... all of those seem like they're not quite right... for this. So therefore, I go back to just energy because it feels neutral. But, I think it takes a *lot* of energy... of a certain kind... that is *not* like calories and heat... and energy in our bodies in the normal way. It takes a lot of energy to be able to place your awareness... on that feeling. Not easy.

[00:07:23] Therefore... some people will say, and even some very qualified teachers will say that.... you're more likely to be successful at this... putting your awareness on a conflicted state... than on an easy one. Like, 'oh, I'm having such a pleasant day. I'll put my awareness on that and that'll be really nice.' And it's really easy to do... but the outcome also is not profound. So, I think it does take a lot of energy. Kind of like holding down a mad dog. You know... it takes a lot of energy. So we're not talking about that *kind* of energy exactly. At least one person I know... will say, that the greater the energy required, in terms of what you're what you're placing your awareness on, the more profound the result can be. The experience can come quick and disappear quick. But you can recognize it... kind of like a flash bulb going off. I think that analogy

is very loose analogy, it's not like you would see some light. [responding to something off-mic] Yeah, that's also my experience. If I have... some kind of an experience, it doesn't have to be conflicted emotion... just some strong experience, one thing that, that is *easy* to discover... and is *really* important to find... is *that* experience cannot be accessed... by the intellect. ... I saw you conk your head. [laughter] Try it. See.

[00:09:36] Let's say you're having... uhm... I had to think of something. ... I had lunch, so now I feel sated. [laughter after off-mic comment] Right!? But it doesn't have a lot power. It's the power to sleep. But so let's say it's a conflicted thing. Like you have a disagreement with somebody, and it's going on... and it's getting worse. It's getting more... intense. And it's *difficult* to put your awareness there. Kind of like... putting one marble on top of another one. It's really hard to get it there. But if you *can* get it there... then it's also kind of like a magnet. Like, it will like connect, click together. And what you end up seeing... is more important than what you would have seen... with the less emotive situation.

[00:10:44] It's one of those things that... if you've *never* tried it and you have a lot of trouble doing it, then you're probably doing it correctly. Because it's not easy to do. And it's the thing, of course, that we *want* to do, because what we want is to be able to incorporate... our *intense* feelings, pleasant and unpleasant... into our practice. It's not like we want to just do all the negative stuff, or all the positive stuff. ... There are times when we want to do whatever it takes. ... And those are the times when we can't. We're more likely to be able to do it, even though it doesn't *last* long, then the experience of *seeing*... the conflicted experience... and *then* seeing that it's not there. That you *did* feel it just a while ago... but now you can't find it. That's an important experience. And shamatha... fundamentally... though we might say it's a somewhat... advanced stage of shamatha, nonetheless is... what you're using.

student 1 [00:12:15] [indecipherable]

LMC [00:12:15] Oh, I think... well... yeah, that's a good question, I think... no, I think it *is* an insight practice. But shamatha is always... when the shamatha is very stable... it's often right on the edge of lhatong. Sits right on the edge. Especially, if you've been practicing lhatong, the shamatha then... can easily just slip into that, without even trying.

[00:12:49] So, I think that's... what it is. The *key* thing here is... you have an experience. Experience cannot be accessed by the intellect. As soon as we think that it *is*, soon as we think.. that we *have* accessed it from a conceptual standpoint, we actually now... are just talking to ourselves about this thing. The experience may still *be* there, but... we're not there with it now. Now we're talking about how... how awful it was... or how good it was... or something. Does that make sense?

student 2 [00:13:36] [indecipherable]

LMC [00:14:07] I think the 10 second thing that I was talking about was really an issue of... it's better if you could do it 10 minutes, if you could do it 10 days... is better. But of course, we can't do that. We have trouble doing... especially something intense that we're trying to look at, it tends to get more intense.

student 2 [00:14:38] Okay, I thought it's otherwise, because you watch more than 10 seconds, you'll get attached to the idea.

LMC [00:14:45] Could be.

student 2 [00:14:48] You get arguments in your mind... and then, you'd better stop and let it go. And then start again, you know, watching it. [laughter]

LMC [00:14:55] Yes! ... Sometimes it's good to talk in generalities. And this maybe is one of those kinds of situations. One of the things that makes... the practice of calm abiding *effective*... when you're using it to rest your mind on a conflicted emotion... one of the things that makes that work well... is if you can bring... the *intention* to benefit all beings. So that you remove yourself from the equation. If you're doing it to benefit yourself, then... it's most likely not to work. But if you do it... and you have the understanding of *why* that would benefit others... then it's far more likely to work. That your awareness will rest on that because it's not encumbered by a sense of... *I have to do this. I need to learn how to do this. Which is its own problem.* In other words, soon, as I think to myself, I *need* to do this, I've now... kind of penetrated the experience with the intellect. So now it's conceptual. I didn't mean to make it sound like it was easy. [laughs] But the truth is, is that... because a *conflicted* emotion... is powerful, our *intention* and our *willingness* to work with it might be much more. And that can work, also, just because it's so much *more* powerful. Whereas if I just want to look at this plastic lid, that's got no power. ... I can do it. I can sit there and look at it. And maybe the shamatha will be good... maybe not. But either way, it doesn't really amount to too much.

student 2 [00:17:28] The other thing, I will follow up a little bit is that the experience it seems to me, is a memory. It's a mind. And emotion, it's like a body. And the way I look at emotion inside, I feel the *lump* here.

LMC [00:17:43] Yeah.

student 2 [00:17:43] And I can't breathe or whatever. So it's basically it's a reaction of the body. When I look at the experience, even, you know, in the past, usually the past experience... is a memory of something ...even if conflicted, it's a still a memory. You use your mind to do it. And then when I look at the emotion, it's really is a body. And feelings... reaction is like... short of breath or... get, you know, lump in here, can't get out. So you look at this one, symptoms of your body? Or you look at the memory of experience?

LMC [00:18:25] That is good. Of course, there is an experience... in the *body*... that we feel. Painful. Pleasant. Whatever it is, we feel that experience... in the body. But we also feel something usually, it's not just that much, then there's often this thing of... we have a *relationship* with that experience. We like it. We don't like it. That's different from the experience itself. Though it may become... part of the experience.

[00:19:02] We're trying here, I think, to... you know, for many years, I'll say... maybe 20 years... when I would work with a group of people and we were practicing shamatha... we never went deep. We always went, what we call the horizontal axis. That is to say we spread out... like oil on water. In other words, we could go really wide. We could talk about all the things that could come from shamatha, but we never went deep. And so lately it's been my *wish* that we also tried... for the deep. To work with that also. So we're kind of in an experiment right now, frankly. And my hope is that people will work with it at all levels. So, when this shamatha is not so good, they'll work with the *not* so deep to kind of get back in. And when it's good... they'll work with the challenging things... which take us to a different place. And so anyway... that's my wish.

[00:20:42] I think that *lots* could be said about that approach... but, the primary issue of it is... that in the more advanced teachings in this tradition... you're dealing with experiences... *separate* from a conceptual understanding. So that requires that the practitioner... learns how to *not* use the intellect. Or to recognize that they have now *left* the experiential and gone into the intellect. So... *without* those, you can't really explore these things. You have to be able to... leave the intellect alone. It's not that the intellect can't *access* the experience, but when it *does*, you've *lost* the direct experience. Does that make sense? You have your lump... and that we would say... so there's a direct experience. You could sum it up in... I feel tense. I feel tight. I feel something. But even as soon as you *call* it something... you've now brought the intellect into it. So the experience is modified... by bringing the intellect in.

[00:22:12] And now we have to ask ourself questions about that, which is *all* intellect. We've stepped outside the realm of... resting the awareness... completely. So the *trick* is.. which I think doesn't happen... in one day or one week or something, the trick really is... how do you bring your awareness to that difficult state... that feeling... and *not* try to analyze it, or do something with it? Just like look at it... just see it... *feel* it. And then we have that thing that I mentioned just before lunch... where feeling is what we could call *appearance*. And when we look... and it's gone... or when we're looking at it and suddenly it's not there, that *is* what we say, the primordial relationship between emptiness and appearance. That's how they *are*. When that feeling, which felt so perfectly *real* a moment ago, is gone, that *is* the union of appearance and emptiness. It's not something else. And as long as we don't bring the intellect to bear on it and try and understand it from *that* perspective, then we're getting somewhere with it. ~~OK. Yeah.~~

student 2 [00:23:48] *Insight*... basically it's not intellectual ... it's wisdom.

LMC [00:23:54] Definitely not. Yeah. Wisdom is not intellectual. That's certainly is not how Western philosophy considers it. Of course insight is conceptual. [laughter] It's like... that's fundamentally what it *is*. So, we just need to look at the words... what we're using. And maybe come to use words that we more generally understand in that we're not talking about... a conceptual understanding. Just talking about the experience. Maybe you go to a doctor and you're sick. And what they do to you is somehow painful. And, you know it's gonna be painful. So you're not *happy* about the painful *coming*. On the other hand, something good is gonna come out of it maybe. So therefore, you can sit and you can feel the pain... and look at the pain and understand that something good is coming out of this... and have a different relationship with that pain. The shamatha... used in this way, is the same thing. Changes our relationship with it. And when the relationship changes, then our understanding of it changes too.

student 3 [00:25:29] I had a question around this also, but... and you might have answered it, but I did ask...

LMC [00:25:39] I did. [laughter]

student 3 [00:25:40] My spin on this... my experience in looking and calling up a conflicted emotion was, as you said, it was like trying to stand a greased pig. There it was. And then it would slip away. And I found myself falling into kind of a trap of battling... trying to get it back. Where'd it go? You know, it became much more of a conflicted type of situation. And so... what I did in that situation, and I'm not sure if this is... I would go to the cup. I would just go to the cup. I'd drop the emotion and just switch! And the cup was simpler. There it is. There is the cup. And that lasted maybe... another three or four seconds before I go off. So I found myself switching quite a bit... midstream. That's what I found myself doing. And I'm not sure that's the best way to

go, but I didn't want to go into the struggle. I didn't want to... try to get... this emotion *back* when the...

LMC [00:27:03] Struggle is no good.

student 3 [00:27:04] Right.

LMC [00:27:05] Definitely. This is the starting place of... you go for refuge and you bring your awareness to some... object. An emotion would *not* be an object... right?

student 3 [00:27:22] Right.

LMC [00:27:23] You could put your awareness on it, but it's *not* an object.

student 3 [00:27:25] No, it's ... not there, solid.

LMC [00:27:26] In that sense, it's not stable. And so... we have to think a little differently about those things. If you can rest your awareness on something... *routinely*, for five to 10 seconds... you will *not* be able to get five to 10 seconds placing your awareness on a stronger experience.

student 3 [00:27:47] That was my experience. It was slipping.

LMC [00:27:52] But, you know, it's also kind of a curiosity. We could ask ourselves, like, "Why is that?"

student 3 [00:27:59] Right.

LMC [00:27:59] I mean, this is *my* experience. This is not some other thing. It's not a rock that's laying in the ground out there. It's like a living thing. Like it should be more easy to see it than something that isn't even in the building... or an inanimate object. But that's because... the stillness of the mind, when you just rest your awareness there is fine. It's no more stable than the conflicted *emotion* is. ... So, the conflicted emotion has something that the rock doesn't have. And that is... it has a kind of intense energy about it.

student 3 [00:28:45] Oh, yeah.

LMC [00:28:45] And so... if I'm looking at the rock and then I *forget* that I'm looking at the rock... and five minutes later I realize I forgot. I haven't *really* witnessed the union of emptiness and appearance. It's kind of like, I left the building. So... it's not the same. But when you have a strong... *experience*... and the only reason why I say emotion is because... most of the *strong* experiences we have... are emotional. Strong *experience!*

student 3 [00:29:24] That's true.

LMC [00:29:25] So, I mean, you can get a great massage... or something. And in a certain way that would work also. Physical sensations are not quite the same kind of experience as an emotional sensation... but it still should work. You put your awareness on that *experience*... and you will be thrown off it!

student 3 [00:29:52] Pretty quickly.

LMC [00:29:54] Just like... let's say that... we could divide the abilities of everyone in this room, in terms of the ability to practice just straight... shamatha. Here I have a pea. I put it down. I put my awareness on the pea. All right. Well, let's say... a 1 is kind of not so good... 2 is medium and 3 is really good. So... the beginner looks at the pea... and just can't stay... relaxed on it for more than one or two seconds. Again, it's like trying to put the marble on the marble. However... you can take a steel marble... and put it by a magnet... and it'll stay there really nice. Because something... magnetizes it. Something draws it. So when we put our awareness upon... a strong emotional state, it's the same thing. We *actually*... if you look close, you may see... and I don't mean that this is universal at all... but I see it. I don't *want* to be rid of that state. It's like someone who's really angry. Theoretically, they could just let it go anytime. We don't *want* to let it go. We want to do something. Sort of like... I got a weapon in my hand, you know, and here's this person that I don't like. I don't want to put the weapon down. They might kill me. [laughs] So it's really an issue of... first, discovering... that you *can* put your awareness... on a feeling... a feeling which is imbued with... emotion. You *can* do that, but it's *less* stable than the other more simple one.

student 3 [00:31:59] Right.

LMC [00:31:59] The difference here is that... if you really... have the experience of, I put my awareness on the anger... and the anger... suddenly... I just saw a *glimpse* of it and then it's gone. And once it's gone, it's not like I look again and it's there. It *takes* a while. And sometimes it may feel like... it's *totally* gone. So that's a *very* different experience than putting your awareness on a penny. And it does not *occur* to most of us, most of the time, that when I'm having depression... or anything that's really strong... that I will be able to put my awareness there... and rest and relax there and just see it and then see that it's *not* there. And then... without making some big storyline to myself... "Wow, that was amazing." Now I don't have to do this and that. Just like, back again, relax again on it, see it, then it's not there. Then... a little break, then back again. It's exactly what you do with your shamatha anyway when you're learning shamatha. So when we're learning shamatha, we often feel excited about it. Like, this is interesting! How is it that... I could have a leaf... and I can put my awareness on it, but it's only for a very short time and then I forget where I am.

[00:33:30] So the same process holds... as you go into the feelings... and there's different things to be *seen* there. Like, for example... if you bring the intellect into the experiential... the feeling part of it... you lose what you would *get* if your awareness was on the feeling. Instead, you've pulled it away and replaced it by the intellectual eye... the analytical eye... instead of the eye which just sees the emotion. And then you don't get much from it. You find one, that your awareness isn't able to stick there... anymore. And the analysis... may be interesting, it may be *very* interesting, but it's not the same. So you could divide it up into three levels there. You know, the most important single one of all is... can you put your awareness on that feeling for even just... two or three seconds... with nothing but just *feeling* it? Just feeling it. And then... let it go. It's *best* to let it go on your own. It *always* is. It's always better to *end* the meditation... yourself, rather than to end it... when the meditation is corrupted. That's a loser... because we train our minds, to end the meditation when it gets difficult.

student 3 [00:35:16] Well, this is a helpful distinction then. I mean, what we're seeing is the emptiness, the innate emptiness of our experience, which is not what you see if it becomes a thought.

LMC [00:35:32] The emptiness is the most vulnerable... to being corrupted by the intellect. Of course! We could really confuse ourselves in ten minutes flat.

student 3 [00:35:48] Okay. I won't go there.

student 4 [00:35:57] I wanted to ask about... experiencing the opposite. Of, what would you call that... a kind of repellent magnetism. Because what you're talking about with intense emotions... positive or negative... in this case, I'll just say negative because that's what I'm asking about. I experience a sort of like a negative polarity. Sort of like... I look and there's this immediate... revulsion. This immediate... "Get away from me." When I approach difficult emotions... there isn't a desire to get closer to them, and to.. watch them. It's a desire to do anything *but* that. To do anything but look at it.

LMC [00:36:53] There is a desire to do anything *but* look at it?

student 4 [00:36:56] That's all I want to do is not look at. Anything but look at it. [laughter] And maybe it's because... when I look... the intellect has already kind of introduced itself... and has already begun... pinning down the experience without really... any *conscious* effort on my part. And I don't really know what to do with this because... it eliminates any and all motivation to actually engage in the practice.

LMC [00:37:28] What does? What does that?

student 4 [00:37:31] The experience of looking and feeling the repulsion of... I don't want to do this. Like looking and then the repulsion, it creates this sort of like a, a strong... yeah, a very strong aversion to... practice itself.

LMC [00:38:00] And you don't want to look at the emotion?

student 4 [00:38:04] Yeah, it's... looking at it and bringing it to the forefront... is the opposite of what I want to do.

LMC [00:38:17] I mean, I hate to say this, but you're in the norm.

student 4 [00:38:19] Cool. [laughter]

LMC [00:38:23] That's really... the penalty that comes with avoidance. ... You don't get insight into the emotion and you still pay the *price* for having it. So it's kind of like, you know... I'm really... I'm the expert on that... if you need any advice on that.

student 4 [00:38:58] Care to say a little bit about that? [laughter]

LMC [00:39:12] Earlier, we talked about... the role of... I want to say the role of the Four Immeasurables. ... These things do not bear fruit outside of that. Or they will bear fruit, but they'll be stunted... fruit. Because... all of the *driving* emotions... for engaging in these practices... on their own, by themselves, are left to compete for our attention. From the perspective of our wish, our hope, our expectation that... *I* will benefit from this. And we're screwed... in the moment that we hold that view. It's just *not* going to work. *Worse*... we get fooled into thinking it did work. And now... there's a longer trail... till kind of backtrack... to find your breadcrumbs. When in fact, the

key piece in this.. are those Four Immeasurables, again. Compassion and Loving Kindness, it's *all* about others.

[00:40:48] Joy is that thing of... when you see somebody do something good... when you know that somebody has done something good... *you* feel joyful... that they *did* that. Because you understand... that every action... with the body, with the speech< with the mind will bear results. And so when you see something that even just looks to you like... that will bear a positive fruit... that will help this person who just did that thing. And you also have the sense that when they're helped, they will help others. Then you just have a natural welling up of joy for that. So that's the third one. And the fourth one is *absolute* equanimity. Not only for other beings... but for our own inner experiences. So this where it comes with... the issue of, how do you work with things that you don't want to work with or whatever it is.

student 4 [00:42:39] I recently found that... working with the Four Immeasurables can bring up negativities for me as well. I engaged in the practice of cultivating joy... upon witnessing, you know, other people... being joyful, being happy, doing good things, other people and engaging in virtuous acts. And I felt all of this like... jealousy and envy just rise up like a flood. The geysers.

LMC [00:43:18] Well... that's good you're alive. [laughter] We could start there.

student 4 [00:43:30] There's negativities with that, too. That's something that I recently discovered that... I have work to do with... appreciating the preciousness of *this* specific life.

LMC [00:43:46] Of course. ... That's the one... you have, so... that's the one we're supposed to work with. ... You know, it's interesting because... I think that... on the one hand, the best view to hold is this not a magic show. ... We have these things... and we have the tools to work with them. So... just like someone who's a carpenter and has a tool shop. And it's full of a lot of tools that could make almost anything that you needed to make, but you don't know how to use them. So you can't make those things. You can twist things and do weird things with stuff, but none of it is what you want to see. So you can remedy that by going and finding somebody and being an apprentice, you know, there's various ways... you can go to school and learn how to use those tools and gradually become good at that. There is a certain way in which this is just the same thing. We have to get the tools... we have to get some instruction... we have to ask some questions and get some answers... and some direction... and gradually build this thing. And... I think most people would say... halfway down that corridor, that this is *far* more difficult than anything that I ever did before. On the *other* hand, if you're lucky... there's somebody there who is saying, "Yes, but how do you measure the benefit?" And then you can see... if I can do *this*, the benefit is exceptional. ... It cannot be measured, actually.

[00:45:52] There's a teaching by... one *great* magician, if you will, [laughs] from Tibet. His name is Thangtong Gyalpo. And he was kind of a magician, actually... in an odd, very practical way. He built iron bridges. However long ago that was... five hundred years?! He built iron bridges... across fairly wide rivers. Making it possible for a kind of commerce and convenience that wasn't there before. And at the same time, he was renowned... meditator with *deep* understanding of the Dharma. It's interesting putting those two things together... in *one* person. You would think that one of those things would be more than enough for one person. But... he was also renowned for being a highly realized person. Which *meant*... that in the eyes of most people, he was crazy. [laughter]

[00:47:15] He himself referred to himself, the mad man of this place, or the mad man at that place and so on. And because... the *experience* of him was so profound... rather than lose... I don't know what to call it... I want to say, *admirers*... he gained them. More and more people wanted his teachings and all... and now his teachings have become... a codified part of long retreats. At the end of those retreats... you end up spending a few months on *those* practices in particular... that he was renowned for. So, I think if you could look at that person's life, you would probably see that... it was not easy. Not easy. And that maybe the very *cure*... in some cases, was the obstacle also.

[00:48:26] He was renowned for the Four Immeasurables. You know, you can ask that... 'Where the hell did he find the time for that?' Well, because... you can experience kindness towards others while you're doing all sorts of other things. There's no... boundary there. You're going to experience it in your sleep and when you're awake and when you're eating... it's all the time you can experience it. *If* you spend enough time developing that habit. ... We don't have to talk about habits. As Buddhists you know, we're not supposed to have *habits*... [laughter] but the truth is, a great *fraction* of the time that we spend in our *practice*... is developing habits. But they *should* be... at their very *best*... self-destructing habits. That is to say... they *expose* the things that we're working on... like equanimity for example.

[00:49:25] What is absolute equanimity... look like? Conceptually... we can say exactly what it is. If it's about kindness, your kindness is equally... for everyone. Kind of like, the sun is shining. It doesn't care who it falls on. It just shines. So that's *often* the analogy that's used for equanimity. Like, your loving kindness, your compassion, your joy... falls on everyone equally. It's not an issue *of*... even if the person is really... *horrible*, they *still* have... a human body. They still have the potential to be a saint. To be a bodhisattva. Therefore... you experience joy for that. If they also do... phenomenally good things, you experience joy for that! In other words... it doubles back on itself so that you *always* have a reason... to experience joy. No matter *what* they do. ... That's not normally how we define equanimity, but... it's supposed to be how it works.

[00:50:39] So you have to bring these Four Immeasurables... joy, equanimity, loving kindness, compassion... you *have* to bring them... to this... while you're fundamentally working on yourself. You have to bring *these* things in... while you're *also*... nurturing these other experiences. And little by little, you'll find yourself doing exactly what you didn't want to do. Because you know what it does! And that is analyzing! Conceptualizing! "Oh, that's compassion. Well, that's equanimity. Oh, I see the difference there!" And then you realize... you just ruined the whole cake. You looked in the oven too soon. [laughter] But that is the process. It's like you can't avoid that.

[00:51:40] I remember telling my mother I wanted to bake something. I was about five. And so she gave me what I wanted. And she says, "Well, what are you gonna use?" And I said, "Well, I need salt." [laughter] "What do you want to make?" "I want to make custard." "Well, try not to use too much salt." "Okay." So I used about a quarter of a cup. [laughter] Things like that. It was *utterly* inedible in the end. But when you're working, it's reasonable because we're all children in some way. So when you're working with children, you assume that's what you *get* for it. You don't expect gourmet custard out of this thing. It's a different job. You expect this person to *do* something and then you reward them for it. So they feel like they're empowered... to do something. And... even that's not easy! That was the last bit of salt that you took out of here. [laughs] We have to change our roles in these things... with ourselves as well as others.

student 5 [00:53:15] I want to talk about experience. Because you talked about... anger... as a really sort of, primal experience. And I can remember one time, when one of my very precious enemies made me *very* angry. And it was so powerful it would overwhelm me and I couldn't... look at it. But finally, one time... I got up the courage to stare straight into the anger. Not this person... but the anger itself. And the experience... was *very*, very powerful. And it was not... what I expected of something that would qualify as emptiness. It had *so much*... an enormous energy. It was not any longer anger. But it was an *enormous* energy. And I'm wondering if you could talk about that as either a segue to the experience of emptiness... or a form of emptiness? Is emptiness *without* energy... and just like a calm sea? Or can it be something else? That's my question.

LMC [00:54:44] What did you call it... a something seem?

student 5 [00:54:46] A calm sea. It was *not* a calm sea. It was anything *but*... a calm sea. It was very, very profoundly energetic... and almost a... *life* transforming experience. Now, would that qualify in the realm of emptiness? Or is emptiness ever like that versus... something so peaceful and calm... like sky? That's what I'm really wondering about the *experience*... that comes from a meditation of, say... on anger... which mine was.

LMC [00:55:27] You can't predict what... your experience will be... around... anything really. And when we talk about experience, we're never talking about emptiness. ... The emptiness is... and always has been... part of the appearance. And we see the appearance all the time. And we even have descriptions for it... calm sea and you know, we have the description. We know what those things are *pointing* to... but we normally don't witness the emptiness... which is also always there. And the hard thing there is... that if you go looking for, you'll never find it. ... It's not there like that.

[00:56:19] On the other hand... I think it's safe to say... and you know, Bokar Rinpoche spoke about it, Thrangu Rinpoche has written about it... especially the second half of that book, 'Creation and Completion Stages' that the emptiness is always there... with the appearance. And... we all *witness*... you can't say you *experience* the emptiness. You witness the emptiness from time to time. One. We don't recognize it... though... we've seen it. Second. We can't remember it because it's not something to remember. Normally when we remember, we remember *something*. We remember words. We remember tunes. We remember all sorts of things. ... There is nothing there... to remember that's emptiness. It doesn't leave a footprint. It doesn't leave an imprint. But, the *experience* of that emptiness... can occur. But it doesn't occur like, "Well, there's that emptiness today again." It doesn't leave an imprint. Thrangu Rinpoche says everyone has the experience of the... co-emergence of... the union of emptiness and appearance. Everyone *has* that. People have it... under many different circumstances. They do not recognize it. It has a certain sense of... being a little different than their last experience of that waterfall, or whatever it was. But that's all. Exactly what it was... quickly fades. It's not there.

student 5 [00:58:13] So what was I experiencing?

LMC [00:58:20] Well... the only really kind of *foolproof* answer to that is... you were experiencing the union of emptiness and appearance. Because that's what all of our experience is. There's just... there *isn't* anything else. That's how we describe things. The emptiness... is the *cause* for the appearance. The appearance itself is *not* the emptiness. But it's not *separate* from the emptiness ever. In a certain way, it's like a car dragging a trailer. The trailer is not the car and the car is not the trailer. But you always see them together on the road. They're always together.

They're not the same. In this case, though, we would say, they are *completely* codependent. You can't have an appearance without the emptiness nor vice versa. And in the the teachings on Mahamudra and Dzogchen and other high-end practices... this is what they talk about. This is what it's about. How do you recognize that? The more you recognize it, the more likely you are to *have* that experience and recognize the experience! Whereas we *all* are having the experience and the sense of... I pick up this cup... it's got a little bit of coffee left... it's always been... co-present with emptiness. It's never been separate from that. And we all know just how helpful that is. [laughter]

[01:00:01] It's not so helpful! And yet, I just read, like yesterday or the day before, Thrangu Rinpoche's little passage in the 'Creation and Completion Stages' his statement that... everybody has this experience and they recognize it. They see it. They have the experience and they... I would say, they somehow manage to not bring the intellect into it. They somehow manage to just like, soak... that experience up. But then... they can't describe it. They can't repeat it. They can't do all the things... in fact, what they *do* then is all the things you do to avoid ever having it again. And so, I think that's true, partly because Thrangu Rinpoche said it... and partly because I think, in my own experience, I've seen enough... so I think that's exactly how it works. Those two are *always* together. There is no such thing as an appearance... *without* emptiness. Emptiness is the *means* by which an appearance can occur.

[01:01:16] Now, we would tend to think, appearance of this occurs... because I have eyes, because I have a brain that interprets the vision and all these things. That's fine. No Dharmic practitioner is going to refute *that*. But that's *not* what they're talking about. So it's an issue of... we just have a lot of things to look at. For some people... the intellectual thing is so big that that's what that person needs to work on. You need to learn do *not bring* your analytical mind into *this* practice or you will never be able to do it. So the first thing you got to do is... stop doing that. Other people actually... need a little intellect. They're so used to living in an emotional state of some kind, maybe a miserable emotional state. They need to have a view there... and in that case, the emptiness provides a new direction. But I think this is *very* personal stuff, in the end. Even though it's often taught, in a kind of generalized way... I think that it really comes down to a personal thing in the end. You want to do it. You have to learn to do it.

[01:02:35] It's kind of like... building boats. You want to build a boat? You got to go find somebody who knows how to build a boat. They show you how to build the boat and you build the boat and you got to go and find someone who knows how to sail. And pretty soon you sail and then more happens. And then maybe... you become like Dilgo Khyentse. [laughter] You know! Yes... yes! It's just like... in a certain way, it's just like what we always *do*. We go to school to learn things. And we learn and we think that's what there is.

[01:03:09] This esoteric stuff... what Ken McCloud loves to call, and I think I'm just on the edge of joining him on this... this *is*... mystical. If there is such a thing as the mystical... the mystical is this. Where we are exploring our *experience* of the union of emptiness and appearance. And actually, *having* the experience and *recognizing* the experience.

student 5 [01:03:41] Thank you.

student 6 [01:03:55] I didn't quite understand what you said about... something about a good habit should self-destruct?

LMC[01:04:02] Self-destruct? Did I say that?

student 6 [01:04:18] Well, you've been recorded. We can rewind the tape. [laughter]

LMC [01:04:23] Do you want to slap me? [laughter] I'm going need that. Some of us find these teachings... to be humorous. And I can't *imagine* why anyone thinks that. But actually... I find them to be really humorous. I think it's like, we're really... trying our best to explore... something that means more to each one of us than any other single thing. And when you add... *into* that... the Four Immeasurables, kindness and compassion and joy and equanimity... it just throws fuel onto that fire. And the fact that it's difficult... means *something* to us. But the hotter that fire is... the more passionate we are... in trying to get *at* it. Because otherwise, if that weren't the case, we would never do it. The results just come to slow... for the most part. ... Did we answer your question? Somehow I think we didn't. [laughter] Did I dodge it or was it just...

student 7 [01:06:33] Good habits.

LMC [01:06:35] Oooohhh... that's so easy. Yeah. Good habits, bad habits. They're just... they come and go. You know... it's like... it's the attitude we carry is like... so *critical*. There is this wonderful story that Lama Tsang Tsing on long retreat, he said this... somebody was complaining about somebody else on retreat, which is kind of more or less continuous. [laughter] And so the story was., there was this monastery and there was the main teacher in the monastery. And they have, like many monasteries, I think have... kind of *cops*... you know. People who watch to make sure that things are not stolen... that things happen in certain ways or rituals are done in a certain way. And so there was this one guy, who was kind of a troublemaker. And so the cop... I can't remember what they call this guy... has a name. I don't think he was quite that bad, but yeah... Dub Dub is good enough. A thug basically... a monastery thug to keep people in line. And so he kept bringing this boy in to the to the head monastic person... and complaining. Saying, you really should get rid of this person who's like... he's so much trouble. And the teacher would say, "Oh. I don't know. I think he has some latent goodness there. It'll come around... somehow." And so he just kept repeating this. And then one day the Dub Dub... [laughter] brings this guy in and he says, "Now we caught him red handed *stealing* from the shrine." Like the worst offense in the monastery, stealing food from the shrine. And so he says "Now you have no choice... but to kick him out." That was the prescribed penalty. But the old monk looks at the boy and he looks at the guy and he says, "Yeah." He says, "But look at this guy... look at his Buddha nature shining. It's so good! Like, how could you imagine not *having* him in the monastery?" [laughter]

[01:09:15] Like, the whole thing just kind of turned around in that thing. And I think it's a great example... of how we go. We like... propose things... we experience things... we try to change them... sometimes we *do* change them. And what we're *missing* in all of that... is the show. You go to the movie. You know, it's empty. It's just a light show. You... along with your brain and your habitual tendencies in your eyes... you put together a whole storyline... on the basis of a light show, flickering lights. And we grieve and we laugh and we cry. We do all of these things. There's nothing there. [laughter] And we *know* there is nothing there. That's the thing. If it really was going on, we couldn't say this. But we know... when we go and the movie makes us cry, we *know* there's nothing there. So why are we crying? In a way we all *know* why we're crying. But... *really*... the question that's more interesting is... why? What *is* that?

[01:10:43] Kalu Rinpoche once said... I was surprised that the old monk actually had this insight. He said, "It's so interesting! People in the West... pay money to be terrified." [laughter] So who's going to deny it? Somebody once asked him, "Is there any value in going to a movie?" Because generally, he didn't have any use for frivolous activity. He was pretty strict. And he said,

"*Absolutely...* there is value in going to a movie." Precisely *because* you can be *terrified* in the movie. You can feel *sad* in the movie. You're gonna have *all* of these emotions." And when we're talking about... putting my awareness on this *leaf*... and I lose the leaf and I forget where my mind was... I don't go home and cry. I don't beat myself up. I don't jump off a bridge. It's like, oh well, so what. We actually *need* to feel like... this is *really* important! This is really important. The fact that... I was angry five minutes ago and now I cannot find it. ... That leaves me feeling depressed. Not because I'm not angry, but like, what role do I play... in having that anger? And where did it go? How do I find out how to *do* that?

[01:12:42] It's a *really* big deal. In the context of our spiritual growth... it's absolutely critical! To know... where our experiences come from... what we do with them... how we work with them. How we fundamentally *use* each other... in negative ways and positive ways... in order to discover these things. This is like, critical. So every one of these things... are easy to do. The leaf is a really low energy. You know, you want to climb Mount Everest... you don't get to the top of Mount Everest... holding a leaf! You're risking your life. And if you don't *know* you're risking your life, you probably will lose your life. So it's very tricky... to do that. We will not attain realization... as long as we think that it's just a hobby. But that's where you start. You walk into the Hobby Room and... you find out some things and then you want to do it. We need to know where we are... and to work it from there. We *really* need to do that. Otherwise, we'll lose it. We'll lose it.

[01:13:57] And that's where the emotional stuff comes in. Emotions are high energy, at least potentially... high energy. Therefore, when you're working with high energy, it's kind of like you're working with radioactive material. You have to treat it... with a certain amount of respect. So you treat your emotion with a certain amount of respect. This is my body. I'm glad I have this body. I'm having an emotional reaction. My body is hot and sweaty. It's shaking, all sorts of things. I'm afraid. I'm worried I'm not going to get what I want. I am going to get what I don't want. There are all these things going on. And there's a certain way in which if we have the experience, we can say to ourselves, "Now I got it where I need it." Like somebody who builds iron bridges. They have to learn how to build *big* fires... and melt a lot of things. And that's very dangerous. And they have to know how to *handle* the dangerous material... so that they don't burn themselves, but it melts and it flows into the place where they can make chains and all sorts of things to hold these bridges up. We are fundamentally doing that sort of thing... from a mental perspective. And that's why... it's worth using high charged emotions because it has the heat.

[01:15:26] My friend Ken McLeod, who I just mentioned, his take on it is... if you don't use your high charged emotions, you will not cross the barrier. You can't do it. And fortunately, you don't need to artificially do it... they just come. [laughter] But there is some positive things there. Normally, if somebody makes you really mad... you feel mad at them. And you're carried away by your anger. But if you're used to taking that energy, you feel like you just were given a gift. ... That's night and day in this world.

[01:16:11] So just knowing that potential is there... should be extraordinary. Just *knowing* it's there. I don't need to be angry at the person who offends me. I don't need to feel offended. But if I feel offended even better! It's not so good if I hit them or I do something... I hurt somebody else. But if I can feel *offended*... I have an energy that I can work with that you can't just summon up. It has to come to you... by virtue of a gift. This is why we often say, if you have a guru... who you really appreciate and have some devotion to... no matter *what* experience comes to you... you view it as a gift from that guru. Even it came from somebody you'd never

seen before. You don't question the intention. It came from the guru. Because... that's where the power is. You want to do this thing... you can't run your car up the hill without gas in the tank. So someone brings you the can of gas... you feel grateful. They don't know who gave it to you. You don't care. So you just give credit always... to the person where you learn these things from. That also keeps the lineage... pumped up.

student 8 [01:18:03] Well, I originally had one question and then listening to you talk... I came up with another question. The original question was... when I was meditating... I have a terrible stiffness and rigidity in my neck that drives me crazy. So I'm watching it and feeling it. And then I'm looking for the aversion and anger and fighting it. And it's not there. I'm just watching it. I'm not experiencing what I usually experience, which is fighting it and hating it.

LMC [01:18:38] And when did this happen?

student 8 [01:18:40] This morning... during the meditation. I was just... with it. And no... negative energy like it usually happens.

LMC [01:18:51] That's too bad. [laughter]

student 8 [01:18:56] Well, it'll come back. I know.

LMC [01:19:00] Yeah, it's kind of the room that we're currently in... and I don't mean this physical room, but kind of like the conversation we're having... is really, you could say, about... learning how to work with every situation that arises... in a way which results in... positive progress on the path. So these experiences will occur. Of intense feelings and then they disappear. Sometimes an intense feeling and you actually see... kind of... *experience* the union of emptiness and appearance. But you will not be able to recreate it. It may happen. The *intention* to do it cannot be there. I think that's... pretty much universally agreed.

student 8 [01:20:00] The intention for what?

LMC [01:20:01] The intention to have that experience cannot be... you can't push it from that side. You do the practices... you do the things... and then things happen. It's like a cake in the oven. You know, you close the door, everything's put together right. The only way that it could go wrong now is... you look. [laughs] So I think, a lot of what the practice is at a certain point. So in the beginning, the intellect is of critical importance. You have to be able to read. That's the intellect. You have to be able to know what the words mean. That's the intellect. You have to be able to know what it means... to look at something... to see something without looking... like seeing is passive and looking is active. You have to know the difference between things like that. After that, it's a matter of... *progressing* naturally along the path. You can't make it go faster.

student 8 [01:21:15] Well, actually, I'm thinking the experience was pleasant. That I wasn't fighting it. I was just with it. It was... I didn't realize that till now that it was really quite pleasant.

LMC [01:21:24] Yeah, well... it's a critical skill. Right? The ability to recognize for example, for whatever reason... you're emotionally sinking. And... to recognize it as something which is a passing experience, and therefore... you can just kind of relax. Not kind of relax, *relax*... completely. And in a very short time there'll be another experience which probably won't... no, which *certainly* will not be the one you were just having. ... We're trying to push ourselves here.

So, many of the things we're talking about... I would say *all* the things we're talking about... someone will understand... and have those experiences. Others will *not* necessarily understand... a particular conversation or piece, but the experiences from other sides will occur. ... It's a matter of just persevering.

student 8 [01:22:42] I have a second question that comes from something you said this morning about... don't end your meditation with... I can't remember what. With something negative or ... does anyone remember? Oh, don't end distracted-

LMC [01:23:10] That's the classic. I So what's the question with that?

student 8 [01:23:33] Well, I'm not sure what the question is. A long time ago, years ago, you did a teaching that it was important to end with awareness when you're ending and not when you're all spaced out. So I wondered if what you said this morning was the same thing, but with different words.

LMC [01:23:53] Yeah, I think so. Yeah! You definitely want to end your meditation... intentionally. That's the *key* point. And generally... especially as beginners, which we all are... we want to end the meditation when it's not going well. ... So that's not so good. Because then... your mind sort of says, "Aha! I see what to do." So we need to actually have the ability to... not stop... at the wrong place. So we want to end at a place where... in this case let's say, the mind is resting on the object of its attention, that it's *supposed* to have... you *intended* to have... and things are not going so well. You're distracted. You're remembering all sorts of things you're supposed to do that you forgot to do and... you're in kind of turmoil. And so you think... I got to go to work. I'm going to be late. So what do you do? What you *don't* do is... stop in the middle of that distraction and call that the end of the meditation. First... you *intentionally* bring your mind back to the meditation. Rest your awareness on the object... two or three seconds... *anything*... and then end the meditation from that place. And don't forget... even if you don't do a recitation... which is really only a support, you *must* dedicate the *value* of that session... to all beings. Critical piece. Otherwise, inadvertently... when you're not looking, it will grab it and take credit for it. Your mind.

student 9 [01:26:11] I had a question. If we experience a strong aversion to working with strong negative emotions, why couldn't we work with strong positive emotions? Because it seems to me it's the same mechanism. And then when we get confidence that there's nothing there... then we can move on to negative emotions.

LMC [01:26:37] Fine.

student 9 [01:26:37] I mean we do that in our equanimity practice... and in our loving kindness practice. We work with people we *like* before we work with people we *hate*.

LMC [01:26:49] Who does that?! [laughter]

student 9 [01:26:52] No!?!

LMC [01:26:57] Yeah. Yeah... it doesn't have to be negative emotions. But if we're gonna present... the whole range, you gotta put negative emotions in. You gotta put weak emotions in at the other end... all of those things. So that, I think especially... because we don't live in a monastic environment. And this is not an insignificant fact... in terms of its *effect* on us. We are,

in the West... more often by ourselves meditating... than with large groups in a monastic environment. Such that, the monastic environment, large groups situation, is more an.. oddity. Almost like going to Disneyland in a certain way. It's not the same. It's *very* hard to maintain the meditation... when you've got 200 monks and they're all chanting and you're not able to follow the language. You're not able to read it and all. Meditation is *very* difficult... and deeply compromised, I would say for most people. But when you're at home... then we need to have the tools. Now, best case scenario... for *me*, who I am and how *my* mind *seems* to function... what's the practice that I should do? And experiment... and work with it. There is no penalty for that. You can straighten it out later.

[01:28:31] So we've covered a lot of material... and if certain people knew what we had covered today, I can assure you I'd be in front of a firing squad tomorrow morning. [laughter] I may be anyway. It's not the normal *approach*... by a long shot. So I've dragged you into my own experiment. ... I hope that it bears some fruit. And then we can cover more of it at another time. Tomorrow... or something.

LMC [01:30:16] When we finish doing anything that we overtly think was good, whether it was done well or not... it's worthwhile dedicating it. So we'll dedicate the merit of this conversation now.

sangha [01:30:27] *dedicating the merit*