

2018_01_07_1_Shamatha_LMC.mp4

*reason to wish practice benefits self as well as others, practice recognizing and working with our discomforts, **Carrying Practice:** train by resting in short sessions on physical sensations, aspire to recognize nature of mind, the need for and the learning how to relax which includes view of fresh, short sessions are key to success*

LMC [00:07:10] So welcome all of you to the first All Day Sit, on the first Sunday of January in this new year. It's always good to think that... any given day for any reason is a special day. Here we are alive still... *miraculously*... in some cases. There's always some *seed*... that we can plant in our mindstream... that, with very little effort... will be *nourished* and evolve into something... profoundly good. So to think of the first Sunday in January... as a day in the year... when we would like to *launch*... our understanding and experience... of our meditation practice. Just to hold that wish and that aspiration... is an excellent start all by itself.

[00:09:34] For most of us... and I would include myself... our interest... in the Dharma and the practices... are important to us because... we personally *benefit* from them. ... And while we also hold the aspiration that we will... be beneficiaries of our practice... and benefactors... for all other beings... if we ourselves do not benefit, we will not continue. That's just a human fact! We *must* benefit. And while we hold the aspiration to benefit and the hope to benefit... there is no contradiction in also holding the view... that if we *do* benefit... even effortlessly, we're likely to bring benefit to others. Especially those with whom we have some close relationship. Having held this wish for a long time, since we were just a few months old... not knowing that we were holding that wish, but nonetheless... from time to time, trying to escape... the pain of existence.

[00:12:01] Because the wish is important... to benefit ourselves and others... and our wish to be able to accomplish these things... requires a certain amount of effort on our own part. And the first piece is just the willingness to acknowledge... that we *have* some level of suffering and pain, physical and mental. And we'd like to make a *big deal* out of it. But we look around and realize that... everyone has that... discomfort. This discomfort in some of the earlier traditions, the phrase was coined the *dukkha*. A word which is often translated as... suffering and pain. Not a very good... translation, I think. Most of us, on any given day, I think, could say... I have no suffering today. I have no pain today. But still, technically and correctly, there is still *dukkha*. Still, the... discomfort... the uncertainty. Whether the pain in the back of my throat might be cancer. The argument that I had with my friend may end that relationship. Or I could catch the flu this month and not be able to do something I want to do. These things just... constantly bubble up.

[00:14:47] So, of course, the practice of the Dharma would be a kind of useless endeavor... if there was no... *means* to work with this subtle level of discomfort. So we start our practice by... putting our attention on this suffering... the discomfort. All the little ways that discomfort arises... and in truth, when we look close, all the little ways that we *nurture* that suffering. Not intentionally, but... inadvertently. We judge ourselves... and suffer the consequences. Whether we judge ourselves... positively or negatively doesn't actually make any difference. It's the same. We still feel discomfort from it. If we judge ourselves positively, then we judge ourselves later for not having lived up to that. If we judge ourselves negatively, we're not actually recognizing... the talents, the kindness, the abilities, hidden or not, that each of us have. So this underlying... kind of underground stream of suffering... doesn't refer just to abject physical and

terrible mental suffering. It compromises... our ability as human beings... and as practitioners of the Dharma.

[00:17:00] So it's good in the beginning to start by just recognizing... that suffering. And giving rise in our mindstream to the understanding that... this actually is what the Dharma is about. To nurture ourselves in the direction of being whole. We are already whole. Nurture ourselves in the direction of being complete. We are already complete. So the issue isn't really whether we're good or bad or complete or incomplete. It's about whether we recognize those things. Every time we sit down... for our meditation... though we certainly don't need to limit it to that... it's *always* a good time... to work on *this* point.

[00:18:30] For a long time, in the beginning especially, we need to recognize when we're having... that suffering. More and more subtle levels, we could say, why would I try to recognize subtle levels of suffering? The gross ones are bad enough. So we have to come to a place of feeling happy, satisfied... and recognizing our states of mind, states of our bodies... and honoring those things. When we honor them in ourselves, we at *least* give rise to the potential... to honor them in others. And therein lies... the real key. If we can honor the value, the goodness, the kindness, the generosity, all of the things that we can imagine for any given individual... then as we all know, we feel happy in that moment. And there is a discovery there that we make, that is important to recognize. *We each* contain... this kernel of enlightenment that we talk about. The kernel of the ability to recognize... the nature of our own mind. All the struggles. All the kindnesses. Positive physical and mental feelings as well as those that are uncomfortable. Recognizing these things just as they are... is the very profound foundation... of the Dharma. And all of our practices are focused on that.

[00:20:46] So we start then by turning our minds rather than refuge in our judgments, refuge in our opinions, refuge in our... whatever worldly activity we would like to accomplish today or tomorrow or next year... we turn our minds to... giving rise to the *wish* to recognize the nature of mind itself. Which is the foundation, that recognition of complete enlightenment. Unbounded... loving kindness. Unbounded compassion. Unbounded joy in all the goodness of all sentient beings... individually and collectively. And unbounded equanimity... that there is not a single being, no matter how much we dislike them, not a single one who does not contain the *seeds*... of all of this goodness.

[00:22:06] So our refuge then is really... in the Buddha. Not really the person who walked around twenty-five hundred years ago, but the teachings and refuge... in that ineffable... nature of mind itself. ... So thinking carefully as we read the Refuge Prayer and the Bodhicitta Prayer, which is the wish to attain enlightenment *in order* that we might... *be able* to accomplish the benefit of others. Clearly, we're not going to be able to accomplish the benefit of others *before* we have accomplished our own benefit. So we will recite the Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer together three times.

sangha [00:23:26] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:25:32] Last Sunday, on the New Year's Retreat, we focused... on the practice of calm abiding. Which one could legitimately say is the foundation... of all meditation practices. The ability to rest our awareness... on something. ... Our breath. ... Some inanimate external object. ... The itch on the end of your nose. ... But in an effort to go a little deeper... than that practice... in it's kind of pure form... we need a few... supports.

[00:27:27] So first of all... we need to relax. Mostly we have... perhaps a kind of *common sense* understanding of relax. ... But often that common sense understanding is more an aspiration... than an actual experience. So we could add... *we need to relax*... in order to familiarize ourselves with ourselves. Kind of odd proposition, isn't it? Familiarize ourselves with ourselves. Don't you just want to say... duhh. Of course! So the first thing we need to discover... is that it's actually not easy to relax. It's much easier to do what we do *all* the time. Talk to ourselves about ourselves. Talk to ourselves about others. Think about what others are talking about to themselves, about me. And so on. And then, since our aspiration was to relax... we call *that* relaxation. ... And then we ask, where do I learn to meditate?

[00:30:03] Most of us are familiar with the state of relaxation of the body. And we need, in addition to that, a relaxation of the mind. Before we can talk about the nature of the mind... before we can talk about... the *benefits*... of resting our awareness on the mind or resting our awareness on experience... as we did last week. We have to first... put our energy... and by that, I don't mean effort, I mean energy... a willingness and intention... in the direction of... discovering the *meaning* of relaxation. ... And as we did last week, we also... talked about how difficult it is... to relax the mind for any significant period of time. So this morning... I thought maybe we could touch on that again... and go a little further.

[00:32:18] If I say, while you're sitting still... which is kind of the first thing, can you sit still? If you *can't* sit still, then we have to start there. Because there is no use starting where we aren't. You'd like to walk to Portland. You have to start from where you're sitting. ... If you're already walking to Portland, then... half of it's done. We start then by, just for a *brief* moment, recognize any... physical sensation. ... And bring your awareness to that physical sensation. ... Now, the idea here... *is* to be able to rest your awareness on that sensation... for as looong as that sensation continues. ... But most likely... you will not be able to do that.

[00:34:14] So like so many things in our lives, we want to learn something... we begin by doing... what is *really* easy. So this is what's really easy. ... If you have a sensation in your leg, your arm, your nose, top of your head... anywhere, any sensation. If you bring your awareness to that sensation... and for just two or three seconds... you have *only* the awareness of that sensation. ... In *retrospect*, looking back at it, you can see. You put the mind, you put your awareness in a place... and rested there... for just a few moments. ... That's all. Then you *literally* acknowledge... that's the end of that session. ... But... you're still here! There's still time! So we'll do another session. Could be the same sensation. ... If you say, right. I have to say, wrong. There is no such *thing* as the same sensation. So you need to add this into your meditation. If you just place your awareness... on a sensation... that's fine. But if you return and say to yourself, or imagine, or have the sense that... putting your mind back on that *same* sensation... it's absolutely no validity in that. So you have to hold what we call a view. A *view*! Like a view out the window. Except this is a... view to the inside.

[00:37:26] And the view is... not an issue of truth... not an issue of debate. We don't *care* about the truth in this particular place. We want to... accomplish... a step in the direction of recognizing the nature of our own mind. So one of the ways we do that is... we say to ourselves, "There is no such thing... as having the same experience twice. It's never happened. It never will happen. So when we finish that short, little meditation... then we bring ourselves forward and we place our mind, our awareness... on another sensation. And when you do that, you have the view... it's *another* sensation. Even if it feels like the *itch* is continuous. It is not. So you look through the lens... of the view... that every time I bring my awareness to place it on... a sensation or an

external object or anything else... it's *never* the same thing that I placed my awareness on previously. It is always fresh. Always new.

[00:39:25] And new has... a characteristic that we are all familiar with. It is unpredictable. New *by nature*... is unpredictable. Have you noticed that, to a significant degree... we do not *like* the unpredictable. And we help ourselves... you have to put the help in quotes... we 'help' ourselves when we place our awareness on the same sensation... two times in a row when actually it's not the same sensation. We *think* we're helping ourselves. But if we look closely, we can see... there is only a bare semblance... between the previous sensation and this new one.

[00:40:38] So we are doing two things. One is we are learning to relax our awareness... on a sensation. We are also learning, without trying... to relax our awareness... in difficult situations, contentious situations, combative situations, pleasant situations. So we gradually train ourselves... to be just a little surprised... every time we place our awareness... on our *own* experience. Experience of our bodies. Experience of our... connections with others. Experience of our apparent *dis*-connections with others. ... These are simple... basic levels of the fruit... of engaging in the meditation practice... without expectations. Open to whatever arises. As we do that... notice! Just notice your body. Relaxed. Perhaps even comfortable. ... You're like someone who goes fishing. But you are one of those people... who actually is not interested in catching fish. You just want an excuse to sit in the boat, float around in the lake. ... That's meditation. ... You are fishing for experience. Your own experience. ... You will watch it rise. You will watch it dissolve and vanish.

[00:43:31] Now, I need to remind you of the key that we already mentioned. You *must* engage in this process... in short sessions. At least begin that way. ... Sessions can be... three or four seconds. Because one thing's for sure. You *can*... rest your awareness on a sensation or an experience for three or four seconds *successfully* over and over again.

[00:44:27] If you are used to criticizing yourself... then it's simple. It's just another experience. "I don't believe I'm *worthy* of resting my awareness on the sensation." So then, since you're unworthy... rest your awareness for two seconds. Everybody's worthy of two seconds. Set an upper limit. Ten seconds, absolute maximum. Do not exceed it or you'll *always* be seeing your failure in the rearview mirror. Do not do that. ... But three or four seconds... there isn't anyone who can't do it. And when you do it... and you see that you've done it, then you just abandon... the whole process and relax. As if... you've actually completely forgotten why you came here this morning. Just utterly relax. And then... when it feels appropriate... do it again. Any sensation. Any experience. So simple. So I think that's enough. Let's take... a little time up until our first break. On your own, do your best.

[00:46:28] *period of meditation*

[00:55:03] Now, as we bring our session to a close... in the same way that the way we begin and the way we progress through this session is important... the ending is, in a sense, more important. How you end... is important. There is a natural inclination that we have... to end our sessions when we are distracted. "Well, I ruined the session anyway. I may as well finish." That is a mistake. We establish a mental pattern. Through a kind of... *not so good* mind training. A mental pattern that leads us... to become distracted, naturally, as we get closer to the end of the session. And we come more and more to think that that's a reasonable... approach to ending the session. It's not. ... What we want... is to end the session at its very *best*. Kind of like if you are an artist... you work hard to paint something. You don't finish it... when you have messed up part

of it. You fix it. You finish when everything looks perfect. In the same way when our meditation is at its very best, and if it's not going well, then start it *fresh* for a moment. And when it's at its very best, gently... let go of it. Like you're... placing a piece of fine crystal on a table. Gently let go of the meditation. Not abruptly. Just carefully... so that the mind settles and the body relaxes. ... And then, from *that* place we recite together the Dedication Prayer.

sangha [00:58:08] *dedicating the merit*