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*resting non-conceptually on experience to develop stability, need to discover what is and isn't relaxation, **Carrying Practice**: train with experience of illness, practicing with easier things to learn to remain present with challenging experiences*

[00:04:37] Generally speaking... can you hear? [chuckles] Of the other 'generally speaking' is that the practice of calm abiding or zhinay, as it's called in Tibet... has as its kind of... *clear* function... is stability. But it's rare for anyone to ask... what stability is. Since we have... a pretty good understanding of the word stability... pretty easy to apply it to all sorts of circumstances. But our usual... understanding of the word stability... may not be completely apropos... in the context that we're looking at right now. If we're talking about the ability to... rest with an undistracted mind... resting... with *complete* clarity upon an experience... for an hour... a week! What's the limit? If that's our... measure of stability, most of us are... in trouble. ... Even more than that, the entire Dharma is in trouble. Since so few of us might be able to... rest in that state. Which ought, by definition, would be effortless.

[00:06:59] So we need to *refine* what our understanding of stability is. There are great benefits, it is said... I have heard, by virtue of being able to *rest* in a state of calm abiding... for long periods of time. Hours, days, even... longer than that. But those benefits do *not* accrue... or occur... when we want them. So *wanting* those benefits... apparently, pretty much, neutralizes the potential benefit. The want... pollutes... the benefit. And so, you're left... with nothing. It's commonly said, that working in the direction of enlightenment... is positive. *Wanting* enlightenment can be a problem.

[00:08:27] First of all, it's confused. Enlightenment... is an experience, clearly. Not a conceptual proposition. So how do you answer the question, "Why do you want enlightenment?" It's difficult to answer the question without moving into a conceptual mode. And you want to understand it... because we think that we'll get it more easily if we understand it conceptually. So pretty much it's been my experience, listening to various teachers over 30 years that... *wanting... any* meditation state is a problem. What's *important* is to become good at the process. And then you see the result of it. And you just continue to do it. It's like almost everything else that we do in our lives. ... But since the... deeper stages of meditation are not accessible *at all* to the intellect... that seems to be our biggest obstacle... we *demand* to understand it conceptually, somehow. And I don't mean that we really demand it in a certain way, but it's like, if I can't have a conceptual understanding of it, I feel like I have *no* understanding of it.

[00:10:28] We all have the experience, *completely* non-conceptually, of walking. We get up. We move around. There was a time when we got up and fell down. Got up and fell down. Got up and fell down. And that was an experience too! Utterly non-conceptual, we might say. And little by little we got up, took two steps, fell down, got up, took two steps, fell down and little by little, completely non-conceptually... we stood up. We walked. We jumped. We ran. We did all the things that we're used to doing. All of that can be described... conceptually, anatomically, in myriad ways. None of those conceptual *add-ons*... are of any benefit at all... to getting up and walking.

[00:11:30] This is actually *not* a specious... comparison. It is actually the same exact case with our meditation. We need to understand the principal pieces of it... and engage in our practice with that, like we're learning to walk. And we will get the result in the same manner that we got

the result of getting up, falling down, getting up, falling down. And *far* beyond that, we get a *lot* more on top of that. We *have* to learn to relax... or we won't be able to do it. Just like you have to be willing to stand up and fall down or you won't learn to walk. We don't need to stand up and fall down here, but we *need* to... discover what is relaxation and what is not. What are the 'friends' of relaxation and what are the 'enemies' of relaxation? Not as people, but as just... *habits* that we have.

[00:12:39] Relaxation... occurs in at least three different ways. There is a physical relaxation, which we're all familiar with. We wake up in the morning. We don't want to be awake. We relax a little more and we go back to sleep. [laughter] We want to relax... without going to sleep. And furthermore, we want to not *just* relax, we want to relax in a way that we are more *awake* than we are... when we're not relaxing. When our mind is *busy* doing things. We would like to just be *clear* and completely relaxed... with no agenda whatsoever. That piece is a problem. We are... *agenda* freaks. It's almost impossible for us to not have a goal. So, we give ourselves a goal. Because otherwise we can't eat. So we give ourselves a goal... to *not do* certain things.

[00:14:11] So we could state it something like this. If I'm a scientist and I work in the laboratory... and I'm looking at some kind of disease or some other thing through the microscope. And I'm trying to see something... that I've never seen before. I look through that little microscope and I look and I see and I explore and I move the slides around and I... do that sort of thing. ... A sense of... anxiety will not help. Tenseness, of any kind, will not help. I need to relax. Just look in there and see it. When I was younger... I used to go camping in the desert with friends who were all rock hounds. And they would go around and they would pick up rocks and they would look at them and they'd say, "Oh, look what I found." We weren't looking for gold. We weren't looking for anything that had economic value. It was some other thing which, frankly, I didn't really understand. [laughter] But that they would find nice rocks, you know, and they would distinguish between agate and quartz and all these different things, which I also didn't understand, or why anybody would want to. But they wanted to. So, this is kind of like *us*... as meditators. Nobody who doesn't do it, understands why you would do it. [laughter] In fact, more likely, they'll wonder what's wrong with you. [more laughter] You don't talk enough. You don't move around enough. You sit way too long to remain alive. And so... have lots of strange questions. Which are best answered by strange answers.

[00:16:31] We can ask ourselves those questions and ponder them... in a way which is actually useful. Why am I doing this? Why would I do this? What am I getting from it? And we can answer those questions in a number of ways, which will not be exhaustive. That is to say, there will be many things left to look at. But... there are some things which are *exceedingly* helpful. For example, let's say you have an illness. And you have a fever. And you know you have a fever because... you're hot. You don't feel good. If you can pick, out of that... array of experiences that you're having, that you don't normally have when you are, quote, 'feeling good'... then, you can use *all* of those experiences as objects of your meditation. You have to be a little strange. Because mostly, when you're not feeling well, you have to groan a lot... and make noises and ask for things and demand things and all. If you don't do those things, there's something wrong. Fact, you might get hospitalized... for an unknown defect of some kind. [laughter]

[00:18:16] But as long as you don't talk to anybody, nobody knows that you might put your awareness on the sensation of heat, which is *utterly* non-conceptual. *Exactly* what we want. We want an experience which is *difficult* to conceptualize. About the only thing you can do is say, it's hot. It's cold. It hurts. It's this. It's that. And especially if it's something that... 99.9% of the time

you recover from anyway. And you know that. So, it's just an array of sensations... not so pleasant. But *if* you put your awareness on those not so pleasant things, you will have a number of experiences... that, *of course*, you don't normally have... because you're not normally sick. And then you discover... oh, this is interesting. I can actually put my awareness on *this* just like I can on the itch on the end of my nose and just watch it come and go. And then someone will say, well, why are you not groaning? You'll be back in that place again. That *also* is interesting. Like, what is different when you *do not* engage in a dialog with yourself about something which does not require a dialog? Just to be present with the sensation. But not *just* present, which you're sort of forced to do anyway, lying on your back, but present in the sense of... seeing it, your awareness on the feeling. It *is* the *object*... of your awareness. So your awareness just rests there on the sensation. Like it would on any other sensation. There are discoveries to be made in that process.

[00:20:28] The first thing again is... relaxation. Can you relax when you're sick? Of course. Are you likely to relax? No. You're likely to struggle with it. Just like everything else. I had a fight today with so and so. You're struggling with that. Can you relax with it? I wish I could. It just goes like that. There is nothing in our experience that we are barred from... noticing. Nothing in our experience that we cannot just relax with and be present with. And notice! And put our awareness on. Not a single... thing. And in the process of doing that, there are discoveries that can be made, that are naturally made, that are almost unavoidably made, that... again, you cannot penetrate... with the intellect. So then you make that discovery. Oh, there actually are *things* that cannot *be* penetrated with the intellect, where the intellect is of no value. In fact, if you use the intellect for it... it's kind of like the proverbial thing... using a sharp knife, the sharp edge of the blade to hammer nails. Not so good. So, in the same way, our meditation brings us into... touch with insights... into our experiences... which change the way our meditation works with those things, which changes our relationship with *all* of our experience. And just to push it out to the edge... it shouldn't be too difficult to imagine... this a very useful process at the time of dying. Some of us *will* die.

[00:22:33] In my experience, watching other people die... from time to time... most people do not like it. Some... actually... do. ... So it's an interesting question. How does one become so prepared... for *any* experience which arises... that even... pending near death... becomes worthwhile. So, not proposing that today, but... I think it's good to know we're starting with very, kind of... non-challenging experiences when we're looking at experiences in the body and itches and other kinds of things. But the intention is to move forward into more challenging areas... that provoke us... and challenge the limits of our ability to just remain present with certain things. So let's continue with the meditation... for a bit. The best you can.

**sangha** [00:24:18] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:26:21] Short sessions. Three to 10 seconds. Admit... that you have relaxed for a short time. And that you have witnessed... the mind being still on occasion. End the meditation, *utterly*... for a minute or two or three... and then engage in a short session again. Over and over like that.

[00:27:09] *period of meditation*

**sangha** [00:47:27] *dedicating the merit*