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*learning to place our awareness, confidence is critical, the moving mind and the still mind, learning to see what's standing in the way of our learning something else, looking dualistically at experience is a necessary step, reasons to practice with placing awareness on emotions, **Carrying Practice:** working with the 4 Immeasurables and view of unborn undying, recognizing still mind for even a moment is seed of Mahamudra, working with emotions and witnessing appearance dissolve into emptiness*

LMC [00:01:24] So we have scheduled up until around 3:00 for open discussion, conversation. So the ball's in your court. If you have one, throw it.

Student 1 [00:02:14] I was having difficulty with the... keeping my mind focused on the object of meditation. What I'd find was I would be fine for a couple seconds and then I would realize five minutes later I was somewhere else. So at that point, I wasn't real clear... like you bring it back to the original thing you are using for an object and then you let it go. Is that correct... when you stop your meditation?

LMC [00:03:01] Yeah. That's fine. We probably need to be clear that... in any text on shamatha and insight practice, that's, let's say, over 100 pages, you will find at least 100 different variations on this. So you need to take that into account and get clear about the principles of it. So one method is, as you just said, you're engaging in the practice and things are going okay. And then you suddenly realize that you're somewhere else, right. And so there's two options there. In the beginning... and I'm not entirely sure that that applies to you, frankly, but in the beginning... it's better to start over. It's better. Like you realize you're distracted... just go back. Your session was too long. So, just to take the extreme example, which is *not* irrelevant... you have a one second meditation. Like you place your awareness... on the object, or on your breath and it's just... like just like *that* [snapping his fingers]. And the idea is, did you see it? Was it clear? And most people will say, "Yeah, but it wasn't very long." Well, but the point was, could you *do* it, and know you did it! You put it there. That's number one. That's called placing... the mind or placing the awareness. Most people, who don't do kind of formal meditation, will *never* place their awareness. And so they'll go 20 years without the experience. Because you *must* place your awareness on the object of the meditation, whether it's loving kindness, whether it's a coin on the table, whether it's the experience of hatred, whatever it is, you must *place* the awareness there... and know what you're doing. You place it there. If you're distracted in the next one second, that doesn't change the first second.

[00:05:55] And you can do what you just mentioned also. So if you can... *routinely* place your awareness there and have a sense of... it was there for a second or two or three or *more*... then, I would say... the longer your awareness can be there, the more likely it is that you can *handle* bringing it back. Our problem often is... it just seems like... the learning curve for this should be really short and small. And what we all know is... that is totally not the case. It actually should take a *long* time to get familiar with this to where you actually feel *Aha!* when you got five seconds and you feel *Aha!* That's an appropriate response. It is not like, oh, it's only five seconds. You know, like tightrope walkers when they learn to walk, they don't start at the three-hundredth floor. They start like one foot off the ground, kind of. We have to think like that. And the fact that it's our *own* mind is what betrays us.

Student 1 [00:07:30] Okay, so say... I placed my mind on the object. My mind wanders. I'm aware that I wandered... could you also use that awareness to where you are at when you wander?

LMC [00:07:46] Yes.

Student 1 [00:07:46] Or is it better to just go back to the original?

LMC [00:07:52] So, thank you for pulling us into the subtleties. [laughter] But we have more than one thing going on there. So in the very beginning, it's important to keep reiterating what is *very* important. I have the leaf. I put the leaf. I rest my awareness on the leaf. If I'm distracted, it means I'm thinking about lunch. It means I'm... I'm gone. I come back to the leaf. In the beginning, I come back to the leaf over and over. I don't think, I wonder if I should put a flower or a penny or something on the leaf. The *leaf!* Just the idea that you're considering other things is a distraction. We have to get the *basics* in place... so that you can kind of branch out on it. Otherwise the branching out becomes just... an excuse kind of, for distraction, which then undermines our confidence. So if we can do two seconds consistently, we can get confident with that. But doing 10 seconds that never works doesn't breed confidence. We just get... I can't do this. I'm not going to do this anymore, which is where actually most people go... in the end.

[00:09:11] So yeah, you can... at the other end of things... just to say, because maybe it's inspiring to have the sense that... at the other end... there can be no... such thing as distraction. Whatever occurs in the mind... your mind is there. Almost like an observer, but not an observer in the sense of a dichotomy where there's an observer and the observed. You're just present with it. So thoughts arise and fall and various things happen. It's kind of like you're down at the sea and you're watching like terrific waves crashing on the rocks.... and the sound like an explosion, it's so loud and... you don't run from it and run towards it and all. You just can be there... and you hear all the sound. It's not a distraction. *It* becomes... the thing upon which the mind rests. And your mind, the more busy it is, it *can be* like that. But again, it's like a wild horse. Someone who knows how to break horses and train them... might be able to ride a real bucking bronco with ease. But most of us would fall off and break our backs! So it's really where are we with it and at what level are we gaining our confidence? The confidence is critical. *really* critical.

[00:10:49] Lama Tsang Tsing, on three-year retreat, would tell us about once every three or four months... that the single most important thing is confidence. Whatever you need to do to get it, do it! And of course, most of us were a bunch of cynics. So confidence wasn't our specialty. Or you could say... *faking* confidence was not our specialty. Like we were more easily in the place of I'm not confident... then that we were. That we *need* to be really confident, but it has to be the confidence of... I can put my awareness on that thing... and that thing moves around and... you know, more often than not... I can stay. I'm there with it for a while. Interestingly, unlike the bucking bronco... you have to be a professional. You have to be really good at it. You get on a nice *tame* horse first, right, you know, and work with that. So that's also what we need to do. We need to be on a nice, tame horse. And ultimately... your conflicted kleshas, all of the emotions... can be dealt with... by just placing your awareness there... and you have the experience of... yes, it's moving. But... it's okay.

Student 1 [00:12:21] Thank you.

LMC [00:12:31] We having fun yet?

Student 2 [00:12:42] Lama Michael? After having two days at the New Year Retreat and working with what you suggested about going deeper, using an experience and emotion instead of the leaf or a cup, I'm really glad you came back to more instructions on this today. On how to go deeper. Tips on going deeper. The question that had been building all week, you answered in your first intro... about like looking at an emotion or an experience and how it... changes. The next two-second or 20-second session will be different. But what I'm *still* wondering is... and there's a lot of 'if's' here... if there's awareness on that two or three minute break between these mini-sessions, if there's awareness, if there's non-distraction, even though we're not meditating... *if* there's awareness, it sure seems like meditating without an object. You know, can that be?

LMC [00:14:06] Can you say that again?

Student 2 [00:14:07] So say I place my mind on an experience, on the emotion that's happening... and I do that briefly. And then I take the two or three minutes off... and you say, 'don't meditate!' If there's awareness of just being present, not meditating, that sure seems like meditation without an object. ... That was the question. Is it?

LMC [00:14:47] Well, there's a little distinction to be made here that... you might want to just... work with a little bit and see what you see. But... it's almost always the case that... it's never one thing. Right? [laughs] And so you place your awareness... on your emotional experience and the next thing you know is your mind is ... resting on the color of the wood here. So which one is it? Well, it's both. So the truth is that... stability has multiple forms also. Which is why it's good to simplify this whole thing in the beginning. Stability has multiple forms also. The kind of stability that we *first* hear about... is the stability of... the mind resting on *some* object and usually we're not talking about our experience... because that's a deeper level. We're talking about something like, you know, an object or a little statue of the Buddha in front of us. That sort of thing. These things do not evoke... big emotional reactions, for example.

[00:16:14] But so, we have the experience then of putting the mind on the statue of the Buddha. And then because we had an argument with somebody earlier... pretty soon we're distracted by that. But maybe this time... we have the experience that it is just... it's recalling. We're having this experience from that encounter and we're not doing anything with it. So it may feel like it's... mind resting on no object. But I would say... probably not quite... that. But of course, you're the only one who can really measure that. But commonly... placing the awareness on *itself* is what we sometimes call it, placing the awareness on itself. So no object. Mind is never an object. Placing the awareness on itself is a very unstable meditation, but if you *can* experience stability in it, it really leads to... important experiences.

[00:17:34] I would say the single most important things... we have to, it's good to remind ourselves over and over, what is important here? If I'm not doing something right, which, which piece is it exactly? You can do *everything* right all day long and still go home wondering what the hell happened. And why didn't I have this experience? Well, you can talk to yourself endlessly about it. But... you definitely, let's say at the far end, you could say that... placing your awareness on a conflicted emotional state... and being stable enough to have your awareness sit there for, let's say, a *whole* minute and you're not distracted. And you're really good at seeing your distractions and you didn't see any distractions. You didn't experience that and you were just there. So maybe there were things kind of swirling around in your head somehow, but they did not impinge. Kind of like the waves on the beach crashing on the rocks. They're not crashing on *you*. So you're not concerned about them. It doesn't mean that you're *dead*. You experience

them. You hear them. So in the same way that happens in our meditation, sometimes. We can have a very kind of busy background somehow.

[00:18:57] The example I really prefer is... when you're walking in the deep woods, and especially if you've never been in *those* deep woods before. Sometimes... you hear wind in the trees and it sounds like water running. And you think, oh, there must be a river, a creek nearby. And sometimes, it *is* a river or a creek. And sometimes it's just wind in the trees. But both of them are totally appropriate objects upon which to rest your awareness. You don't actually *need*... to be concerned about the fact that you were fooled. The same is true sitting in here, you don't need to be concerned about having fooled yourself into thinking that something was still and it wasn't.

[00:19:49] So the classic description of this is at a certain point... you'll see this in teachings or in a book somewhere... the mind which is still, we call it the unmoving mind. And the mind that is not still we call it the moving mind. So, the mind, of course... it's one of those trick things, the mind does not move in the sense that we think of movement. Like maybe my mind was in my brain and then it went for lunch and it was gone. And during that time, I felt kind of blank... and then it came back... and then I felt busy. This is *not* how we look at these things. We look at them as... just simply... the moving mind and the still mind. We generally say... we have no control over that. Not any! We *think* we control it. But generally, the teaching is... we have no control over that mind. *Even*... if you've been practicing shamatha for 50 years... you've still got the situation of the mind moving and the mind still. And *you* are not behind the wheel. It's just... coasting down the hill. Yeah. Your job is to rest your awareness on the experience. Because *that's* how we make the discoveries. Because the mind... in its most pristine state... well, we call it the dharmakaya, right, the ultimate... that mind will... produce... experiences continuously. Like just... continuously!

[00:21:53] It's like when we sit somewhere and we're just thinking, like... thinking this and then that, this, that, just going back and forth. From a kind of advanced perspective... there's nothing wrong with that. It's kind of like, you know, when you open the window and well, you hear the wind blowing the leaves and the rains falling... there's nothing wrong with that. It's nice. We listen to it. Open the window more. It's the *same* thing. We can have this experience of... the mind just is the dharmakaya, is generating... we also call it the emptiness... it generates experiences. And these experiences we may like, we may dislike. But they *are* probably... most *great* teachers would agree, that's where you put the mind when it's moving. You put your mind... on that movement. The mind generates experiences which we could even say, oh, that's a table floating by in the river! There's a river there! Oh, that's nice. But we have to know there's no river there. This is just the mind moving.

Student 2 [00:23:11] So the way I heard that was...

LMC [00:23:17] Yeah. Yeah. [chuckling]

Student 2 [00:23:20] The mind's moving or the mind's still, or those terms used to describe the phenomena, the experience... and there's no control over it. The only thing is... what I *do* with it. Whether I get carried away... with the movement or I just notice it.

LMC [00:23:39] Yeah. Yeah. If you get hooked... then usually, the symptom of that is, that we're controlling it.

Student 2 [00:23:51] Because we had two days recently and another morning with repeated sessions with your talking about *extremely* short sessions and then take a couple minutes. And say, you know, make a deliberate stop to the short session. With the repetition... and then practicing it during the week *with* that repetition... there's a little more... it's like riding a bicycle. It wasn't quite as wobbly as usual. And so with all this repetition and your continued tips, and variations on it, has... brought a little more experience of that... when I said 'The short session was stopped. And this is a couple minute break.' there was a little more ability to just... watch.

LMC [00:24:59] Yeah

Student 2 [00:25:00] But, I think that's, um, because of all the repetitions in a row in the last week.

LMC [00:25:07] Yeah. Oh, yeah. It's, you know... you need to modulate it... from your own side. Kind of run your experiments, in a way. There's no hard-core rubric here for this. But... the idea is, that we're aware of the distinctions between the beginning, the middle and the end. So when you start the session, maybe you take a breath and just let it out. If you're just going do one breath, you just kind of like bring a breath in... put your awareness on it... and just feel it flow out. And *then*... rather than take another breath... just allow the mind to be aware of what *is*... in that moment. And then you realize... that's *it!* It's only a few seconds, but that's *it!* Then you can like relax a little bit... and try it again. And... after some time... some time, meaning minutes or hours or days, whatever it is... you'll be able to do... five breaths... ten breaths. It's just goes like that. But if we want to hurry, we actually lose ground. It's one of those things, just patiently move forward with it. This afternoon, I want us to look at... how it is that that practice benefits ourselves and others. I think that's important because we're inspired by our own benefit. But mysteriously, you might say... *far* more inspired by benefitting others. So, we'll do that this afternoon.

Student 2 [00:26:58] Thank you.

student 3 [00:27:07] I guess I'll say that I'm new. Although...

LMC [00:27:10] When were you not?

student 3 [00:27:12] Yeah, right. Right. [both laughing] Certainly new to this instruction, which is so... specific. I really appreciate it. I've been looking for a meditation teacher and I've stumbled into one. But...

LMC [00:27:29] You still what?

student 3 [00:27:30] I stumbled into one.

LMC [00:27:32] Oh, I see, did you hurt yourself. [laughter]

student 3 [00:27:35] Not yet.

LMC [00:27:38] You don't know yet.

student 3 [00:27:40] Yeah, probably... who knows? But I loved doing these short segments. And I even love even more of what you've said now. I've been meditating, you know, for about

two and a half years. But... not like this. And... I've never really used a physical object. And I guess what I'm hearing you say is that a physical object is helpful for people who are new to meditation... as opposed to the breath. I mean, I love what you just said about just taking a breath... exhale... and then just be... at that moment. That pause after.

LMC [00:28:26] Yeah. I think it can be that a physical object is useful. And I say it *can* be. That's not a tricky way of saying it *is*... and you should do that. But... I think in the process of learning the practice of zhinay, or shamatha, calm abiding... it's helpful to try a number of things. So you just kind of get the variations in the *flavor* of it. And you start to get a sense of... where the experiences are. Like one step beyond that place is where we start looking for, looking for the mind! Which is an odd thing to look for. It feels like you shouldn't have to *look* for the mind. I mean you *are* the mind. [laughs] And we look for it in terms of like... does it have a color? a shape? a location? Like where is it? Location we generally think... like it's in my head. But oddly, we can't find it there. If you look enough, you start to get a sense of, you know, I think this is an assumption I have. It doesn't look any more there than it is in another place. So little by little, then... over time... we tend to... if we are *allowed*... in the context of the teaching of it... I think we tend to come to a place where we feel like... this one is the most helpful for me at this time. Or *this* is it. And sometimes we're in a situation where the teaching and the whole situation really requires us to be in a certain mold. And for some, that's helpful. And for others, it's debilitating. So... I don't know if you had another question there?

student 3 [00:30:23] Well I guess, during the meditation sessions this morning... I was telling Sally that by the third one... I was distracted more... much, much more than during the first two. But you had us... meditate on an experience. And I was just using what I was feeling in my body. And, you know, where something came up as a little pain or a little tightness or whatever. And I found myself being with one for a while, and then... it would subside or I would get distracted and I would either come back to that same one, or I'd go find a new one. And I don't know if *that* made any sense or not. Whatever came up then. But anyway, I was playing around with it, I guess.

LMC [00:31:20] We are so accustomed to assign a meaning... to things. We don't think about it. I'm gonna assign meaning. It's just... we feel like we've witnessed the *inherent* meaning that's already there. And one of the things that you... could come to, which is considered important... is to not find any meaning. Or to find that the meaning that is there... you hid it there. You're the one who put it there. The issue here is this, it's kind of an interesting thing to ponder, aside from the more formal teaching... we say... whatever you believe, whether it's true or not... but you believe it... whether you're *aware* that the belief is intentional, or you just feel like you've *witnessed* the truth and that's there, whatever it is... it stands in the way of something else.

[00:32:30] Now, you might *like* to have it stand in the way of something else. That could be pleasant. It could be unpleasant. But, it definitely stands in the way of something else. And so sometimes... in order to make... cautiously using the word 'progress'... in order to make that progress, we have to let go of the thing that stands in the way. Which means that *first* we have to see what that thing is. So oftentimes, we can find that by virtue of the practice of calm abiding or something else, we can find kind of the lump in our throat, as it were. Oh. this is what's keeping me from speaking, I'd say. Sometimes it's physical. Sometimes it's something far more ephemeral.

[00:33:24] So... I think that it's helpful to simplify things *a lot*.. so that we can... feel like we know where we are. Instead of floating around in a big space somewhere, we don't really know. And

oftentimes that ends up like... that was an interesting sideshow, but I'm not sure that it's actually what we're doing. So, the idea that things stand in the way of us learning something else... is, I'll say from my own side... the most interesting and fascinating meditation... side effect... that I know of, personally. To see what stands in the way of something you are trying to learn about. And to have not seen it for some time and then to have it come into focus is... once it's in focus, it's not always easy to let go of... that doesn't get resolved by just finding it. But at least you know where the demon lives! So it gives you a direction to work on.

[00:34:43] But that's one of the things in the meditation is that we discover things... that actually are not helpful in the meditation. And sometimes people get totally... like thrown out. They decide that they can't meditate. It is too difficult. And so they're going to do something else for a while or forever. It should be, I think... as, as you can read in the writings of a really great ancient teachers, is that... the meditation, which is *always* including the exploration of what we are... not just as human beings, but as *just* beings, human or not... is the exploration, that is not only the most interesting exploration to make in this life, it's also the *only* one that carries enormous, unmeasurable value. Not only for ourselves, but for others too. ... Okay? More than enough for now. [laughs]

student 4 [00:36:20] You used the phrase a couple of times, which periodically you use, that... [laughter] I'm not criticizing, and I've heard I've heard other teachers use this phrase, too.

LMC [00:36:34] Oh, good. [laughter]

student 4 [00:36:37] But it struck me very curiously in the context of some meditation experience, which is... from your own side... or from my side, when you use that expression, which kind of makes me think, well... what's the other side? [laughter] But that seemed to be linked, it seemed to be connected to an explanation you were giving about how your job is to... put your awareness on the object of meditation, the flow of thoughts, whatever the instruction is. So... as I tried to think about that in the context of what I experience through meditation, it's like... what do you mean by 'you' when you say 'your job'? It seems as though there is a volitional aspect to it. What you are *intending* to put your awareness on, your intention on. But when one is... practicing and... when the shamatha can stabilize somewhat, and one is looking at the awareness itself... and can occasionally have an experience that awareness and experience... seem to be... inseparable. So that all there is... is the flow of experience. But when one examines, when one kind of tries to look behind that, you know, when you're looking at.. "So what is this? Where is this awareness? Where does it coming... you know, what is it? And I mean, we say, like from the Mahamudra Aspiration Prayer, it says. "Appearances which never existed in themselves have been confused as objects. Awareness because of ignorance has been confused as a self." So there is this awareness that is just experiencing this flow of experience. But when one tries to look and say... well, where is this experience? where is this mind?

LMC [00:39:30] Soon as you ask that question, you left the building.

student 4 [00:39:34] Well, so it's kind of like looking... is there something that is apart from the experience that's having that experience and you can't *find* anything... that's apart from that. You know, just like you say, you can't see the mind when one is looking for the mind. It soon becomes apparent that... what's doing the looking is what you're looking for.

LMC [00:40:08] Or one of those.

student 4 [00:40:11] Or one of those? So, when you say "from my side".

LMC [00:40:19] I never say that. [laughter]

student 4 [00:40:25] Well, if you say from your own side.

LMC [00:40:30] Yeah.

student 4 [00:40:32] Are we inherently... looking at experience dualistically. That I am separate from what I am experiencing.

LMC [00:40:53] Sure, absolutely But it's okay. It's a necessary step. So, if we don't embrace that step, then probably we won't get to the next place. But it is true, of course... if I say that the confusing thing is, what I'm looking for is probably the things that's looking and this is like, how do you resolve those two things? I think... from my perspective, I have to back out of that. It feels kind of like, I've made a turn onto a small dirt road into the forest and then... I can't find my way back out. And so... somehow, you've got to figure out how to get out of that cul-de-sac down there in forest.

[00:41:50] The trouble is also that, like we say, often... we're too smart. Not in a kind of ultimate sense, because there we could say we're too dumb. But we're too smart in the sense of we're so good at manipulating concepts... that we can fool ourselves over and over that somehow we found it. But even more... *debilitating*... is to discover that we're *not* fooled. And we can't stop doing the thing that fooled us, that we discovered. I discovered I'm fooled. I'm constantly, like... conceptualizing what it is that I'm doing. And since the pieces kind of fit together, it looks like I'm really close. And then, in time, I see I'm not really close. It's not really helpful. And... yet we can't quite give up the habit.

[00:42:50] So, that's why I think that a really good practice... that we have done almost none of... at the center... you know... of placing... our awareness on an emotion. Which is clearly... not a concept. We can recognize an emotional feeling is *not* a concept. And so we're placing our awareness now, which we normally use to generate conceptual material... we're placing our awareness on... *the feeling*. Not in order to fix it, not in order to increase it. Not in order to do anything. And when we say *look* at this, we also have to be careful, of course, because in that context, we normally think the word *look* is an *active* thing. Like... I'm looking for. That's different than just being *aware* of the feeling that's there. It has to really be just completely devoid of any agenda, in order for it to really work. And then you get this sense of... knowing what it's like... to *feel*... really something really deeply. [00:44:15] It actually works best if it's slightly painful, not too painful, but slightly painful because it's not inherently painful, so slightly painful. And then we can get this sense of... the emotion and the ability to put my awareness on it and just rest there is actually an enormous gift. Because now you get... you get the *energy* of the emotion looking *for* you. You don't have to look. It's right there. It's pulsating. So you rest your awareness on it. And you get something from that. We can talk about that, but that will open up another day.

student 4 [00:45:00] And you did recently advise me about doing that practice and suggested using The Four Immeasurables, which are sometimes... some teachers have referred to them... as emotions. To use The Four Immeasurables as that object.

LMC [00:45:21] Yes.

student 4 [00:45:22] Okay. Thanks.

LMC [00:45:27] Thank you.

student 5 [00:45:45] Since the Four Immeasurables were brought up... the original way I was taught... and maybe that's how it's taught in this tradition, is you repeat phrases. And eventually generate the *feeling* of loving kindness or compassion. Should I be aware of what the phrases I'm saying are to myself? Or... what were you telling [him] about being aware, placing your awareness on The Immeasurables? Because now I'm confused... which is nothing new.

LMC [00:46:30] Yeah, I was going to use The Immeasurables this afternoon, so maybe that's what's happened. The Immeasurables, in case anybody doesn't know what they are... they are four... and I think I'll use the word emotion here. They're normally referred to as The Four Immeasurables, and it's unusual but not completely unusual that somebody would refer to them as The Four Emotions. And they are loving kindness and compassion, and joy and equanimity.

[00:47:23] The loving kindness and compassion we all can relate to. It's kind of straightforward. That is to say, to make it simple... the loving kindness is the wish that others would have... the causes of happiness. And the compassion is the wish that others would be free of the cause of suffering. So you've got the cause of happiness, the cause of suffering. And you're wishing that others would be free of the causes of suffering and have the causes of happiness. The *joy*, the immeasurable joy, is the joy that we are meant to nurture in ourselves when we see the positive things that others do. So if people are being kind to each other, then we rejoice in that. And if they're not? But there is someone who is doing *something* that is kind... then we rejoice in that. Or if they're involved in some kind of compassionate activity. Any of those Four Immeasurables are worthy of putting our awareness on... as a kind of an object.

[00:48:44] And it's important to recognize that those Four Immeasurables are called *immeasurable*, not because our loving kindness or compassion is immeasurable, but because it's *directed* towards immeasurable beings. In other words, *all* sentient beings. So we don't hold out ...everyone but *this* person. Or every group but this group or every race but this race. It is like all the ways that we divide up the world, we just put those aside. It's immeasurable from the perspective of... in my compassion, I hold *all* sentient beings without exception. No exceptions.

[00:49:29] So one could ask the question, how does that benefit *me* as a practitioner if, like we said this morning, in order to benefit others, you really do need to benefit yourself. I mean, how much pain can you take before you give up, in other words. And the answer is usually not much. So it has to *work*, to some degree right out, from the beginning. So the easiest way to do it is start with the one of those Four Immeasurables that we relate to most. Often we relate to one of the Four Immeasurables or two of them because we're focused on some person or some group. And we just naturally have that Immeasurable functioning for us. So the idea is that we just throw fuel on it. Just keep throwing more onto that.

[00:50:33] And what happens is, when we see... for example, someone doing very positive things for another. Especially in a situation where you wouldn't have *expected* that to happen. Or where maybe somebody really disliked or hated somebody else and then something happened and that changed and they're suddenly engaged in some kind of positive activity. Then we feel joyful for that. And *that* joy we nurture. That's one of the Immeasurables. So now we want to feel *that* joy for *every* person, not just for the person who was able to generate

compassion and loving kindness for one person. We want to just expand it. And the value of that is not altruistic. So it's a mistake, sometimes we feel like this is what altruism is. It's really not. It's actually more profound than altruism. It's meant to be driven by *our* emotion.

[00:51:45] Maybe you've noticed that if you say to yourself, I would like to have altruism. I would like to be a really altruistic person. The likelihood... that you're going to accomplish that is very small. As soon as somebody... doesn't accept your gift of kindness, you're probably finished with that challenge. [laughter] So you really need to give rise to it from an understanding that it *feels* good. And when it feels good at a certain level, we don't wanna let go of it. So it just gets more and more like that and then we feel like, you know, it's like I would do it no matter what. I would do it for everyone I see, everyone I meet.

[00:52:34] And so there's, there's a meditation that goes with it, of course. And there's a lot of meditations that go with it. But the one that I particularly prefer... having started doing this about 30 years ago, is... when you walk out of your house, or walk out of the center here, or you just walk down the street or you go shopping somewhere, you run into... a lot of people that you never saw before. You don't know who they are. You don't have any idea, anything about them... and what you do is... you use these Four Immeasurables to connect with every person that you come on to. You meet them or you just see them. And so you generate those Four Emotions, Four Immeasurables, directly for that person. And you can do it in many different ways.

[00:53:42] So the instruction I got early on was... go shopping at Safeway. And every time you go in to a market and buy something, find a way to connect to one person every time you go. And pick one of those Four Immeasurables, whichever one strikes you as workable and approach somebody. And I remember, like the first person I did that with... and you're talking about a *complete* introvert here... that may seem really not quite right today, [laughs] but there was a time when there was no way that I could, I'd rather die... than approach somebody I didn't know. But I approached anyway. And I just said, "Can you tell me where the soap is?" It was a simple question that got a simple response, like it's down the aisle in this way. And so, I wasn't even able at the time to say, "Thank you." But within a couple of days, I was saying thank you. And within a couple of days I was saying, can I help you with anything else? I don't work here, but maybe there's something! And it just grew and it grew really fast. So that pretty soon you've set a trigger situation up for yourself. You see somebody you don't know, they're walking toward you. You have an opportunity... and your bag that you can reach into, gets deeper and deeper and deeper. And you just pull something up and you make some kind of a connection. And then you have a whole other level, a myriad of possibilities.

[00:55:27] One of them is based upon the view that we hold, generally, that... this life is not the beginning of our existence in this body. It may represent the beginning of our experience in this body, but it does not represent the beginning of us. That is to say... our lives, we say... in a nutshell... our existence, if you will, speaking loosely... has no beginning and no end. Technically, we say, we have not been born and we have not died. We have never been born. We have never died. And... it's a way of capturing a certain... philosophical perspective, that's a little bit hard to pin, and that is that there was never a point when we came into being and they'll never be a point when we're *not* anymore.

[00:56:43] That defies all of our science. It defies... most of our assumptions, which are based on science for the most part, and a lot of other things. But that's the assumption that we begin to work with that... when you come to the place of feeling like... not only am I kind of an unborn

undying being, but so is everyone else I meet. And the implications are many. And one of the most important one is... if we assume that... your current mother... and let us also assume that your current mother is extraordinarily kind and sacrificing such that even we can see that her kindness exceeds her need for her own benefit. Then we can step into the possibility that the person that is our mother and all of the other people that we see out in the world are people who have been our mothers. And that because of the nature of things... we are able then to embrace them from a distance... in terms of our connection to all beings, that if I am unborn and undying, then it must be true for all beings. And my relationship with all others is thereby defined by virtue of that relationship.

[00:58:38] So the nice thing about all of that is you don't have to believe it. It's not something to believe. In fact I like to say that if you believe it, then it's probably a mistake. Let's just say it's a method. If you *act* as if that is true... your life changes around it. In a positive way. And then you want to exercise those Four Immeasurables even more than you did before. And gradually, your connections with other people become defined by those Four Immeasurables. When your relationships are defined by those Four Immeasurables, many of the practices that at one stage feel impossible, they become easy. And even inspiring and bear much more fruit than they did before we carried that view. So that view is really important. The view of all sentient beings having been our mothers. And our willingness to generate loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity for all of them, becomes a moving force in our life.

[01:00:03] And again, it's not a, it's not meant to be a belief in the way that we normally think of as a belief, like it's a fact. If we see it as a *fact*, then we would say, I believe it. If we see it as *not* true, we'd say, I don't believe it. But actually, neither one of those are what it's meant to be. It's meant to be a *tool*. And the tool brings just almost unbridled... joy. To carry that view around and function through it.

[01:00:45] Okay? If we don't do something else, it will be tomorrow. Is there anything else that we would like to cover... any more... questions about this?

Zopa [01:00:57] Well, I got my own mic... So that means I'm really important. [laughter]

LMC [01:01:10] I can tell you it doesn't. [more laughter]

Zopa [01:01:13] Yeah. Learning that, too. So this morning, a couple things that you said that were really helpful in a different way for me in trying things out this morning... and I want to see if you want to say anything else about it, is... this thought that every single moment is new and has never happened before. And I've read that in the Dorje Chang Thung-Ma many times and just not like... okay, all right, that sounds good. But today, when we were trying this four to ten second thing and... it hooks to this other thing that we say over and over... Oh, if you lose your attention, bring it back. And this morning, and at one point you said, bring it forward. I don't know if you even remember you said that. But that really struck me because I thought, yes, you can never bring it back. Back to where? In that language we use... bring it back... hooks in as though... it's not fresh. We were coming back to something, but that thing's already... gone. So I don't know. I just want to say that and see if you have any more about that freshness. That every moment's brand new. I think if I lived in that, I would be really interested in things. I would never be depressed, you know, never be flattened. So... I don't know, it's just feeling very new. And it helped frame the four to ten second thing.

LMC [01:03:28] Yeah, But it's, it's one of those, it's one of those odd things... like Zopa says there's a, there's a phrase in an important text that we use. Can you say it?

student 4 [01:04:16] "It is taught that non distraction is the legs of meditation. The essence of every thought that arises is new to this meditator resting in this unfabricated state. Grant the blessing that meditation be free of concept. ... And then "it is taught that the essence of thought is Dharmakaya. It is nothing, but manifests as everything to this meditator in whose mind this unimpeded play arises. Grant the blessing to realize the inseparability of Samsara and Nirvana."

LMC [01:05:11] We have a lot of things on the table here. And I think some of them, if we all work on these things, some of them, some of us will say... at some point in the future from... you know, a day to a year to a decade... will at some point wake up and do something and say like, oh, that's what that means! That's how it works. So you look at it, the words kind of make sense and you can kind of conceptualize it. And then the trick is... how do you allow the experience to unfold... without trying to like have that experience through your conceptual understanding of the thing somehow? And then that takes another decade... and so on. But fortunately, you see, we are neither born nor dying, and so we have plenty of time. [laughter] The unborn undying is a pretty big deal... because it's part of the whole system whereby... we *think* of ourselves as neither coming into being nor going out of being. Like, there's no beginning and no end. It's just a continuous flow. And even when we think of continuous flow, we usually think of the flow has a beginning and the flow has an end. So, like many things in the tradition, there's just a ton of challenges... like can you swallow this or is it just too big to get down? And if it *is*, then later on along the way, there are ways to kind of cut it up into bite-sized pieces or maybe to take more of them at once and all sorts of ways.

[01:07:08] But... for now... I think the single most important thing in learning to do zhinay, is the ability to witness your mind when it's still. So it's really important not to forget *that* piece. And when you see it... and you see it still... even if it's only one second, you *must* be able to say to yourself, I think that's it! Doesn't matter how big it is. It's important.

[01:07:42] I tell you I had an epiphany some years ago. I was reading a text called 'Mahamudra of Moonbeams', and in that text... Mahamudra tradition is like the most advanced tradition in this lineage... and it's not really possible to divide it up into stages, but this famous translator... was asked by the single most famous person in the Karma Kagyu lineage, the 16th Karmapa, to please translate this text if it's the only one you translate in your life. And at that time, his name was Lungpa (sp?) and he was unquestionably the most renowned translator in that tradition. And so, of course, that's the first thing he did... to make sure it got done before he died. And he divided the four stages of this Mahamudra tradition into sixteen stages. And then he came back and he apologized like... there really aren't even... *four* stages. Even *that* is really not right. But... knowing how difficult this is, I decided to divide it up into sixteen stages... so that it would be kind of in bite-sized chunks. I'm saying that. He was a hard core Tibetan national and wouldn't have used that phrase, but he just thought it would be really helpful to have those stages laid out.

[01:09:22] There are lots of books and papers written that show the stages of meditation and how you do one thing and then the next stage comes and so on. Personally, I find those things totally useless. One thing is, I can never find myself in those lists. Like it looks to me like... they're so sophisticated that I don't think I've ever had those experiences. Or it even looks like the very first stage will not mature for at least another ten lifetimes. You know, it's just like it's so... out there. So Lungpa (sp?) divided it up. And I remember coming up to the list, you know,

thinking oh man, another list. I gotta deal with this. And the *first* item in the list was a *small level of still shamatha*. Like just a few moments. He didn't use seconds because they didn't have seconds in those days, but, but he said... it's like the smallest thing that you can just see. *That's* what it is. Just *that* much. I looked at that and I said, *unbelievable*... I'm in a list! [slaps the table, laughter] I'm on! Let's go. [01:10:51] That was really my experience. I just felt like overwhelming joy... because this was like 20 years into the practices. Just thought like... where that point was in the list, you might be thinking was some high exalted place. It's like, probably, you all have it today. It was just that simple. It was just like, can you *witness* yourself being still and clear and aware? And there it is. That's it. Just a moment. That's all. That was the *seed* of Mahamudra.

[01:11:28] And... I think that it was a grand gift for him to break it into sixteen, sixteen levels because so many of us would never have found our place in the list. And you can't go up the stairs unless it has a first step and a second step. And so it gave an opportunity like, oh, I can do that. Now, what's the second one? Maybe that looks really hard, but you have this sense of confidence now emerging. So I think actually, that there isn't a one of you that shouldn't have that experience of this... like confidence in recognizing the still mind, just for a moment. You recognize it once, it's kind of like... you can be separated from your mother for 20 years and recognize her when you see her again. It's like that.

student 6 [01:12:52] This is a bit more, I think, of a ... a description that might lead to an observation from you, and that is that the concept today, you know, of making a point of focus on an emotion. What I found happened to me just a couple days ago in my practice was dealing with some difficulties with a family member. And I wanted to just see what was going on behind it. And I was feeling like I wanted to move away from being too conceptual and intellectual. And that going into doing the practice and getting that occasional stillness... that maybe would start making more sense to me. And out of that, when I completed my practice, I went and got my list from my MVC class of all the feelings, and I thought, I'm just going to scan these and see because I had a sense like I understood something, but I didn't have any intellectual word to go with it. But when I looked at the list of emotions, there it was, regretful. And... it's helping me now, and what I'm curious, I guess, to take from the next step of what you've just talking about is maybe to go back into the practice and make *that* sort of the center focus ... is on the word...

LMC [01:14:34] The word regret?

student 6 [01:14:34] Regretful and see what that will do in terms of the practice moving through towards stillness.

LMC [01:14:49] Was there a question in there? Did I miss it?

student 6 [01:14:55] Well, I think I'm answering my own, but yes, you could... [laughter] take it to the next day of practice, next time on the cushion and use that term regretful as an emotion because you were referencing earlier, well, the Four Immeasurables are emotions. But they don't immediately call up negative emotions. And to me, you mentioned a little earlier that sometimes taking tougher emotions is a useful place *to* put your focus. So I guess I'm asking if going into the next round of sitting... to take the word regretful and just use that as the place to center would be helpful idea.

[01:15:45] Yeah. ... Of course... we want to... go into the thing that's behind the *word* regretful, into the actual experience... and leave the word behind. So that we can put our awareness on that... *feeling*... that we would call regretful. Which if we think about it, the conceptual attributes

of regret... soon we'll have a long list of conceptual pieces which are *not* useful. I mean, they are useful in some situations, but in this case they're not. Because the real value of the regret... is the power behind it. I mean, there's a lot of energy behind something like regret. At the time when we *have* the regret and notice it and feel it. There's a lot of energy in it. And usually, of course, what most of us will do is we'll figure out a way to not look at the regret. Not deal with it. Later. Or it was their fault... or whatever. However, we want to get rid of it when in *fact*... in the context of what we're talking about, that regret is a profound gift. That you could not get any other way! And it's a profound gift at the point where... when we look at it... and maybe it's overwhelming... it's so overwhelming that it brings us to tears... and even a sense of grief possibly. And if we can hold our awareness on that feeling as it emerges, you know. This [holding a leaf] doesn't hold much power. Even if it's said to come from the tree that the Buddha sat under at the time of enlightenment. I don't get a big thing out of it because... I know that it was like grafted and more trees were made and all these things, and it just doesn't do it.

[01:18:11] But... if I can have regret... that's a different situation. Because what I want to do is... I want the regret itself... to produce something which is overwhelmingly good. Not to brush it off... not to neutralize it somehow, but actually to see how much I can bring my awareness to something which ordinarily I would have nothing but an aversion reaction to. Then it feels like a gift. You feel like... whatever other people or persons were involved in that regret... that they have given you a gift. Because the power... the energy... in fact this is what Ken McLeod likes to use is that word energy... if the energy comes from that emotion and because it's energetic, you can bring your awareness... like a laser focus on that thing, not that you *focus* on it so much as just awareness of it. The energy can hold your awareness there. And in the context of holding your awareness there, you come to see the awareness clearly. And *while* you are seeing it clearly, then the big, then the big thing can happen, which is... the awareness disappears. At the same time that the regret disappears. ... No kidding.

[01:20:08] You've had that experience. We've all had that experience. You have an experience you're looking at. Usually they're kind of more light experiences, light hearted experiences somehow. And we would like to encourage that kind of nice, warm experience to continue. And then it disappears and then... it doesn't give us such a good feeling. But in this case then, we're talking about something which feels much more energetic because it feels negative. And the negative... often is the thing that's the more powerful. Focusing on it just kind of brings the regret and the energy of the clarity together. So it *feeds* into the clarity... not the *word* regret... not the conceptual understanding of the regret... not the history that brought us to that place. None of those things. It just feeds into the appearance of the regret.

[01:21:18] Because two things are always present here. So, the grand formula that we always have is... appearance and emptiness. It's always those two things. And we can struggle for our entire lifetime, like the appearance I understand. The regret I feel, I know what *that* is. What's the emptiness piece? Just sounds like a cop out. In fact, it's a cop out usually because we find a way to really avoid it, because we actually don't know *how* to embrace it as a gift. So we do our best, which often is not very good... and we move on because... that's what we can do. But far better... is to bring such strong awareness to it that we actually recognize a much larger context. And then... the whole thing just kind of dissolves. Not part of the practice. Not part of the ritual to dissolve it. Though there's plenty of those practices, too. But in this case, just, it just dissolves because the *nature* of that clarity *is* emptiness.

[01:22:36] Which is why the emotion is... such a powerful thing to use rather than this [leaf] because we can relate to the emotion being the nature of emptiness. We've all had emotions

that... it's just not there anymore. We didn't see it go maybe, but... in this case, you put your awareness on it, just rest your awareness on the power of an emotional state and it'll disappear. It has nowhere else to go. If you're not feeding it something, it doesn't have anything. So we witness it, but most people will say, I don't know what... you know, I just didn't have that regret anymore. But if we were looking *close* at it, if we were like, good at the zhinay practice... we may have witnessed... the appearance dissolve into the emptiness. And *that* is a big deal.

[01:23:37] It's interesting because we're all right on the edge of it. And every time we have an experience, almost all of our experiences, just are like... you know, it came, it went. So really we're experiencing the dissolution of the appearance into the emptiness. But it's too small. It's kind of like... you don't feel the breeze of a fly going past your face, you know, or buzzing by. It's just it doesn't occur to you. But if you feel real regret or real pain of some kind, that's a different matter. And when it dissolves, you see it, often, dissolve. What we don't see is, we don't see it dissolve *into* the emptiness. We struggle with the concept of emptiness... for decades. It's a key phrase, certainly in the Tibetan system of meditation and in many of the Mahayana practices also. But what *is* that emptiness? And what we hear is... emptiness is nothing. Which is just profoundly unhelpful. [laughter]

[01:24:55] On the other hand, what we want is something which is a nice conceptual package all wrapped up nice with a beautiful ribbon where we can just name it and push it aside. So, the thing about it is, is that we want to use... if we're *up* for it in your meditation... place your awareness on an experience. Because experiences have power. Concepts don't. They just don't. As much as we'd like them to. They don't. They don't pull it up. Somebody dies. Somebody is dying. Your relationship falls apart. You know, it comes back together. We meet somebody. We fall in love. It's like these are the big things. These are the big things. We *want* those to be big things. And we want them to be positive. And we want them to be part of our spiritual path. And what's really unusual, I think, in a certain way in these practices, the use of these things in the path, they're all defined quite clearly there. So we can use our really strong emotions and strong sense... our hurts, our pains, our joys, all those things can be brought into the path... by the very simple, straightforward practice of bringing your awareness to the experience. This [leaf] is not an experience. And if I put it here and put my awareness on it is kind of, kind of has the shadow of an experience with it. But it's not like... somebody tried to kill me this afternoon or, you know, somebody insulted me in front of 10,000 people. Those are the good ones! [laughter] Right? The door is open. Somebody must have already left. ... Okay. We take a little break. We can come back, and maybe just do 10 minutes of meditation. Does that make sense? Okay, scram. Oh, yeah, dedicate!

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