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*settling mind with aspiration of bodhicitta, posture relating to channels as well as just another experience, humor as antidote and cause for joy, experiences e.g. emotions even if conflicted are energy to accomplish path, **Carrying Practice**: using the 'juice' of anger and other conflicted emotions, levels or stages of practice, contemplating past karma ripening as motivation for now, usefulness of confidence and curiosity, **Carrying Practice**: daily interactions that benefit others by sharing joy*

LMC [00:01:18] So what are you interested in this evening?

Student 1 [00:01:26] I have a very short comment. So I've never done that before and I really liked that.

LMC [00:01:36] Never done what?

Student 1 [00:01:39] Resettling my mind, my focus... kind of over and over, but with the discursive thought and aspiration of... may this be for the benefit of beings... throughout the meditation. And I just want to say that was... really helpful. I felt... this was very different. So I just thought I'd comment on what that was like and it felt like it was easier. I don't know why, but I mean, just seemed easier to resettle my mind and then I would feel like I was... more present with the breath and still... at least for a few moments. And then I would get distracted... and then I would notice and then I would do it again. But I really liked that. So thank you.

LMC [00:02:33] When you say, at least for a moment, I think... it's important to acknowledge the moment. Because the moment... is only distinguished from... the big thing, by virtue of being shorter. It's not less! So that's like our days, in our life are made up of moments. So a lot of value can be... squeezed out of those moments by paying attention to the moments, rather than thinking that we need to... have a meditation which is uninterrupted for an hour, or even for five minutes. Because you get a short piece and then once you're confident that you can get a short piece, then you can... string those together! And have the longer one and get that experience.

Student 1 [00:03:31] Thanks.

Student 2 [00:04:53] I have a question about posture. In some things I've read, there's a lot of emphasis on several points of posture here and there. How much do we really need to be focused on exactly how we hold our body and where does that tradition come from? Why is that often stressed so much in certain books or teachings?

LMC [00:05:29] I'm not sure you're asking the right person. But I'll lie anyway. [laughter] I don't know enough about it to wax eloquent on the subject. But, we all know that our posture makes a difference. So if you sit in one way, or... let's take you sit, as opposed to lying down. So there is a change in posture that will not be lost on anyone. Nor will the experience be lost. It's clear... that if you do one, you get one experience and if you do another, you get another experience. The issue of posture clearly goes way back. It's ancient. And many of our teachers can explain in some detail, the benefits of different kinds of postures and the deleterious effects of certain other postures and so on. ...[00:07:19] One of the kind of common... rationales for... posture, which includes remaining upright and... and not lying down, for example... and also keeping the body straight... in certain ways, the legs in certain ways... is that there are, in most of the, or in

many of the Buddhist traditions, there is an acknowledgment of certain energy channels in the body... that we can, if we're not careful, *block* those channels... and the result is then... something that's not so helpful. And so then there's methods for opening those channels. And to some degree, they have a kind of... analogous relationship to various things within our physical bodies, but in other ways, they're not connected to those... things that our doctor might tell us about, let's say. ... Are you having trouble?

Student 2 [00:08:47] I just have some struggles with chronic back pain. Most of the time it's manageable, but sometimes it gets in the way. Just depends on the day and sometimes I'll find something that's stable and it doesn't bother me. And other times the same thing will not be helpful. So, yeah, I've tried different, you know, more upright back, like allowing some relaxation to also maybe come into the back as long as I'm sitting, but I haven't landed on something that works consistently.

LMC [00:09:30] You have not. So that's what you're saying?

Student 2 [00:09:32] Yeah.

LMC [00:09:50] Well, one thing's for sure. If you're interested in pursuing working with your sitting posture and your posture in general... there are a lot of people, who are connected to those things. And many of them are even in this sangha. So it would not be difficult to... explore that. I don't think I'm the person to explore it with. My posture is *not so good*... most of the time. And so, I think it's helpful, at times in my life when I've had better posture, that it's *helpful*... to maintain that, to remain aware of it. In another way, you could say... it's just like any other experience. If you... maintain a certain kind of posture, you have a certain experience. And if you maintain another posture, you have a different experience. And from the meditator's standpoint, it's really the experience that counts more than anything else. So you have the opportunity to... bring your awareness to the experience no matter what it is. But my guess is that you, you can benefit by... getting some professional help from people who are highly adept at those things.

Student 2 [00:11:28] Okay. I'll reach out... and work on that. In general, I find that, if I kind of relax the effort and allow my body to slump a little bit, the tension will be resolved. But then my meditation becomes... like dull. Or that I have a tendency towards sleepiness a little bit more. So I kind of go back and forth with that. But, I will reach out and try and find a balance with it.

LMC [00:12:00] Yeah. Good luck with that. I mean it. I'd be interested in knowing what your results were. Curious both ways.

Student 2 [00:12:11] Thank you.

Student 3 [00:12:28] More observation than a question. I'm trying to follow your advice for the very short meditation sessions. Two, three seconds and then say, "Yeah, good!" And relax, right. And it happened to me before and today was even stronger. Probably combined with this, with this bodhicitta, which I also find very interesting and enlightening kinda. And I realize that... when I relax... like, that's the best quality meditation. *After* the meditation. And... as long as I don't acknowledge it mentally. So I just wanted to share that those were the moments where I actually meditated the most.

LMC [00:13:38] They were... which moments?

Student 3 [00:13:39] The moment when I go like, okay, so now I put my mind on this cushion. And one, two, three. Oh, I'm soooo good. [laughter] And that, at that moment when I said like "I am so good", I managed beautifully. And at that moment... *that's* the moment...

LMC [00:14:09] The moment was what? Complete your thought.

Student 3 [00:14:12] That's the thing! Like I see through, like, that's the moment when I feel... good. I feel like... [lets out a big relaxed sigh] I wish I was always like that. I was always in *that* state of mind.

LMC [00:14:32] Is that helpful?

Student 3 [00:14:34] Oh, yes. Yes. Yeah, yeah.

LMC [00:14:41] How about the *wish* that you always are like that. Is that helpful?

Student 3 [00:14:46] I know what I *should* answer. I should say, "No, it's not helpful!" [laughter] but I'm not sure. Maybe it is even that, which is... because it will remind me.

LMC [00:14:58] Yeah.

Student 3 [00:14:59] Yeah. The bodhicitta aspiration is a very strong motivation. Yeah. It helps a lot. It motivates.

LMC [00:15:12] The bodhicitta aspiration... it's no accident, that it's there in virtually every liturgy in our tradition. It's just always there. It's always there so much that you get tired of seeing it so much. It's really... meant to remind us... that our *own* benefit is accomplished, not through focus on ourselves, but through focus on others. And that's actually, for the majority of us, that's all we need. We just need to understand... that my benefit does not come from focusing on myself. And most of us can look and confirm that! That the most enjoyable, the most joyous times in our life have been when... something very nice was accomplished for someone else. So that's no accident. No debate around that. It's easy to see that. The, the odd thing is, if there is an odd thing, is that we don't embrace it more fully.

Student 3 [00:16:26] And we forget all the time. We forget, we not aware enough to repeat it and remind ourselves.

LMC [00:16:34] That's what's odd. It would seem like when you see how it works that you would just do it all the time. You just couldn't forget! Or that when things were not going well you'd remember. Oh, I see. I'm not doing *that*. And then we do it. But it isn't that easy. Because we have a deep sense of illusion that we carry around with us. That the more I pay attention to my own benefit, the happier I'll be. There's no evidence for that. Which is what's interesting. All the evidence is on the other side, but we don't seem to care about that evidence. We continue with the same illusion and support. Which *actually*... can also be a cause for joy. In the moment that you see it and you laugh out loud. Once again.

Student 3 [00:17:31] Thank you.

LMC [00:17:32] A sense of humor about it is actually a great antidote. That's my personal sense of it.

Student 4 [00:17:52] I was reading something by Thrangu Rinpoche that was talking about... suffering and samsara, being, you know, connected to the kleshas... the disturbing emotions. So I guess my question is, because I'm also in my work, as a therapist, we work with emotions a lot and... I tend to like... tell people validate that the emotion that arises is never really wrong. Right. It's just what arises. And how you manage that emotion or what you do with it is what... is really important. And you have some choice over... or you could have choice. But I guess I'm wondering like the kleshas, like anger... you know, fear... those things that arise, are they in and of themselves... I mean, I guess what my question is, is... if you were... trying to achieve a state of enlightenment... would that mean that you would not experience those emotions? Would those emotions not arise? If you were enlightened, or are those emotions, I guess what I'm wondering about is... are the emotions in of themselves okay? I mean, are they the root of the problem? Or is it how we... attach ourselves to them or identify with them? I don't know. I guess the last thing I read sort of raised a little doubt in my mind about...

LMC [00:20:08] What raises the doubt?

Student 4 [00:20:10] What I read about what Thrangu Rinpoche was talking about kleshas and maybe I misunderstood, but...

LMC [00:20:15] What did he say that raised some doubts?

Student 4 [00:20:17] Well, I think it was something like samsara or suffering is based on... the causes, the disturbing emotions, or the kleshas. Or that's part of it. But I always think of emotions as... just part of our experience, I guess.

LMC [00:20:48] Well, I'm not sure what you're referring to with Thrangu Rinpoche, but generally... when we talk about this, we're talking about *conflicted* emotions, not just... experience. But actually, *conflicted* emotion. The kind of emotion that... almost immediately turns into some kind of a poison. Like hatred, for example. A craving of some kind, and you can't get that thing. Or you've identified with something which is not helpful but harmful. Those are the kinds of things that we're often talking about when we talk about... those kleshas. We're talking about conflicted emotions. So the emotion itself is just an emotion. It's an experience. Experience is what drives our practice. So, you can't completely... I'm not sure if you *could* completely eliminate that, I'm not sure where you would be... in terms of... I guess what I mean to say is... I think your gas tank would be empty. You wouldn't have any... power or energy to do... what needs to be done.

[00:22:18] And a lot of what needs to be done, when we talk about enlightenment... that's also a little bit of an issue to be careful about. Because... we need to start at the place, and our instructions generally encourage us in this way, we need to understand that we do not know what leads to enlightenment, or what *is* enlightenment. As soon as we think we know what it is, we now are going to have a problem. Because that's going to be very hard to let go of. And so... we may need to learn some things... to understand some things, that we don't already understand, safe to say. And now it's difficult to do because we've already decided what's correct. What it is and what it isn't. That's a problem. So it's far more fruitful... and we might say... more guaranteed to bear fruit, if you will... speaking sloppily about it... that if we pursue the path as something... that is an experience... as opposed to having a goal. We often talk

about the *disadvantage* of having a goal. And sometimes that's ponderable, like we can't quite figure out, like, why would you not... how about the goal of enlightenment? One of the problems with the goal of enlightenment is, is that... it's hard to have a *real* goal of enlightenment when we don't know what it is. And if we think we know what it is, then it's even harder. So it's better, I think, to identify... with the *pieces* leading up to enlightenment. Maybe with a sense of curiosity about it. And like you just asked, what's the deal with emotional states? Aren't they just part of... having this human body and having relationships with other human beings and all. I mean, it seems pretty clear. I can't imagine Thrangu Rinpoche saying, no, that's not what emotions are about. I mean... of course.

Student 4 [00:24:42] I think he said disturbing emotions.

LMC [00:24:45] Conflicted. It means conflicted emotions. So I feel, I feel happy. I feel hungry. I'm gonna get something to eat. And then somebody says, no, we're not going to get something to eat until tomorrow afternoon. Now, maybe I have a conflicted emotion... because I feel like I need to eat before tomorrow afternoon or I don't want to eat at that place. I got sick there the last time. So now we begin to have conflicted... things and we're not clear how we're going to get those things that we feel like we need.

[00:25:20] The *upside* of all of that, and Thrangu Rinpoche *definitely* would say this... the upside of all of that... is that those conflicted states... are like the power that we use to accomplish the path. That's where the juice is. We all know that's where the juice is, right? When everything is going just totally okay, we don't even want to meditate. It's like it's too smooth. Someone's got to slap you [laughter] or some *thing* has to... wake you up! And sometimes we can do that for ourselves and sometimes we can't. But when we see where the suffering is coming from... that insight, sometimes we make the mistake of feeling like... Oh, I'm not meditating right. I'm seeing this suffering and all. When actually you're seeing the *cause* of the suffering that you yourself are generating. What a gift! Because you know *exactly* what to do... about that. If you don't, we've got a problem.

[00:26:36] But mostly I think, we know what to do. We know what to do. And to develop the *habit* of doing what is clearly the thing that will be helpful is, in that case, a helpful habit. In its most raw... and kind of exalted form... my experience is... the best thing to do is, if you can... bring your *full* attention to the experience of that klesha, or that emotional state... just to the energy of it. Just bring your awareness to it. One hundred percent.

[00:27:17] And what you *get* for that... is insight. There is no insight without... some kind of energetic thing there. There's something, we're looking... for something. There has to be some interest, some curiosity, something driving it... and mostly our own mental states, we don't have curiosity about. We just want to maintain them or identify with them or get rid of them. So all of our relationships tend to be dysfunctional in that realm. We're not really getting... what we deserve to get from them. Because we're putting up with them, we should deserve to get something! And the *something* is... that we have the opportunity to learn... to bring the energy of that conflicted emotion... and use it to focus our awareness. That energy to focus our awareness *on* the conflicting emotions. Nothing else. Not to fix it. Not that we shouldn't fix it because, of course, we make an effort... or we go and get therapy to fix it. The fixing it may not be the best approach.

Student 4 [00:28:39] One more thing that I'll just want to say about that is... I don't get, like, super angry anymore. Because I've kind of been able to work with that more. I don't get like

really, really angry. But like a couple of months ago, this situation happened... and I was just in a *rage*. Like I was so angry. I was totally lost. I had no awareness... in the moment. But afterwards, it was so intriguing. Like it was like almost exciting, like, Wow! I mean, I didn't want to be angry like that, but it was also like that curiosity. It was really interesting. I could just look at it and see how completely lost that I got into this and that I was still capable, obviously, of going there. But I wish I could do it in the moment more often. But it feels like it happens a lot sooner. Like it might happen 2 minutes afterwards, that I see it or that I can step back. But I haven't really gotten to the point where I can... really like look at it *right* as it's happening, but... a good reminder.

LMC [00:30:08] You can use that as a trigger... also. So, you're looking at the anger in retrospect. Perhaps it's already begun to wane. And you're looking at it... maybe thinking that you've lost an opportunity or it's not as good as it was five minutes ago. You're letting that experience trigger your interest in the experience. Whereas you could bring, if you looked for it more regularly, it could be that your... meditation itself triggers the experience. If you were in the habit of watching your experience more during the day... you might catch that in the moment that it occurred. So that's not easy, of course, because we haven't trained ourselves to remain aware during the entire day. But the extent to which you can give rise to and nurture that awareness, the more likely that you'll... catch something... in that trap. Where you have a kind of "aha!"

[00:31:33] I mean we get 'aha's' anyway. I mean, you're not completely foreign to the experience of an 'aha!' Oh, so it's really just that! But we're just not *used* to... thinking about... an experience, which we would rather not have ever had as an 'aha!' That's not where we tend to go. We tend to go into a place of, "Oh, you again!" You know, this is... my day is ruined again! Instead of, the best thing that happened to me today was I got really pissed off and the moment that I got pissed off, I saw what it was and everything changed. Most of us would rather be in *that* place. And that place then... provides the *juice*. The anger, the disappointment, the confusion... to the degree with which we see it... that, that provides the energy and the juice to bring your awareness to it. I think... that's how it works. Definitely we are talking *conflicted* emotions, though, not just strong experiences. [00:32:53]

Student 5 [00:33:13] I have a question about, uh, the levels of shamatha. Like the progression of mastery over calm abiding. I don't know if that's even good to contemplate or not, but I read a book, a while ago, that Alan Wallace wrote. I think it was called 'Attention Revolution'. And in the back he talked about the nine stages and that you achieve this masterful, lovely state. I was wondering if you could unpack that a bit.

LMC [00:34:00] Are you saying it didn't work? [laughter] Just checking. Yeah, Alan Wallace is... you might say, the foremost proponent of shamatha. I don't know anyone who teaches it more... or is kind of more enthusiastic about it than him. The question about levels... is an interesting one. And Alan's analysis of that is primarily you know, focused on one tradition that he's more connected to. And you can find... kind of endless commentaries on... the various levels of shamatha, just like the various levels of any meditation. The commentaries run on pretty much continuously. And many of them are very helpful. What I mean is, is that many people find them very helpful. And... for others, not so much.

[00:35:19] So the only reason that I mentioned that is that... those levels are not necessarily discrete things. You know, like this little thing that I hit the [uses stick to ring bowl] thing with... this is, this is a discrete thing. Those levels are *not* discrete things. They're really primarily for...

so this is my own prejudice about it, I guess I could say, but not a negative prejudice. If you find those levels... helpful, which almost always means that you have recognized where you are on the levels... then you might actually find that the whole progression of levels is really helpful. But I can see in my own experience that for decades, literally... I could never find myself in any of the lists. And there's something kind of debilitating about that. [laughter] Like, am I in the wrong place here? It's like... and it was actually the first time... I mean, the bodhisattva path has a whole bunch of levels, too. And... most people will say when they study those... it's very hard to find myself in that list. Even level one looks like not in this life! And that's helpful, from a kind of study perspective... to look at those things. But I think also we need, generally, a way to *feel*... like I'm making some progress here. It isn't just like I'm putting things in place to make some progress, two lifetimes from now. Which is also like we do a lot of talk about that, too. Like do *that* for the future, not for now.

[00:37:32] One of the fascinating... commentaries on all of that is... that it's generally considered to be the case... that the vast majority of our karma... that ripens in this life... comes from previous lives. Very little of the things we do in this life... ripen as the karma in this life. Not to say that they don't... but more that... the majority of things that we experience... as those ripening's... are coming from a previous time. And so I remember the first time I heard that... my first question was, "How do I make use of that? What am I going to do that?" And interestingly, over about a decade... it *did* seem to be useful... in the *sense* that... it became more and more compelling! Like I thought... yeah, that makes sense that... the majority of the karma that ripens in this life must have started at some previous time. Because the past is much bigger than the present in terms of just the flow of time. So it all made kind of sense. And so, over a certain period of time, that kind of permeated my, my practice also. I thought that was interesting. But *more* interesting... is when we sit down to meditate... and we find that we're confident and clear about what we're doing and we have experience in accordance with that clarity in that meditation.

[00:39:26] So if you *get* that from Alan's teaching on the stages... then it's worthwhile. I never got it until I read a text that... covered... the stages of mahamudra ...like complete realization. And in that text, the author, who is highly qualified to have been translating this text, took the four stages of mahamudra, the four stages of attaining full realization let's say, and... thinking, as he said in his own words, that... to only present mahamudra in four stages was not enough. Because... nobody will be able to find themselves in those four stages. It's just... too much! And so what he did was, he broke it into 16 levels. In other words, each of the four into four more. So you got 16 stages of mahamudra. And he said, now we have to remember... that there's actually not even one stage. Mahamudra is just mahamudra. You either have it or you don't have it. There are no stages. But since... people have such a hard time with this, I broke it down into 16. But I just want you to know that there's not really 16! [laughter]

[00:41:06] So of course, I look at the list... and the top one looks to me like it's not even in English, in my mind. So I go down to the first level... and there I am! It's there! I find myself in the very first one and suddenly 16 levels feels like... that's totally comfortable. I can see myself in one, maybe even kind of stepping in two. And then you feel like, okay! Maybe I'm on the right path. Personally, I find that a very powerful and *necessary* experience. To *remain* on the path and to feel *confident* about... our meditation practice and our understanding of these things, and our ability to work with a kleshas, all these things... they have to function for us or we end up not being able to do them. We *have* to find a way... to feel good! You get angry and you have some way to deal with it. And the next thing you know is you're totally happy to be angry. It's sort of like you found this like, you know, rough cut jewel and you... and you're exploring it.

[00:42:25] So, that's just by way of saying... if exploring the levels that Alan lays out... which there is certainly lots of kind of... precedent for doing that, especially with shamatha, with calm abiding... and you find it useful... then I would say... continue in that vein. There are so many... lists of the stages of shamatha. In fact, in the mahamudra book that I was just mentioning, it's actually two books in one big volume and half of that big volume is *all* on the stages of shamatha. And it becomes nauseous, you know, it's like there's so many fine differences to be made amongst all of the stages, and at a certain point you wonder like, when do I meditate? [laughter] When do I get to this thing. So I think that all of that is good. And we need to give rise to lots of curiosity and have some... this month, I'm not feeling particularly good about the word 'diligence', but kind of a... strong intentional curiosity about it might be more like it.

[00:44:14] Strong enough, so that it's like... you don't want to give it up. You want to stick with it. And then you *do* stick with it, not because... you've set a discipline for yourself necessarily, but rather just because... the more curious you are... I mean, we're looking at our own mind. So one would *think*, naturally, what could be more... a source of curiosity than our own mind. And it's kind of curious to discover that actually it appears, for most of us, to be the *least* curious thing of all! And yet... most of us will say... I can't control my mind. I think this, I think that, all these things happen. I get happy, I get unhappy. This happens and that happens. I fall in love and then I hate the person. Then I fall in love. Then we get married. Then we get a divorce. And yes, I think I fully understand my mind. [laughter] Whatever it takes to give rise to the curiosity so that we feel like... No, actually, I *don't* understand... this mind. And what I really need to do with this entire life... is set, as a goal, by the end of this life... I should understand my mind. Whatever it takes. Not control it... but *understand* it! Know what it is. Recognize its nature at its core.

Student 6 [00:46:02] I'm having a hard time figuring out how to ask this question. But it kind of piggybacks on this sort of Alan Wallace thing. And I think the direction I will go with... it is sort of about the experience of shamatha, calm abiding... and what that is... or what it's supposed to be. And maybe the direction I'll go with this question is... you know, that Alan Wallace, those nine steps, I haven't read them in in a couple of years, I don't think. But my recollection of them is they have to do with the degree to which you can focus. That's sort of some of the nine steps. And so, in terms of technique, you know, we hear a lot of instructions about focusing on the breath. And I guess the question is, you know, in each sit... I find myself a little confused maybe... about how much effort I should be putting into that.

LMC [00:47:01] Effort?

Student 6 [00:47:02] Yeah. How hard should I be trying to stay there at the tip of my nose or my belly coming in and out? And much of the experience for me... lately... like I know when I am distracted and I'm making a 'to do list' or getting embarrassed about something I did 10 years ago. [laughter] But even when I'm not doing those things...

LMC [00:47:25] It's better than getting caught in the act. [laughter]

Student 6 [00:47:28] Even when I'm not doing those things, there's a lot of experience happening. Like I can do breath, tip of nose, stomach in and out, up and down my esophagus. I feel how relaxed my back is. I can feel the pain in my knee. I can hear the fan going on over there. That's all happening, all the time... when I'm sitting. And I'm wondering is there, is there supposed to be something... more tight focus, more loose focus? And I know there's no perfect answer, but....

LMC [00:47:59] Thank you. [laughter] Appreciate that.

Student 6 [00:48:03] What's your advice about that?

LMC [00:48:12] A question comes to mind... in your description, and the question is ... are you finding joy in it?

Student 6 [00:48:26] Sometimes.

LMC [00:48:29] Can you see what's different between the times you do and the times you don't?

Student 6 [00:48:51] I don't think so.

LMC [00:48:53] You can't see the difference? Sometimes it's joyful and sometimes not, but you're not clear why. Is that what you're saying?

Student 6 [00:49:01] Well... joy is a difficult thing to describe. ... I guess the joy is some kind of just combination of... lucid and relaxed. But there is some little juice there, too, you know. Erik Fromme taught several times this meditation that I really like that... Norman Fischer does.. that Reebay (sp?) Zen 7-step thing... where actually... I feel my breath. I feel joy. I exhale. I feel joy is one of the seven steps... and I get a lot of joy out of actually putting a little intent... like this is supposed to be joyful... into it. But what the experience of joy is like, I guess... really, just when it's really... bright.

LMC [00:50:09] You want it to be really bright. Is that what you said?

Student 6 [00:50:12] No, just that's when I feel joyful... is when it is. When it's not... I don't know... I'm feeling like I'm a little lost in this discussion now.

LMC [00:50:24] Well that's... totally okay. ... I definitely don't mean to imply that joy is a requirement. It's clear... that not only is there a great deal of natural diversity amongst human beings, but also within each one of us, there is an enormous amount of diversity in terms of our... uncountable experiences. And some people... really enjoy... just trying to set the extremes here, for starters... some people really enjoy a kind of harsh discipline. Like if they have a really harsh discipline, they're more likely to engage in the practice and in a fruitful way even. And other people run from that like their body's on fire! It's like they can't do it. And... so that's just like... two of *myriad*... of those kinds of things.

[00:52:19] We need to find, individually... the *spot*... the place where things work for us with our meditation. And again, I can say from my own side, I have abandoned the path... more times than I can remember. Just because, I worked myself into a place where... it was not interesting. It was too much work. It was too much effort. The teaching itself maybe appeared to be... not comprehensible. Over a fairly long period of 30 plus years... I would come and go. And my primary teacher, who died in the late 80's, I used to be totally honest about it. Like, I'm not interested. He thought that was fascinating! I did not... *appreciate*... his fascination. [laughter] But, I also felt I didn't have anybody else to *tell* it to. Like... I can't find the place... I'm still here after all these years. I need a door. I need something to find a way into this thing. And... a lot of the rubrics of the practices... I couldn't relate to. And... I couldn't come to a place in my own mind where it was clear... that *engaging* in any particular practice... was going to bring any

benefit to *me*. That seemed *really* clear. And as to whether or not it would bring any benefit to somebody else... well, I kind of hoped that it would, but I couldn't quite see how it would since it didn't seem to be doing it for me.

[00:54:20] And this is where... my own inclination is to say... and not everybody would agree with this, but my own inclination is to say that... *your practice must work for you first*. And *if* you hold the view... that you are engaging in the practice from the *very* beginning... in order to benefit all sentient beings, it will work for you... quicker. But another thing happens, that used to bother me also. And that is that... holding the benefit of others was *easy*. Holding my own benefit was also easy. I couldn't see how either one of them... was getting accomplished. Like the benefit just wasn't coming. And so little by little, it became clear... to me, that if I looked at... the 15,000 hours on the cushion, let's just say... I could find places that were joyful, that were filled with insight, that felt... exciting and interesting and filled with more curiosity and so on. The things that I found attractive... those things. And when I could find a practice, that I felt... I could squeeze the *juice* out of it... somehow. That I knew how to do it. To get something that was good. That made me... feel joyful and careful around other people, when I met them.

[00:56:20] A practice, for example, that was given to me by one teacher was... you should go out every day for an hour... and you should *connect* with as many people as you possibly can. Like, you just see somebody on the street. You say hello. You try to... give rise to the intention to benefit that person. So even if you just say hello, in your own mind, it's like, "Hello!" You know, like you try to imbue every motion with every person... as if it was really important that... they felt some joy. That they felt some insight and so on. And that, very quickly became like the most interesting practice I'd ever had. And it was from somebody... who was an authority, you know, he was somebody. So therefore... it's like, the degree to which we rely upon the *authority*, it worked!

[00:57:17] And I still do that. I go into a store. I *always* try to... approach at least two or three people. You know, my wife, Tara. Go with her as she's shopping for a necklace or something. I have no interest in the necklace. But the shop owner... is interested in something... and that's easy to find out. All you gotta do is ask, "What are you interested in?" Most people are *totally* willing to tell you what they're interested in. And now you have an 'in'. Now you have... something you can... share... and you can leave a sense of joy behind. And if it's appropriate, or if they ask, you can you can say that you are a practicing Buddhist these days, without getting executed or something. But generally, I don't do that. I think it's better from my practice standpoint to not tell people... why I am or aren't anything at all, but rather... that if when I leave, there is a sense of joy in the air, or a sense of insight or anything... I feel like that was a good day. That was a good day. I'm not concerned with what it does for me because I saw what it did for somebody else. So then, it's just done.

[00:58:41] And... I think that, that's what we each need to do. We need to *find* the practice that... makes us get up in the morning and feel like, yeah, it's another day, let's do it! And it's so corny that I'm kind of ashamed to even say that... but I think that... if we don't find the *thing* that... lights our fire, somehow... we will not continue to practice! *That* I can say, all the times that I did not continue to practice, were because I was doing something that I hadn't found how to fit. How to put that on. It's almost like a piece of clothing that was five sizes too small. I could put it on my arm. I couldn't put it over my body. It didn't work. So what do you do with those things? You discard them or they go into a pile somewhere. And the Dharma, for me, went into the pile many times. So, I think it behooves us... we want to practice. We come to the place where we feel like... I think this lineage, this tradition, these practices are somehow very useful. And then we

meet people like Khenpo Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama and all of these people. And we think like, yeah, this is like, really good. I want to do this. Then, then we still got to find... what's the practice? What's the method? What's the thing that actually wakes us up?

[01:00:09] Some people can do it with discipline. ... That has never worked for me. It's like... I don't care. So for me, it's had to be... there are things I care about... I need to find the practice that... connects to those things. And then it's easy. Then it's just exactly what you always wanted to do anyway. And so it just follows naturally.

[01:00:45] [sound of bell] That is good. Thank you for ringing the bell. It's tomorrow.

sangha [01:01:02] *dedicating the merit*