

2018_02_25_am2_QA_LMC.mp4

working with obstacles and conceptual or experiential understanding, experience changes because of nature of emptiness, working with difficult situations as a gift from guru includes union of appearance and emptiness, more on obscuration of knowledge and assumptions, seeing experiences as fresh, the best approach to complex situations is to simplify our practice

LMC [00:02:12] Yes, so we have a time to... entertain questions or to be entertained by the questions. [laughter] Some mixture of the two.

Student 1 [00:02:49] My question is on defilements. So, Lama Michael, I was reading something this week and then I did some investigation and I thought I would ask you about it. So, you know, one way to look at the entire Buddhist path is... get rid of defilements, right? Eliminate defilements. So when I think about defilements, I use two references for myself. One of them comes from the Pali Canon, and the other one is something that you have taught in the past, which are the two obscurations. Now, when I look at the Pali Canon, there's the Majjhima Nikaya (sp?) number seven. It talks about sixteen defilements. And the sixteen defilements are you know the standard type, right. Attraction, aversion.

LMC [00:03:53] I'm intimate with them. [laughter] I don't know their names though. [louder laughter]

Student 1 [00:04:10] So... I mean, that's fair. [more laughter] Now, what's interesting is that we often say, you know, the five poisons, right. And I like that. It's straight and simple. But, when I started looking at the teachings a little bit more, it got more nuanced. So firstly, when you look at the teachings in the canon, they take the 16 defilements and say, if you are a 'stream enterer' you have eliminated these six. If you're a 'non returner', you have eliminated these four. And if you're on the path of arhatship, you have eliminated the remaining six. So that's their *view* of it. But then this week... what triggered this whole thing in my mind was... I was reading Sakya Trinzin's (sp?) book. And in that, he talks about the two obscurations. And he says the obscuration of defilements and the obscuration of knowledge. And he says, well, the obscuration of defilements, once you have eliminated the defilements... that takes you only up to personal liberation. But if you want to go all the way up to Buddhahood, you have to get rid of the obscuration of knowledge. So, he actually took it a step even beyond what I had read in the canon. And he didn't dive into all of the 16. But... so that's the background. Now, here's my question.

[00:06:14] My question is... [laughter]the one that troubles me most... when I think of defilements, I say, well, okay, these are the poisons. And so I leave it at that and so be it, you know. I'm happy. However, whenever *you* have talked about obscurations in the past, there's the part of it about obscuration of knowledge... that actually I don't really understand. Can you speak to that? I mean, I understand defilements. So, all of these defilements are there, okay. They are in my mind and I see it. But obscuration of knowledge, is that really getting into ignorance? Is that the piece? I mean, what is the obscuration... that is being eliminated... at that stage? Because obscuration of knowledge, I mean, you know, if you tell me to obscure knowledge, well, then I can't do surgery or I can't design a computer chip. What does it really mean?

LMC [00:07:22] You might be surprised... what you can do and can't do. ... Listening... to your erudition on the defilements... the *key* thing that strikes me... is that you have thoroughgoing... understanding of some material, but... it's highly conceptual. And at that level... of the conceptual understanding, we could go on about the conceptual end of it, more or less endlessly. And some people do. Some *groups* do. You might say there's defilement clubs [laughter] or just Dharma groups. They get together and talk about these things and defilements come up. In a nutshell, I don't want to... say too much about it... lest you see my defilements. The issue here is manifold. Like there's many, many aspects to it. So, from my own perspective, because I have so many of these things, my inclination is to understand them... in a summary form and also... even much more importantly, in an experiential form. Because that's really the issue. The experiential piece... when we're not aware of what our... *obstacles* are, on the path... then, they block us. So that awareness... could be, to some degree, the awareness *itself* could be triggered a little bit by a conceptual understanding. Just like we get a little... conceptual instruction about the meditation and then the objective... is to go into the experience of the meditation.

[00:09:53] So there's nothing wrong with... blowing off the experience and doing a *big* thing on the conceptual... but, ultimately, you have to come back to the experience. And when we talk about defilements, we can enumerate those also, which they have been... as you so eloquently pointed out, in many texts, in many traditions, kind of grandly... elaborated. We *still* have to come back to the experience... at some point. Even with... profoundly... perfect conceptual understanding. That may not... free us from the actual obstacle. And so we could summarize... of the many, probably hundreds of ways that it could be summarized, we could say the real issue here is... let me just take the obscuration of knowledge... which... *it tickles me*. Let me put it that way. [laughs] The obscuration of knowledge... *feels*... like it should be an oxymoron. Like you have knowledge. What's the problem... with that?!

[00:11:14] And, in a nutshell, the problem *can* be... brought down to the simple... understanding that... when you know one thing, that one thing you know... may or may not be accurate. In either case, it may not be possible to know something else by virtue of knowing *that* thing. We do that all the time, right? It's like, if it's cold outside, we put a jacket on. And we go outside and we come in here and we think when we're gonna go outside again... well, it's gonna be cold, but then it isn't. The weather's changed. And we have trouble... reconciling often, the... things that we think we know, when we find out that actually what we thought we knew isn't true. Sometimes we don't want to let go of what we've discovered. And so we continue to hold... the new thing, which feels to us like it must be better. We hold that as true. And then it takes a long time to get rid of that, or to change that, or to replace it with something more *nuanced*, because... we already have an opinion about *this*... piece.

[00:12:31] All of those things, I think... are *useful* in the context of our Dharma practice, by recognizing how those things work. So for me, the *specific*... obscuration, or the specific defilement, is not nearly as interesting... as my own experience, of whatever defilement is arising at this moment. That's the one that I want to look at. It reminds me of... when I asked my dentist which toothbrush should I use, and she says "*The one you use*". [laughter] And so, I feel like, in a way, this is really where we are with it. We need to work with the things that stand in the way... of our practice and our understanding of the Dharma. That's for sure. And each one of us has got a different set of... obstacles and obscurations and... misunderstandings and wrong views. All these things are there. But it's not my experience... that, in trying to work with them in a kind of organized way... is helpful. That's just *my* experience. I don't find it helpful.

[00:13:52] I find myself... like, wandering through a maze... of things... that are not connecting to my experience. Which means that at the end of the day... when I sit down... what caused me confusion and unhappiness the day before is still there... happy to keep doing that. *Whereas*, if I can bring my awareness to... some thing... that feels like an impediment of some kind, it's usually not very complicated. It's usually not very complicated. So I can have the experience, often joyfully, that... I went into this particular habit that I have.... that looks like it's causing... some difficulty, in just an ordinary way. Without any of the technical stuff, I look at it. Bring my awareness to it, in the context of the zhinay meditation... and just rest the awareness... *on that* for a short time. And in a short time... I can *witness*... the awareness sees... the experience. And in a short time, the experience itself... like all experiences do... it vanishes. It's just not there anymore. And usually, I don't see it go. I don't see it... leave the room, sort of. It's just gone!

[00:15:23] One of the early Karmapas explained that phenomena as, in essence... in the moment that we witnessed that we had our awareness on a particular experience and that particular experience was no longer there... what we have witnessed, first *conceptually*, to understand, that that's *possible*... because of the nature of emptiness. So, we often befuddle ourselves with the word emptiness. Which... can be talked a lot about... but, not so easy... to recognize the experience of it. But, every time that we place our awareness on our meditation on *something*... and that thing changes... it's *capable* of changing because of the inherent nature of that emptiness.

[00:16:31] So I would replace... my own personal preference... I'm not recommending it because I think that the conceptual is actually... can be very helpful. But it cannot replace the experience. The experience is what it is. And that's really where the big *juice* is. So... I think the conceptual piece is fine. And you should follow it, in whatever ever way you want, but really... what we're talking about is... what is my experience of the practice of the Dharma? How do I go deeper into it experientially? ... How do I overcome the obstacles that, almost without exception, I put in way of myself? Nobody else has to do it for me. I seem to be *quite* adept at that. And the most profound antidote that I found is... in the context of the meditation, bring your awareness to that very obstacle. If you can *recognize* the obstacle... the rest of it should be... really easy. *Easy*... when we're willing to *do* it, but often we *love* that obstacle. We identify with that obstacle. And we will not let go of it no matter how many times we have *insight* into the nature of emptiness. So... that's a very personal thing. No one can do that for you. You've got to do it yourself. And the instructions for doing it are robust, deep, profound and innumerable. So we shouldn't have to look too far to find a workable instruction for it. ... Just, finally to say, I'm completely, thoroughly aware that I did not answer your question. [laughter]

Student 1 [00:18:44] That's okay.

LMC [00:18:47] Now I will confess that that happened with no awareness on my part.

Student 2 [00:19:33] I think you've already halfway answered my question. I'm wrestling with a difficult situation on an experiential level. I got into a conflict with an employee and then... as a result of that, it became a conflict with my business partner as well. And it's been going on for some time and we've been trying to resolve it and not having much luck doing that. And so I find myself having this very layered... emotional experience around it. At an intensity level that I feel sort of *stupid* now, like my brain doesn't quite work right anymore, because this thing has so much *heat* to it.

LMC [00:20:45] I can relate to that too!

Student 2 [00:20:45] Yeah. I figured. This is why I'm asking. ... You know, it makes me realize there are a lot of situations in my life where, when something feels too intense to work with, I can actually walk away. Like I can do my best, and then if I can't get anywhere with it, I can just say, okay, I can't. I don't have the skill for this. I'm gonna step back from, from this for now. But this is one of those situations where I can't step away! Like, I need to go there every day. Uh, and it's just the three of us.

LMC [00:21:28] Yeah. You're lucky.

Student 2 [00:21:31] So.... I'm trying to find a way to relate to this as an opportunity and not as the *complete* torment that it feels like on a day-to-day basis. And I hear what you're saying about... just take that experience as the object... bring awareness to it... and watch what happens. And I'm trying to do that. But it still mostly feels overwhelming and I feel carried away by it. And it feels like more than I can work with. So I'm looking for, some advice or some guidance about what to do. I feel a little like... it must be sometimes for the folks in three-year retreat, like you can't just open the door and walk away. You're stuck there. If there is a conflict, you've got to deal with it. It feels a little like that, like I can't walk away. So how do I do something that feels like it's more than I know how to do?

LMC [00:22:40] Yeah.... that's good. ... There's a number of ways... that we can approach this from... a skillful means. ... First of all, we have the... what we've been talking about... placing our awareness on an experience. So first, I want to commend you for... raising a difficult situation in a public place, which means that everybody can get something from it. But I also acknowledge that, it's not always comfortable. So it might be that you want to continue it at some point, in another conversation, but let's say this... there is a kind of... terrifying teaching... to put a, just a very *slight*... spin of hyperbole on it... [laughs] where the teaching is that... if you have a teacher and your relationship is of such a magnitude that... you basically can do almost anything that person asks. Then when they bring you really difficult things, you have this practice of... receiving them as if they were, you know, a gift. Always a gift. Always a gift, always a gift... like that. And some of them are... joyful beyond imagining and others make you want to feel like just jumping off a bridge. But it's *always* the issue of... the gift always brings you an experience which you cannot deny. And that's what makes it the gift! Since you cannot *deny* it... you *must* work with it. If you could deny it, you wouldn't work with it. Because *that is the preferred approach*.

[00:25:57] I know from time to time, and I'm pretty much professional at that... skate on all difficult things. But... here we have a slightly different understanding. And the understanding here, if we come at it... *conceptually* first, and then look at it experientially, we'll see something. First of all... you have a situation that you feel like you cannot easily get out with. Or if you *could*, the sacrifice is at least currently unacceptable. So you're really stuck. And the *good* thing is, is that you have the tools to work with. So *that's* the important piece. If you're really stuck and you don't have the tools, then it's really *awful*. Awful for everybody... because it's like the smelly thing in the middle of the room and nobody knows where it's coming from or what to do about it.

[00:27:02] But in this case... we often talk about... horrific obstacles in the Dharma. Especially in this group of teachings and the methods that we talk about within the context of the Vajrayana, in Tibetan Buddhism.... we imagine *horrific* things. People and deities in the midst of flames and all, and these things often represent... exactly what we're talking about. Like it's so intense... that it's burning you up. And so what are you wanting to do in the midst of that! You can't put the

flames out. You're just there. So, *if* there is a means, and we *have* the means, if there is a means to... bring our awareness... to the *power* of that situation... then we have a grand possibility. And the power of that situation is important. Because, for example... you have an itch on your nose. That is I easy to deal with. [reaches up and scratches nose] And it's gone. So, no insight, right? It's like you don't *get* much for it. The itch is gone. It wasn't much anyway. It would have gone away in another three seconds. Who cares?

[00:28:39] We *need* to have... in order to make the large leaps... we need to have... some power. We need to have some... whatever you want to call it... power, energy... unavoidable-ness of some kind. Something that really... brings some energy into it for us. So that... when we place our awareness on the *experience* of the inevitable, which is like, I can't see how to do this *thing*. When you feel it, when you say that... that's a conceptual thing. Then you put your awareness on the *thing* which feels like it cannot be, cannot work. It's just untenable from every angle. And yet... it's a really strong experience. It's tenable from *that* perspective. So you need to put your awareness on this thing. Wind yourself up... and bring your awareness to that experience. You place your awareness on that experience. Sometimes we can have a sound. In one text... it even says that when the energy and that experience comes together, it says... there is a sound... that happens. Just the other day I was reading this. And for the first time I thought, I wonder what that sounds like? ... Think. [laughter] What is it? What exactly is it?

[00:30:09] I think that in the context, it was really just like... like we do so much in the Vajrayana, we *imagine* things. So it actually could be like... *hear the sound*... of the two coming together. It could be that kind of an instruction. Like you're bringing your awareness to something... that you don't want to bring your awareness to you. You wanna bring something that just annihilates it and gets rid of it. So instead of that, we're putting our awareness on this thing. And it's so intense that we hear a sound of the two of them coming together. But really what it is, is that we have to put our awareness there.

[00:30:50] And... there *is* a way that it magnetizes. We have that experience. We are... *intent* on... using it. And if you do this a number of times, it really is like... not so hard to get the intent... because as soon as that energy is gone, it's sort of like the magnetism is gone. When it's really at its peak, you bring your awareness there and it just... connects. And you have the experience, which could be like... sweating, your body's shaking, all sorts of things. But of course, what's really happening is... you're mixing all sorts of '*what if's*' into the middle of it, too. The more you put in there... the more the fire burns. But you also know, there's no fire here. It's not like we're gonna burn up. This is really just... the energy that's required in order to deal with what is otherwise a situation that I would gladly walk away from and never see again. So this is where that instruction of... when the guru brings you... the *gift*... you *cannot* turn it away. That's just a piece... of the commitment... that what comes, we work with.

[00:32:27] When your mind is resting on that... very difficult situation, in the moment of that resting there... it can feel like it's okay. And... because we *always* say... that the *appearance*, which is the situation that we're dealing with, right... we have this thing. *Conceptually* we can see it. And when we put our awareness on it, we can have the experience of it. This is all... in the realm of... what we could say... the appearance. But also, that thing doesn't stay there. We put our awareness there. We just hold it there for a while. And interestingly... once it's there... it tends to stick! Your awareness *sticks* there because there is, there is some sense that... this is the resolution. There's a sense of that. This is the resolution. So that it *sticks* there and then... we could even have a sense of joy. Like, yeah! And then suddenly we notice... it's gone. And then we have another appearance. Which could be summarized as... *damn!* It's just gone. That

then, when we say... damn... we're basically *not* having the experience, that was right there ready to be had... which is the union of the appearance and the emptiness. It goes because... it never was what it appeared to be.

[00:34:16] The emptiness that we've, you know, bandy about... is really just the *potential*... to arrive and go, appear and disappear like... because it's here now doesn't mean it will be here in the next second. The fact that it's gone now doesn't mean it won't be back. And... so that union, of the emptiness, the potential to be there, to be small, to be big, to be the source of insight, to be the source of confusion, to be a source of clarity... all of that... is there in that thing. So you can't put your awareness on it... and not have that experience... if you... stop talking to yourself about it while your awareness is resting there. It just is... natural.

[00:35:07] So we start with things that are not too big, usually. But it's my experience, actually... that the big ones... are really... where the benefit is... *if* we're willing... to just use that... as the object of our meditation. Without any intention, without any... ulterior motive, like... I'll get insight out of this... or I'll resolve the relationship or whatever. No. More like... no matter *what*... happens.... *this* is the thing to do. That kind of approach. And so every time that I'm walking around and I remember this, or I'm in a car or... I'm having lunch and I remember it, then we develop this habit... we just keep bringing the awareness to it... each time.

[00:36:03] And the interesting thing is... is that... [laughs] sometimes when we talk about shamatha, we want to place our awareness on... something. And it feels to us like trying to balance a marble on top of another marble. Yeah, I can put the marble on top of the other marble and I have stability for like a fraction of a second. And then it's gone. But when you place your awareness on an intense experience, it's like two magnets. It's really easy to just have them there. And once you've done that a few times and you feel... the idea of it being *unsafe* is ludicrous. Nobody knows you're doing it. Nobody ever has to know that you did it. And so it has this thing of... it's like *my* gold... my gift. It's a gift to *me*. And the gift to me is *not* the trouble. It's that... I *have* this tool, now for many years... and suddenly... I figured out how to use it. ... When the *feeling* of angst, which has to be connected with what you're talking about, when that feeling dissolves, then... there's a feeling of somehow wanting more... but it's gone. So you don't have the more. So you have to shift it, to what you thought would be impossible. ... *Kindness* and love for the persons that you felt this angst with. ... Okay? ... Anymore?

Student 3 [00:38:54] So this maybe a little bit of an add-on for myself from [the] question earlier, having to do with obscuration of knowledge and just... wanted to see if I was on the right track with looking at that... because I think I sort of had that this morning a little bit. How we obscure knowledge. So this is my conceptualization. I saw that... in a situation, let's say, it doesn't matter what the situation... I had an expectation... that... like this thing always happens when we do this thing. This just always follows that. And then... the thing that always followed that... was *different!* And it was like, oh, that can't be right. This has to be *this* way. And then it was like, no, that's what that *was*. Because I always thought that *this* thing happened, this other thing wasn't supposed to happen... I was sort of... letting myself... I guess, be confused by it. When it was really... there was really nothing to be obscured. I'm not saying it very well, but that was sort of my experience of it was, *oh*, maybe that's what... I was obscuring another truth because I thought this other truth had to be *it*. Is that more or less the right track? [laughter] Sorry to be so vague.

LMC [00:40:42] It's always nice to confess. I think that we have to also acknowledge that... there are a number of descriptions of what is commonly called the obscuration of knowledge. And the

one that we're working with right now, just for the sake of clarity, there's just one... variation on that. It actually is a rather complex... thing, often. Though, I like to simplify it. Because I find that experientially, if I simplify things, it's easier to work with them. But we also need to be clear... what it is that we're doing. But what you're saying seems fine. We have difficult situations where we are pained or where we... have conflict with ourselves and or with others and so on. ... And we stop and we look into the tool bag that we call the teachings of the Dharma to find a way to extricate ourselves from a difficult situation or... to find a way to help ourselves or help others. Sometimes we're doing something that you can't find in a book, but it's an inspiration from something that came from somewhere else, and so on. I think it's fairly easy, if you ask the question... when you're engaged in what you were just mentioning... whether or not that process was helpful... left you feeling more kindly toward yourself and others and so on... is a pretty good test of the veracity of the... approach.

Student 3 [00:42:43] Let's say, that it definitely didn't make me feel worse. It was more like, huh! You know... just seeing how much my assumptions... get in the way.

LMC [00:43:06] [laughs] It's helpful to keep, keep track of our assumptions, indeed. [laughter] They only get in our way when we don't see them. So seeing them is... is often as good as being without them. And you can't function very well without *some* assumptions, you know? I assume that if I'm going to drive somewhere, I need the keys to my car. You know, there's a *ton* of things where assumptions are very helpful. And then there's places where they become kind of... poisonous to movement.

Student 4 [00:44:11] I have a question. It's kind of related to, maybe partially a little bit related to, to your response to [the earlier question]. But, when you have, you know, some uncomfortable feelings or pain arrives and you put your awareness, during your meditation. And maybe.. in that session... it seems like it's.... kind of gone. That feelings are gone. But then [laughs]... later on, as you said, like when you're driving a car or eating or doing something or walking, all of a sudden, it pops up! And I'm like.... ohh, again! ... kind of feeling. And so it's kind of like... keeps on coming back. And also, when you have a little bit like... tender heart, you know, like.... things have started more and more like happening. It's like, maybe before... it was nothing. Like you just brushed it off, whatever. Some people say something, or you know, but then... you've started feeling like... gosh! Why? And then, like more, so many materials that I feel like I need to work with. [somewhat exasperated, ironic laugh] So, in this kind of a situation, what is the remedy? I mean, should I keep on putting awareness on all those feelings? You know, like every time I practice meditation or maybe not even like sitting meditation, but like, when you have, during the walk, maybe five minutes of break, you put your awareness on it so that *eventually* those are gone? Those feelings.

LMC [00:46:57] What if you discovered... that actually... it's not that they're coming back, but that each time it's brand new? How would you work with that?

Student 4 [00:47:14] Well... then... like maybe start over each time. Like, as if it's a new material.

LMC [00:47:27] Well, if it's new, then you are starting over, right?

Student 4 [00:47:30] Yeah.

LMC [00:47:30] Except... after a point, maybe you get used to starting over. Because obviously... if what came, whatever experience you had was there... and then it wasn't there. And then you find yourself saying to yourself, "Oh, here is this feeling again." Right?

Student 4 [00:47:54] Yeah.

LMC [00:47:54] But that's just you saying that to yourself. How do you know that's coming again?

Student 4 [00:48:04] At least it *looks* like the same material, so... [laughs]

LMC [00:48:09] Yeah. Well, the thing that's common... is [you]. [laughs] In other words, you're having an experience. And you're recalling the experience you had before. And you're putting an equal sign between those two. [both laugh] So a better *view* to hold, to kind of engage in this practice... like *teach* yourself this thing... could be really helpful. That... any experience you have, any thought that you have, any emotion that you have... it's never been there before. It's brand new.

[00:49:02] So one could debate all of that and say, well, I don't know... looks like it's new. It's not new. Just put all that aside. And try to develop the *ability* to see... each experience as new. No matter how much it... resembles... what was there before. You will find, I think, that actually... you may just have the experience... that *all* of your experiences... your thoughts, your feelings, physical experiences, all of this, that every last one of them... has never occurred before. Because there are differences between... what happened before and what's happening now... and it's just an ordinary thing. But within the context of the Dharma... engaging in the practice of imagining... at least... that every experience you have is new, is *fresh*... leads to... a certain kind of insight... a series of insights... that otherwise you don't get... when we keep reminding ourselves that... all of our experiences... pretty soon it's *all* of our experiences have happened before. This again. This again. This again. Oh, this one is from *that* person, again! Not from that person. Whoa! Another person is giving me that same experience that that person gave to so and so. It's totally crazy.

Student 4 [00:50:32] It is! It is. [laughter]

LMC [00:50:35] See, just talking about it, you go crazy. [laughter]. So, it's, I think that... this is really a profound... thing to come to understand. That... all of your experiences... are *continuously* arising... and disappearing. It's like clouds in the sky. You see a cloud in the sky. Tomorrow you come out, you don't say, "There's that cloud again!" You'd *never* do that. ...You understand. It's *not* the same one. Causes and conditions, the interdependence of things is all there coming together. So, there is a cloud that kind of looks like the cloud of yesterday, but. So there is a feeling I have that kind of looks like the feeling I had yesterday, but let's just admit it. It's not. That one is gone.

[00:51:36] It's the nature... of phenomena. It comes and goes. The interdependence is continually changing. That's *easy* for us to understand. That all things are arising dependent on all other things. This is not particularly Buddhist. I mean... any good scientist would say it. That's what happens. [laughs]. So all we're doing... is bringing that understanding into our experience... along with everything else... and kind of *viewing* our experience through that lens. It's *very* helpful. It's very helpful.

[00:52:14] So, the *blame* that we put on each other for... doing certain things... now you're doing this to me again, right? We have to step back and think... that's just not right. There's something wrong there. Like, I may feel hurt... and somebody may be trying to hurt me, but it's not the same... person or the same thing or the same feeling as I had yesterday. And that wakes us up a bit. So that we begin to feel like... other *solutions* are possible. Because... each one is... brand new. So conceptually... that's not so hard to get. Bringing it into our experience, so that we begin to experience that, is more difficult. But that's why we're practicing. None of us would be here if the job was done. We'd be out enjoying the sunny weather, right? [laughter] Okay?

Student 4 [00:53:19] Thank you.

Student 5 [00:53:27] I don't really know if I have a question, but I just had kind of a, my own reflection. What you were talking about as far as feeling like, you're in a small space and can't escape a certain sensation or conflict... is something that I've been working with for seven weeks, not that anybody's counting... [laughter]

LMC [00:54:00] Seven weeks?!

Student 5 [00:54:01] Seven weeks. Yeah, And I know that because I'm a full-time student. And so we have the weeks. [laughs]

LMC [00:54:07] So you can tell by virtue of the calendar on the wall.

Student 5 [00:54:09] Right. Yeah. So I'm a naturopathic student. And so, this quarter I'm at school six days a week and the seventh day I'm studying. So it's been, you know, kind of like a pressure cooker. And what has become my practice... is, one of my classmates in particular, has been *really* challenging for me and *very* triggering in so many different ways. And it's not like the kind of thing where you see someone at the store and you either wish them well or you get mad and leave. It's like every day I'm dealing with this. All six days. And it's honestly been a really freeing experience... to the point of bliss. Like, I don't know if I'm smiling, but it's been amazing. Because it's brought up so much for me. And basically, in a nutshell, this student has quite a bit of her own personal things that make it really hard to function in a pretty rigorous academic environment. She has addictive tendencies and is in an emotionally abusive relationship. Her partner lives off of her financial aid. She is constantly smelling like cigarettes, which is really hard for me. And shows up late or sometimes doesn't show up, which, as a student body is really embarrassing if we're working with patients. And kind of what I've found is that... the things that bug me the most about her... are a reflection of my own personal traumas or shortcomings or things that I do, maybe to a lesser extent. And so every time I want to label her as something, or judge her, or talk about her with someone else, I'm constantly asking myself what is arising in me?! And it's been *really* hard. Especially because there's a part of me that if I see it, particularly a woman suffering, I want to... do some sort of action. But what I feel right now is that my practice is not being mean. And not... in an energetic way, giving her anything more to somehow feel or deal with. And it to me, honestly, it's been a practice of equanimity to *not* act, because sometimes... I will act, and hold up signs and say things or be angry about a cause that I think is important. But it's actually just again, a sign of my own wounding. So, it's been this *huge* experience for me to come to the place where I can hold that and not feel much of a charge and picture what kind of person she will be in the future when she's worked through this. Because in my opinion, when people have gone through a lot, they have something really specific to give to others. And so... oh wow... pressure cooker! But I feel actually really thankful for this, even though it's been really hard for me.

LMC [00:58:13] As we all know, our lives can get... very complex. And... commonly, the more complex... things appear to us, the more... uncertain and the more confused or less clear we are about what's happening. And, I think any of us who have been studying and practicing the Dharma also... *that* can also get very complex. And some of you are sort of drawn towards it because... there's promise in it. And we want to keep learning more things. But my experience with that also is that... there are times when... the best approach... is to simplify. Simplify the *practice*... of what we're doing, in order to engage with various things. You need an approach... that, you can reach for, at any time... that is always helpful... in some way. So that, that approach becomes... valuable. Then, if it's a *good* approach, it'll be valuable in many different contexts... in your relationship with different people, in different situations and all. And sometimes when the situation gets complex, we try to *match the complexity*.... with our... Dharma practice. Which I think is a mistake. I think the complexity is better... coming after we have mastered the simple.

[00:59:58] So, again, like we were doing earlier this morning, the practice of shamatha, which is really the... the practice and skill of resting the awareness on an object. The object *moves*... often. And our mind also moves and *talks*... to us. You know, when we talk to ourselves about what it is we're doing, and so on. The more we can simplify and get that down to just one simple process, as a *basis*... is the most helpful. Best thing generally. Because what you want to do is... you're in school and you're teaching and all of these myriad things are happening... you want to get better. Most of the students want to get better at what they're doing. And of course, we don't start out, you don't start out studying physics with nuclear physics... or with how to launch somebody to another planet. You start out with simple things and gradually it becomes more and more complex. And in a certain way, we're just talking about the same thing. There's a lot of tools to work with and many of them *build* on each other. And if you leapfrog too many, you'll end up... really disappointed... in the result. And possibly the worst thing that we imagine as Buddhists is... you'll just abandon the path. With a sort of looking over your shoulder.... well I did that, that doesn't work. So, that's my sense, is that... coming at it, from a kind of clear point and just expanding *clarity* rather than adding more, is good. And I may have completely misread what you said. I'm very skilled at that. [laughs]

[01:01:54] We have to come to an end here. Is this it? [laughs] [sound of bell] Well, at least it is not a lead bell. So I appreciate all of you coming and that we had an opportunity to explore some things which, each of you had some sense of *exposing* some part of yourself, which is always feeling a little bit dangerous, a little bit risky. So I hope that nobody got hurt in that, and that it was useful. We're going to end it now. Personally, I look forward to... doing it again in the future. In the meantime, I hope you all *practice* well on these things so that when you come, you'll have some additional things... and something to *report*. [laughs] Okay, so back to the beginning. We will dedicate the merit and virtue of this session.

sangha [01:03:06] *dedicating the merit*