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starting with conceptual can change into the energy of experiential, interdependence (and karma therefore) not being solely responsible, practicing short enough to have moments of clarity, on the faults of samsara and seeing our confusion, more on karma, every thought is new

Student 1 [00:05:18] Okay... question. You were talking about... I can't remember the word you used, but the only way I can seem to come from... and I'm trying to create an experience of something as opposed to a conceptual understanding of it. The place I seem to need to go to is my body and sensation. Because in terms of contemplating impermanence... or precious human existence, if I go *there*... there is something to hook on to... my heartbeat, my breath... the sense that there is life in this body, there's vitality... that I can have some experience through that. But if I try to construct... or find an emotion somehow... I can't. It's very hard to do that. To come from a concept to... more of a sense of experience. And so I wondered if you could sort of elaborate on that a little bit more Michael, because I have a hard time with that. I can't construct an emotion; I can't construct an experience. I can *visualize* an experience that I might have had ...10 years ago, two years ago yesterday. And so, I'm confused about it.

LMC [00:07:27] You've just done a beautiful job of elaborating on it. [laughs]

Student 1 [00:07:31] I elaborated on it?

LMC [00:07:33] Yeah, you did it.

Student 1 [00:07:33] Oh, well, that's good! ... I have to come here...

LMC [00:07:40] Well, I mean, you could elaborate an experience by sticking a needle in your arm or something. ... Or... all sorts of physical things that you could do, that would bring about a certain experience. But of course, those are not the primary thing that we're looking at. We're looking at something that may very well begin conceptually and then it becomes an experience. So there's nothing in particular to elaborate there. I mean, the experience occurs. Presumably you're aware of the experience. And so you can bring your awareness to that experience as it unfolds.

Student 1 [00:08:32] But what if it's just a concept? It's conceptual. Just... okay, so let's say I'm contemplating impermanence. And I'm thinking about the weather and the trees and the change of season, whatever I'm doing. It's conceptual. How does one construct an experience... just by recalling something?

LMC [00:09:08] No, recalling... could *create* an experience. I mean, if I recall something, I may have an emotional response to the memory or something. That's a possibility. But I think that... some of the things that you would call an experience, you're not calling them an experience. So the experience should be... it could be *seeded* by... something conceptual. Like you're reading about impermanence and you realize, oh impermanence is also about your *death*. Oh, hadn't thought about that! And then maybe you have some feeling about... your coming death at some point. There's nothing to elaborate there. That's the point at which you would put your awareness... on that experience.

Student 1 [00:10:01] Maybe elaborate is the wrong word that I'm using here.

LMC [00:10:05] Well, construct is okay, elaborate is okay. I mean, if you elaborate on the experience of... impermanence, for example, if you kind of think it out. And you think, well, I know, it's like I normally I think of impermanence as... things that have a clear beginning and end. Right? And then maybe it occurs to you that actually... there are some things that don't have beginnings and ends, or at least that's how they appear.

[00:10:34] So then you may have an experience at exactly that point that goes along with the conceptual understanding. And the question is, in my mind, I think, can we... recognize that experience... or do we just kind of like... drive it to its end result along with the conceptual thing that we use to open the door in the first place? I think what we want to do is... we want to get that experience. So, that we can place our awareness on that experience because the experience is often powerful and *therefore*, if you can rest your awareness on it, sometimes you can have the experience of it really being stable. Your awareness resting on that experience.

[00:11:29] Anyway, at the very least, the experiment, the *investigation*... is best done when you can place your awareness on something. If you generate a visualization and you place your awareness on it... that's also a good example. In the beginning, it's a conceptual thing. You generate a visualization. And it's a *conceptual* thing in the sense that... your relationship with it is totally... with something that you're just now *fabricated*. But it may very quickly change... into something else. And that's an important piece. If it changes, then you have something that feels like... it has a lot more energy connected to it.

Student 1 [00:12:22] Mm hmm. Okay.

Student 2 [00:12:39] I had a question about karma, which may be... primarily conceptual, but it seems important. I know you said this morning, and I have read, that our actions influence our future. But I wanted to clarify, did you also say that our actions are solely responsible for our future?

LMC [00:13:16] What do you think? ... You sounded doubtful.

Student 2 [00:13:24] Well, if that's what you said, and I suspect that was... it's less understandable to me and I do realize you said also no one can understand it *until* they're enlightened. But, if that is true, that we are *solely* responsible, our actions in the past are solely responsible for what happens to us in the future.

LMC [00:13:53] Before you get too far with it... That's not the teaching. So whether I said it that way or not, it's still not the teaching. You are not personally... especially in this instance... *solely* responsible for the karma that ripens from your actions because you're connected to so many people, that... all of those people will be involved, likely, in your experiences. And they will have their own karma from things that they say and think and do. And all of those things are kind of mixing together. So *conceptually*, to think that one person would be *solely* responsible for their karma, or their experiences... is a little bit hard. It's a little bit hard to say that's what it is.

[00:14:53] On the other hand... *no one* can have *more* influence on their karmic proclivities over a period of time than *you* do. You're the one who is generating... words and feelings and actions in relationship to your experiences. So you have quite a bit of... for want of a better phrase in this moment... say... over what happens. Now, you may in fact not have very much say at all. I mean, in *theory* it looks like you have a lot, but you may not have very much... because you may be disabled. You may be sick. You may be dying. You may be being born. [laughs] It's like...

there's so many possibilities... that... this is, I think, why the Buddha said, short of full enlightenment, you cannot actually plumb the depths of karma and how it all works and fits together.

[00:16:00] Part of it is... I find it helpful to think of karma as, one of the descriptions, at least the partial description, comes from... thinking about interdependence. The interdependence of all things. So, if that were *not* true, you'd have a hard time thinking of what karma could be. But when we think of *all* things being interdependent, we have some kind of an understanding from that of what karma looks like. So *everything affects everything else*. Just take it from a science perspective, right, of the interdependence of things. Many of those things we feel like we can see... and witness... and many of them we can't see at all. But we are influenced by them and we're affected by them.

[00:17:03] I like in particular in terms of going into the, the place where we have a sense of what we're really talking about, where it feels clear... I understand *this* much. And then there's that place where... he's talking about... if you plant rice, you can only get rice. He starts there, right? You can't get wheat and you can't get corn when you plant rice. But then he goes on to say, but actually, sometimes you do. And his explanation was... not necessarily kind of some kind of magical, whimsical thing, like you plant rice and you get corn. But rather that just due to the myriad of influences, including genetic and everything else, I suppose he could have said, but he didn't... but my guess is he could have... and maybe he was referencing that... that things happen... that you can't quite... predict. And sometimes what happens... the thing that you couldn't predict, is actually... kind of remarkable, what happened.

[00:18:16] So all of that was, was meant to be... no matter how smart you are, you will not be able to get this down into a package... where the pieces all like, you can see how they influence each other. You might be able to find a lot of them and it's clarity. But there is still this overarching thing of... if you take the boundary off of our... *being*, not just as a human being even, but as a *being*... that is to say, our sentience... and you throw *that* out into the middle of the pond... now you have something that's very unpredictable. You really can't say what that is going to do or what's going to happen. All sorts of things could happen, at the point where... the boundary is off... in terms of where did this life begin? We can place a date and time on that, but we can't place a date and time on where *you* began. On where your sentience... your mind began... and where you began having form, multiple forms, one after the other... lives. Living and dying. And were you human all the time, or not? If you go into *that* place, you're likely to have a different experience. But it won't likely give you any more clarity. ... Because the more that you take the boundaries off, the more unpredictable the whole thing is.

Student 2 [00:20:12] Thank you.

LMC [00:20:14] You sure? [laughter]

Student 2 [00:20:14] I am, yeah.

Student 3 [00:20:34] At the risk of making this very mundane...

LMC [00:20:36] Oh, there's no risk there. [laughing]

Student 3 [00:20:42] Since I publicly was... very confused a couple of weeks ago at your instructions of meditation, I just wanted to tell you in terms of a practicing three breaths, you

know, at a time and then maybe a little bit more. And I was very skeptical and like, ah aah, I'm so confused! Just want to tell you, I've been doing that and it's been very helpful.

LMC [00:21:04] Can I just say that again, a little slower?

Student 3 [00:21:06] Sure. A few weeks ago, two weeks ago or so, I was very confused because you gave the instructions for meditation, calm abiding of just do three breaths at a time. Call that your meditation for a little bit. Try again. Don't practice bad habits, so to speak. You know, don't call something meditation that isn't successful. Does that ring a bell at all?

LMC [00:21:39] I wasn't sure what the successful thing was there. What was that?

Student 3 [00:21:42] Well, basically practicing only when you are pretty sure you can keep your attention on the object of the meditation. That was my understanding. Obviously, I'm probably misunderstanding it... by the look of confusion on your face.

LMC [00:22:00] Yeah, I think we have a misunderstanding there. The instruction for that practice was meant to be that if you could have a meditation session... that was short enough, you would be able to have a moment of clarity, of stillness. That was the point. So if you want to sit down and have a very clear, no distracted meditation session and you set it for like an hour, the likelihood... that any of us could actually maintain the clarity uninterrupted without distraction for that hour is very small. And so the point in that particular instruction was to bring it back to the place where... the *session*... is defined... as short enough so that you are virtually guaranteed of success. That instruction was given by, I believe it was The Third Karmapa, to cut things back to *much shorter* than one breath. And... so anyway, that's what it was meant to be. And I'm sorry that it wasn't clear somehow. But sometimes also, sometimes the teacher is not so clear. You've probably met one or two. [laughing]

Student 3 [00:24:02] Well, by practicing very short little mini-meditation sessions within a longer session, I've achieved success. By practicing like three breaths of meditation and then sort of taking a little mini-break... and then doing another little mini-session of two or three or four breaths or whatever, and then taking a little mini-break and saying, okay, I'm not meditating right now. And then doing it again, maybe doing seven breaths, okay. I seem to be building up, where it's, I feel like I'm achieving success. I feel like that's working. So, whether that was intended or not, it seems to be working. Thank you.

LMC [00:24:47] Well, I think, let me just add that of course, The Third Karmapa did not say... what I intended to say, which was... to cut it back to like three to seven seconds, something like that. And of course, he didn't use seconds. They didn't have stopwatches back then. But he said much shorter than one breath. And so, I just elaborated on my own, took, took the thing to court, you know. So, the thing that was clear was that if you tighten it up small enough, you can have a session where you have the experience that that session was free of distraction. And I think for many of us that, in the first instance, we might feel like... it's a kind of useless thing. Yes, if I tighten it up close enough, then I won't have any distraction, but what do I get for that? And I think the answer would be... what you get for it is a session with no distraction. And in *that* moment, you actually *know* something about what no distraction looks like. But if you're having some clear 'no distraction meditation' and you just keep riding it... in the end, what you know is... what distraction looks like. We're all experts at that. So, that was an effort to... try his suggestion a little bit and see like, well is that helpful? To be able to get two or three seconds and see like, well, that was pretty good.

[00:26:36] And the instruction of... *do not wait until distracted*. If you're doing that, go for a couple of seconds, close it. Just relax. Let it go. Then do another one, two or three seconds. Relax. Let it go. So I think, from my own experience, and from some feedback that that was a *useful* thing to do. But that doesn't mean that it's useful and helpful to everybody. ... I have not personally encountered that instruction yet. [laughs]

Student 4 [00:27:34] So thank you, Lama Michael, for your teachings over the years and the many repetitions of these particular teachings... The Four Thoughts. So I'm a slow student and I hear them over and over again. And each time it seems there's a little different understanding or I think I get something out of it. So today, when talking about the faults of samsara, which is always the one that I think I have down the best, you know. I got that one. [chuckles] It's easy. Just look around. So something you said today, really touched something meaningful for me, that I thought I got. But probably *didn't* get it. So, I'm looking for a little expansion on that. So, what you said was... if it's broken, it's working. [LMC laughs] So I came to the Dharma, to the teachings out of that broken place, you know... seeing the brokenness in my own life and elsewhere. And I find it very... and of course, the Dharma has been, you know, so precious and rich and helpful for me... and... although I think you've said this before in different ways, but I find it very difficult to... just let that be. That if it's broken, it's working. The inclination to want to... make it better. Fix it. Find, you know, better ways. So could you elaborate on what you said, that if it's broken, it's working?

LMC [00:30:10] We might be making too big of a thing out of a joke. For one thing, when we say the faults of samsara, and there's other examples of this in the many teachings... on various practices, that we assign a fault to a practice... sometimes.

[00:30:39] Samsara *is*... kind of, the world of confusion, which we, we mostly know quite a bit about it. Because it's not confused, *separate* from the sentient beings, you know. [laughs] If it's just a pond of water or something and nothing living is anywhere nearby this, you wouldn't say that... it's broken or that it's samsara somehow. The faults of samsara really means... the things that we are drawn to and engage in that bring us more confusion and more pain and more suffering and all of these things, and, and we just *keep trying harder*. Partly because most of us, if not all of us, have had the experience of... something didn't work and we tried harder and then then we managed to get it to work. Like, legitimately, authentically... well, it worked finally. I figured that out. It works!

[00:31:56] And we try to do that with samsara, but samsara doesn't, is not amenable to that. Because it's *not something else!* You can say... the fan is broken, the car is broken, the water line is broken. All sorts of things. To call *samsara* broken, though, is a joke. Because there isn't any samsara, separate from... the confusion of sentient beings. And *that*... by definition... is broken in the sense that... we don't see... that we are the ones who perpetrate that. It's not coming from some other place to us. *We are that samsara*.

[00:32:44] So, we also talk about it as if it was somehow external. *Commonly*, we talk about it as if it's external. And sometimes we even *personalize* it, and say I've got too much samsara in my life. I need to get out of samsara. And it's a confusing way of talking about the thing. We really should own it, I think to be really clear. Like I'm confused today because... certain things happened and that got me kind of confused. And then I really tried to figure it out on my own and it seemed to get worse still. And I just don't know what to do. And you could *blame* it on samsara... in a certain way that might actually be helpful. To just say, it's just the nature of

things. This *is* what samsara is. You think you can fix it. You try to fix it and then it appears more broken than ever. And then you think, well, that's one, but I'm sure by three or four tries, I'll get it better. And it just gets worse and worse. If it *doesn't* get worse and worse, then you might say, you might wonder like, well, what happened that was working? That actually brought some clarity out of it.

Student 4 [00:34:24] So then the, the benefit of the *not* working part is just that, just the recognition?

LMC [00:34:32] If you see it.

Student 4 [00:34:33] Yeah, yeah.

LMC [00:34:35] In the moment that you actually see what's going on, it's kind of like... you're not in it. It's not like you have to drive across town to get to samsara. It's with you all the time. You are it! [laughs] And so it's really that same thing that we have in so many of the meditations. The moment that you *see it clearly*... it's as good as if it was never bad. It's like just, it's okay... when you see it clearly. And *likely*, you will be able to do the skillful thing... if there are others involved. Not always. But if the thing that you think was skillful isn't skillful, you probably also see how it was, what you did there. And also there's some clarity there, too. And that's where I think...that this works for me... when I get *inexorably* confused. I want to just *stop*. And just put my awareness on the *experience*! Not the puzzle, just the experience. The *feeling* state of it, you know. I find that most helpful. Give up. Give up. The feeling is still there. It's okay.

Student 4 [00:36:00] Thank you.

Student 5 [00:36:08] Lama Michael, last week Bill used the expression, I think it was last week, about *seeing the edge of our practice*. And this week was a week of coming up against two cliffs, you know, where it just dropped off. Oh, that's the edge. That's the edge. One of them has to do with... and I hadn't thought about it as karma, but this morning it was kind of surfacing as an aspect of cause and conditions. There can be a situation where I can see clearly but not clearly enough. And to use a simple example would be... reading something and having bad thoughts and actually putting them into words about Trump or whatever. But that's one situation. The harder one to deal with... is when it's closer... and it's a close friend of mine who's hurting and wish to protect, wished that not hurting, wish, you know, and wish to be of help. And then seeing... clearly, but not clearly enough, being like a willful child and thinking and saying bad... negative thoughts about someone who's hurting my friend. And *seeing*... but not stopping. So, seeing clearly but not seeing clearly enough to not go ahead and say that, or think that. Because of my anger and my grieving and my desire... that they weren't hurting. ... I'm asking for help... [laughing] to get past that point. It's like when I used to want to stop swearing. First, I had to hear myself *after* I swore. Finally, I heard it *while* I was swearing. Eventually I could stop swearing. But... I'm stuck... here.

LMC [00:38:58] Yeah. Mm hmm. Stuck. You don't sound *really* stuck. I mean, not more than ordinary stuck-ness, you know. So... if you had some kind of an agenda... about something... within the context of what you're talking about, and you were elaborating that agenda over and over again. Then I think it'd be fair to say, you're stuck! It's like an old LP record album, you know. It just keeps going around, going click every time around. And you can't stop it. You can slow it down and it just clicks slower. Speed it up, it just clicks faster. You can't get away from it.

It's now built in. It's now the consequence... of so many clicks. Now it only clicks. It doesn't do music anymore.

[00:40:12] And... we do that with ourselves, of course, regularly in ways that we don't even notice that they're necessarily harmful or helpful. We just *do* them. Because an awful lot of what we do is just the playing out of our... reactive patterns... whatever the pattern is. Might be useful, might not be. But a reactive pattern, generally... will cause some problems somewhere down the road. And it's kind of like if you drive your car long enough, you'll run over a nail. So it's just, in time... the reactive pattern... is bound to play out... at an *inauspicious* moment when more negative things are the consequence. Those are, in a way, if we don't hold the *view*... of *expecting* the unexpected, kind of. If we don't hold that view, then we're likely to get caught. The reactive pattern is plain and suddenly there's something new there. And we didn't see it. And we don't know where the new thing came from. And so, we're taking refuge in our own samsaric, reactive pattern in order to escape it. Which will just... have *two* reactive patterns instead of one.

[00:41:46] So, I think that's why the advice from Tsoknyi Rinpoche, is that... you have to watch this thing more careful than you think. Because, while we do say it's true.... if you want to grow rice, you plant rice. If you want to grow wheat, you plant wheat. You can't just have whatever you want. You have to plant the *right* thing. So that's where the key is. You have to plant the right seed. But *even* the right seed, by everybody's definition, may actually... bring about a result that you didn't expect. ... Because... your input... your causal conditions that you added to it... are just a small piece of the total... swirling around of causes and conditions that we just call kind of like, the causal pool of things. They're not all yours ever. So you can *feel* like you planted all the right seeds. I love that person. I was kind to them and all these things... and still... after my whole life, they still hate me. It happens, right?

[00:43:10] It does happen... or vice versa. No matter how much you dislike them, they love you. [laughter] It happens! It's just because you can't predict the result of every causal condition. If you say something nice to 10 people on the street, they'll probably all appreciate that... some *small* thing. But every once in a while... somebody will say, "Screw you!" And you went, What? Where did that come from? Probably the *last* person that they talked to on the street. [laughs] And you can't see that and you can't do anything about it. So... you can do something about it from your *own* side. Which is why, of course, all of the emphasis on The Four Thoughts Turn The Mind. We're talking about The Four Thoughts that turn *my* mind. The practitioner's mind. We're not talking about turning *other* people's minds. We have to start... with *our own mind*. We don't even have full say about *that* because of all of the karmic patterns and consequences from way back... before this life. But... at least in the moment, we have the possibility of implementing whatever we're able to do. And we can see that and experience that.

Student 5 [00:44:46] So, what I think I heard was... when I'm aware of all the other reasons why... all the other things going on in a situation... and I can be aware that... I shouldn't think or say this about the person who caused the hurt. ... It sounds like just pause again and ask myself... so by saying the negative, and or having the negative thought, or saying the negative thing, what am I planting? ... It would be like stopping, putting myself on hold and saying, "what are you planting here... if you say that?"

LMC [00:45:47] Yeah, I think that's kind of the most clear thing there. And Tsoknyi Rinpoche makes the point that, I like the little teaching on... usually you plant rice, you get rice, but *don't count on it!* You know, almost always it will, but we already know like seeds fly around in the air all the time and they land in your field and suddenly you've got something that doesn't even

belong to you and then you're in court because it grew in your field. [laughter] So, I mean, *that's* the reality today. And I think the analogy is totally apropos. Because somebody walks into this room and says something, you can say something that... coming from the person who is speaking, it is neither harsh nor kind or anything, it is like totally flat. And *yet...* depending upon what my last experience was ten minutes ago... it could make me angry. It could make me sad. It could make me cry. It could make me laugh. And the person who walked into the room... has no sense of that. "What happened?" So, he's just saying you need to look at this, train yourself to like, work with this. Hold the view that... these things unfold. This *is* the nature of samsara. It is working. So, it's not really broken and it's not... the *faults* of samsara are not samsara's fault.

[00:47:31] There's no such thing as samsara! You know, it's like we paint it a certain way and we try to understand why we're confused. And in our effort to understand our confusion and to reconcile it and get past it... to be helpful to ourselves and others... we make more mistakes sometimes. So, it's helpful to know I'm in a situation right now, where... I actually don't know... I don't even know the grain that I'm flipping over the fence, whether it's actually a seed or not, it could be a pebble. So... if we hold that view enough, we get used to... seeing the unexpected. And when we see the unexpected clearly and it's not mixed with our attachment and aversion and personal identification with being successful when it looks like we've failed, we're far more likely to do something skillful... for ourselves and for others in that place. Even if we can just say, I'm totally amazed. I'm totally amazed. I cannot imagine where that came from. It just did. Just... there it was.

[00:48:47] So... I have to say, the whole teaching by Tsoknyi Rinpoche, which I really highly recommend, his whole teaching on this is on the Web with point made that... he has no claim to it, like you can do anything whether you want. ... Because he knows you will anyway, of course, so... [laughter] so, kind of like, why put a claim on it. That's just problems. It's really quite nice. Yeah.

Student 5 [00:49:23] Thank you.

someone off mic [00:49:23] Is that from a book?

LMC [00:49:26] No, he says in the beginning of it online... that he asked his students to gather up some of the teachings that had been recorded and to write some things that would specifically be for the Web. So, that's what caught me because that's where I was. And so I thought ohhh.... that's pretty nice! And when I read the whole thing, I just thought, well, that's one of the *clearest* explanations of The Four Thoughts That Turn The Mind I've ever read. So, if you know Tsoknyi Rinpoche or know something about him and you have access and all, I recommend just going and getting it and reading it and *delighting* yourself. It's really pretty, pretty cool.

Student 6 [00:51:07] Hi Michael, a question about the causes of suffering. So for the past few years, I've been researching, interviewing and spending time with socially engaged Buddhists in Southeast Asia who hold the view that... a good deal of our suffering, not *all* of it, is caused by unjust social structures and institutions. And my question to you is, is that a wrong view?

LMC [00:51:39] Oh boy! ... [off mic comment from Bill "we don't have time..."] Thank you buddy! [laughter]

LMC [00:51:57] You know, you could say that... about anything that causes harm. So, aside from our legal system and the legal system in other countries, which some of us might say, not such a great legal system... sometimes. ... I think, why would that *not* be true? I mean, it's not a guarantee that it *is* true, but... you couldn't say that... unjust social and legal systems never cause anybody any trouble. We wouldn't say *that*. So I'm not sure what difference it is, you know as... well, what's the difference?

Student 6 [00:52:48] Conversely, is it just our own personal greed, hatred and delusion that are the cause of suffering?

LMC [00:53:04] My own personal greed, hatred and delusion. Mmm. What do you think?
[pause].

Student 6 [00:53:13] I'm asking you.

LMC [00:53:13] Yeah, so what. [laughter]

Student 6 [00:53:25] I'm trying to figure it out.

LMC [00:53:29] Well, I mean, what's *special* about that? Is it because you're putting it into an Asian country somewhere or is it... I mean, if your next-door neighbors were in a fight and they were unhappy and suffering. They were fighting over sheep or money or whatever it was, you might say greed, hatred, delusion. There you are. And that could be in downtown New York. But it would be the same pain, the same issues as you got in some foreign country. What would you say that's different in this context? ... Now I got you. [laughter]

Student 6 [00:54:16] No, I wouldn't say there's anything different because there's a lot of... I just see a tension between these two views of like... seeing suffering as caused by these external forces versus *solely* personal ones.

LMC [00:54:31] I think they're both! I mean, we can say it's all internal in the end because it's you who's suffering, whoever that is. So, oftentimes when we suffer, we blame... an external cause for it, but the external cause is not my suffering. It's that suffering that somebody else is having. And it may cause me, it may be connected to me having suffering. I think there's a lot here that's just simple and clear. It doesn't really matter what culture you're in, where you are in the world... the forces seem to me to be the same. Of course, there's cultural differences... which can lead to variations on the suffering and how people relate to certain things that happen, but fundamentally... what's the difference? What's the difference?

Student 6 [00:55:40] I guess, just... take that cultural piece, the Southeast Asian piece out of there. Because you know, a lot, there's a lot of socially engaged Buddhists around the world who feel the same way. It just so happens that I'm studying them over there. You know, but there's lots of people that I've met *here* that feel the same way. So, it is not dependent on the culture over there or anything.

LMC [00:55:58] Okay, so now we've got *that* aside... What's left? [laughing]

Student 6 [00:56:03] My original question, though... it's just like... is it worthwhile from like, say like a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, to attempt to reorder our structures and institutions in order to reduce suffering? Is that ultimately going to lead to happiness?

LMC [00:56:21] Well... I have two off-the-cuff... thoughts on it. One is... yeah, you can reorder things so that everything's more helpful... to people. Where, or maybe it's kind of like Thangtong Gyalpo's building suspension bridges in Tibet over rivers and things. One of his motivations, according to him, was commerce will happen across the bridges now. So, it'll be more easy for people to move around and do things. That sort of thing can happen. That's pretty much external. And yet... there it is. The result of somebody who put their own personal... life into... building these things.

Student 3 [01:02:58] I think I want to make an addendum to that question. I work in a field where I'm supposed to be helping people. And sometimes that works and sometimes it doesn't. I'm wondering if your question relates to the idea that there are two realms... where people don't practice any sort of religious or spiritual practice or Buddhism. One is the God realm where everyone has everything that they want... and so they don't feel any need to. On the other one is the... I don't know exactly what realm that is, but it's the realm where people don't have enough. They're counting rice out that happens to fall from someone else's... packet on the side of the road. And they're counting grains of rice and they literally don't have time to do anything other than try to survive moment to moment. And I'm wondering if there... is an answer.... is there some relationship between... those of us who are somewhere in the middle of those extremes... and so we are encouraged to practice yet... and have time to practice... versus maybe doing something to help those who don't have time to practice or don't realize... maybe they should practice? Anyway. Just a thought. Thank you.

LMC [01:05:14] I don't know. You know... question's not clear to me. What it is that you're looking for there?

Student 3 [01:05:28] Okay. Truth in advertising. I wasn't really asking a question. [laughs].

LMC [01:05:32] Your comment was not clear. [laughs]

Student 3 [01:05:34] I guess my comment is that... and I was trying to be respectful by asking a question, but I wasn't really asking it. But, it's my own... personal conclusion... for this time being, right now... in answer to my own... wondering about that same thing is that... to the extent to which social circumstances are creating gods... and people who are so poor... that they don't practice, then perhaps the social circumstances should be addressed. To the extent to which I'm able to address them. And for those of us in the middle... where we have time to practice, we should practice, I guess, is what it comes down to. And I do what I can... to help those people who are... so poor in various ways that they cannot. They don't have time to practice or they don't have the wherewithal to practice... to see if we can get them to a place where they can... practice. If that makes any sense. And try to work in the political realm to some limited extent to help people... to change social circumstances so that there are more people who can practice. If that makes any sense. But that's kind of where I'm coming from.

LMC [01:07:14] So are you asking... how we could change... the social... I'm not clear at all... what the issue is. Bill?

Bill [01:07:29] I think your, your confession that it wasn't exactly a question was really the key to that.... basically.... if we have time to practice, we can devote *some* time to... helping people in very practical ways... and we can also practice. And people who are so... bedazzled by their success, apparent success in samsara...they're not going to practice. The people who are...

scraping for... for fumes in the metabolic tank... are not going to practice. To mix metaphors rather radically. [laughing] So... but we're in a place where we do have, we do have some opportunities. Yeah, opportunities to practice. We have opportunities to be of help. [something said off mic] I had the advantage of being able to think about it after the fact. [pause]

Student 7 [01:08:43] So, my question... I don't think falls on the heels of that, but I'm gonna make it so it sounds like there's a thread there. [laughter] So, Lama Michael, when you you're talking about karma... you said two things that I'm... wanting to chew on more. You said we can delete our own karma.

LMC [01:09:13] That was Tsoknyi Rinpoche's comment.

Student 7 [01:09:13] Okay, right.

LMC [01:09:14] But it's interesting...

Student 7 [01:09:14] Okay, then you can pass it on to him.

LMC [01:09:16] Yeah, I do....

Student 7 [01:09:16] And then also... karma does not exist... because it relies on causes and conditions. So you said it doesn't *actually* exist. So how can we practice deleting our karma and practice seeing... that karma doesn't exist?

LMC [01:09:37] Yeah, I think there is a... yes, I stand by that [laughs] but, it requires a little bit of explanation. I think we make... a mistake sometimes in talking about karma as if it *did* exist. In that way... I can remember being in a Dharma center in San Francisco where, gosh, it was just really common, people, people would say, "Well, that's your karma." you know, if something happened and "That person has really bad karma." They're doing this and they're going to have this karma as if we *knew* how all those threads fit together and wove into... a jacket or something, you know? And... so I think the point was, is that... karma does not exist like *that*. It does not... it doesn't *reside* in some place. It's in a certain way like the weather. The weather can be predicted because we know many of the causes and conditions that move things around... in the weather. And in the same way, we can talk about things like that... with karma, too, but not with anywhere near as much precision. So... I think that was my intention with that. Not sure if there was something deeper that you were looking for?

Student 7 [01:11:17] I don't know if it was something deeper. But, when we're... talking about karma... in that way... when you were first explaining in San Francisco where the people would say, "Oh, that's your karma." Are we creating more karma by doing that? Are we... like going really off the wrong track, [laughs] by getting it wrong?

LMC [01:11:48] Yeah, I think we get confused. I don't know that is particularly really bad, but it's confusing. It's confusing if we *believe* our own confusion. That definitely makes things worse. It's very difficult for us to not believe our own confusion. That's why... it's confused. And so at, I think it's better, I mean, most of our teachers would say, don't talk about karma like you know what it is and how it works and all of these things. You're gonna be *much* better... if you understand what it is... that will bring about... positive results and consequences. And just focus on that. Forget the rest of it.

[01:12:41] And Tsoknyi Rinpoche has an interesting piece in here. I don't know if I see it right off... but right where he's talking about the wheat and the corn and those things... he says "...with a certain cause," like you say, some are really negative to somebody and you think they're gonna be really angry. But he says there was "...a certain cause, different conditions come into play and the fruition of that cause might change. Because it's possible to introduce different causes and conditions, we can change the fruition, we can change the result. But even this is not permanent. How do you know it's not permanent? You use logic to see it." And then he goes on a little thing there. It's not permanent because we see it change. We experience it changing. So... permanence, anyway, can never be found. So in that way, it's all pretty much clear.

[01:13:45] And yet... there's so many teachings on karma that you can easily, if you're not careful, get the impression that karma *is* something. It's actually at the corner of X and Y, down there, you can go down and see it. It's standing there. I mean, we get so wrapped up in it. And especially if it comes from... an authority... even *more* likely, we can get confused from it. My sense is that... if you can be reasonably confident that the causes and conditions that you're kind of *unleashing* from your own side... into the world are positive things, that's probably as good as you can get. ... Is that okay? Yeah. I don't know. I didn't know whether you were frozen there or...

[Student off mic] [01:14:51] I was wondering about the deleting.

LMC [01:14:54] Oh, the deleting. Yeah, he does mention that. Yeah, that's kind of a shocking.... word there, yeah. And I don't want to apologize for him or explain what it is that he said particularly... but it's in the context that I was just reading. Where he's saying you can't actually take into account all of the causes and conditions that bring about a certain kind of karma. And there are certain kinds of *actions* that actually *delete* previous karma. But it wasn't said in the way of... if you need to delete some karma, this is the button you push [laughter] to delete that karma, else we would all own that button. [more laughter] Yeah.

Student 1 [01:15:51] Okay, well, this is actually a conceptual question, but it's something that I've been chewing on for a while. On one hand, we all, or I, am filled with... habitual, afflictive patterns and habits of mine. They're habitual and perhaps they started early on in life or perhaps transferred from who knows... what life. On the other hand, I've heard you say... many times, every thought is new. That every moment is a new moment. And every, maybe I'm misinterpreting this, but every moment brings... a newness to it. And that... there is no thought that's the same as the last thought. And I'm trying, with my mind, to put these two together. I *know* there is a relationship there, but...

LMC [01:16:59] What are the two? Old and new? [they laugh]

Student 1 [01:17:02] Old habitual! You know, patterns of mine that I experience... when I can experience them or able. And also the fact that... nothing repeats itself. So could, could you say a few words about that? So I don't have to continually scratch your head and...

LMC [01:17:25] Think of some something new to say about it. [laughter]

Student 1 [01:17:28] Right. Purely conceptual question.

LMC [01:17:31] Well, yes and no. That... if you can... hold the view... and I think this is actually the key to it... because we're not actually... defining something here which is objectively real or not real, new or old. We're talking about something else. And the *view* is... every thought is new. Let's just start with that. Every thought is new. So, the approach to that, in order to unwind, or back away from... the sense that no, actually... almost every one of my thoughts reminds me of other thoughts... that I've had. But if you look close, you can have the sense of... well, it has to be new. Even if, even if it was a green marble that was delivered every day to my door, we would at least theoretically say, can't be the same *exact* marble. Something's changed with it, even if I can't see it.

[01:18:38] But in this case, we have a thought, which maybe... actually is pretty clear to us. It's like somebody told us that they had a black cat. And then the next day we remember that they had a black cat. Now, remembering that we heard something is not the same... as hearing it. Right? So we may have said, oh, I already knew that. But that's not the same as the person saying that the neighbor next door had it. And when we remember it a month later, we will say to ourselves, possibly... I'm remembering that black cat again. But then you're going to have to admit, you've actually never seen the black cat. That was just something you heard from somebody. Every thing that we think and remember has these kinds of... *caveats* to them. They're not quite what they appear to be. You can remember something over and over a hundred times in 10 minutes, but every memory of it will be a little different than the one you had before. So, if you hold that view... there *is* no thought... which is not fresh. They're *all* fresh. They've never occurred before. If you hold that view and watch the thoughts and the experiences come in, you will definitely have... if you've never done that before, you will definitely have... an unusual experience. I highly recommend it.

[01:20:15] It's a *fascinating* experience to watch... your own mind go through that. That each thought, each memory, each thing that you recall, you hold the *view*, kind of like a lens through which you look at this thought that comes in, that this thought is brand new. It's never been here before. Okay, it *looks* like somebody I know or some thought I know, but actually... it's not. If you walk out the door and walk down the street and come back in, we will say, "Oh, there's Jan." But you could *also* say, "No. I'm not the same person who walked out the door." And somebody might say, "Well, that's kind of splitting hairs, isn't it?" And, and you could say "Not *exactly* splitting hairs because I walked out and I had this experience and this experience, and then I saw... a person who I'd heard had died last year and I had a *really* big experience with that." So, no, we're not splitting hairs. We're not splitting hairs. We're going from the clear, subtle, little bit difficult to grapple with, to the place of... I can see, if I *stop*... and pay attention... that *no thought occurs* that ever occurred before. But when I'm just in a conversation and we're sitting here having this talk, I have the experience of... things occurring over and over again. But when I stop... just for a moment, with *no* effort at all, it all feels like... it's never happened before.

[01:22:04] And I think that is just the power of the simple view... that there is no such thing... as a thought... or a feeling... occurring twice. Everything is new. And we can say, well, that's just a cool thing to do. You know, you feel different about doing that. That certainly is true also. It's helpful in our relationships. You don't think of the person that you're related to in a certain way as being like that tomorrow or the next day or the day after. And when they say something that you had a certain response to... now you hear the same words, but maybe... because you keep seeing things through this view, you don't interpret the words in the same way. So *you* have the experience that the person is fresh. They're not the same person that... to some degree, you could say, "Okay, but you fabricated that!" And that's where Tsoknyi Rinpoche steps back and....

I'll put words in his mouth because it's pretty clear what he means... Yes, indeed you fabricated that. So would you give me a list of what you did not fabricate? [laughter]

Student 1 [01:23:16] OK, well, that's something to... ponder and something to fabricate. Right. Thank you. Okay. So... you open the door for something.

LMC [01:23:30] My job ends there.

Student 1 [01:23:33] Okay, to open doors.

LMC [01:23:33] can go out the door. [laughter] [sound of bell] Just in time. ... Gonna serve cupcakes now? [laughs] Thought that was the cupcake bell.

sangha [01:24:14] dedicating the merit

The Four Thoughts That Change the Mind ~ Karma and its Consequences
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