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*simple practice of recognize experience as it arises, recognize every experience as gift from guru, how we connect or don't with practices, the importance of confidence*

**LMC** [00:00:55] So it's enjoyable to get together and talk about... questions raised and... anything that's on any of your minds. It's also important, like anything that you have that you would like a more thorough discussion... it could happen here. Especially on an evening like this when no one's here. [laughing] I don't see anyone. Oh, Zopa, [patting her shoulder] did you hear that no one counts. So on your minds. Is that you, Linda. Or are you just raising that as an offering?

**Zopa** [00:03:08] I have a question Lama Michael. This practice we are engaging in tonight... recognizing... the nature of mind. When I practice, it feels very, very close to the simply... settling... then thought goes by. Watch it go. But it felt like you were aiming towards something more... profound. Do you know what I'm saying? I have trouble... distinguishing, simply sitting... going: thought, thought, thought after thought, not clinging to them, but seeing them. But I don't think that's what you're pointing at... to try.

**LMC** [00:04:36] My thought was that it was something really simple. Not an effort to recognize the nature of mind. Though that could occur at any moment, of course. But rather just the recognition of an experience unfolding. And ideally, without naming it. So, for example, you could get an itch on your back. And you could talk to yourself about it. You could scratch it. You could do all sorts of things. But you could also just... recognize its presence without naming it, without trying to make it into anything or change it. And that was what I was... looking at as a kind of... step in the longer chain... that we, that we sometimes talk about, usually on retreats, where we talk about the... the basis of the meditation. Which is the... nature of mind itself. So that's the *basis* of the meditation. It's *also* the basis of our confusion. So, the basis of the confusion is not different than the basis of enlightenment, which is just the discovery of the nature of the confusion. [laughs] So it's the suggestion that we start by just... acknowledging, if you want to call it that, or *recognizing*... an experience that arises.

[00:06:27] So, one example is... in the practice of shamatha... as it is usually taught, and as we have also taught it many times... when you sit down and you relax and place your awareness upon something very simple, like a small object on the table... we *expect* that we will be distracted. And when we're distracted, we expect there will, at some point, *recognize* that we've been distracted, and we'll bring the mind back to where we wanted it to be. In the most simple description of calm abiding, that's what we do. And the *distraction* in that case is considered generally, felt to be, an obstacle.

[00:07:24] So when we recognize it as an obstacle, we have a little energy to change the direction of this. That's a piece of the idea there. When we look at how these things are constructed, sometimes we can see what's really going on. But what we *really* want to be going on is that we... recognize, *ultimately* to recognize the nature of mind itself. That's kind of out there. So, we're not going to easily get that. Or if we do, we're likely to begin by having *occasional* glimpses... and then gradually... kind of fills in.

[00:08:05] So the first thing is the *basis*. Which is a place that we often... get a little bit conceptual to talk about. *The basis of the practice... is our nature. Without having that... nature*

of mind, which is already... without fault... it's hard to imagine how you would have a fruitful meditation. So we start with that as the basis. The basis is what we are looking for... to unite with or understand completely. It's already there. We're not trying to put it there. *That's* important because sometimes we make *that* mistake. That I need to... *fix* my own mind in order for myself to do the meditation. Instead of discovering... that what we're looking for was always there. It wasn't somewhere else. So, in the practice... of recognition... all we want to do is recognize... what has arisen as an experience. And that's it! Nothing more, Nothing less. It *could* be more. But, the intention was... this is really simple. Start with the simple. Get good at it. Do it all day long.

[00:09:55] A really wonderful teacher once said... in the practice of mahamudra, which is the most exalted practice that we have... that there is no such thing as a mahamudra meditation session. ... When you sit down to practice, you do not have a mahamudra meditation session. And the description of that, to clarify... was that mahamudra was not exalted. Mahamudra was... everyday life. And so, to sit down and... treat it as something special... was, you're already lost. You're already lost. You won't be able to do it. And the primary... method of the practice for this one teacher was that... recognition... of our experiences as they unfold was the *key* to that exalted meditation practice, mahamudra. ... And the basis is that we are already endowed... with the awakening mind, which is why we have bodhicitta.

[00:11:31] So I think in time, these things can be elaborated fruitfully... in the context of... longer retreats, following things like what we did today, just to practice recognizing your experiences as they unfold. Not to label it. You know, just acknowledge it. See it. Like if it's too warm in here, you might say "Oh, I'm too hot" But you might also just notice... recognize you're too warm, you're uncomfortable. And usually, nothing wrong with that. We're all uncomfortable... at some level. And we get uncomfortable and we get comfortable and we continually label everything. And... put the judgment of, that one's good, that was not good on things continuously. So just the *act* of acknowledgement and recognition... seemed like a big thing. And something that we could all understand. Easy to understand. We have experiences... *any* moment. There is never a moment that there is no experience occurring. We would, as good Buddhists, we would even say, *even...* if you're dead. It's still happening. So, still an opportunity to recognize experiences... without the conceptual overlay of... this one is caused by this and this one came from that and I did these things, so then that happened and so on. This is just the pure recognition.

**Bill** [00:13:27] Would you include, in the stream of experience... recognizing that a thought is arising that says... this is too warm?

**LMC** [00:13:39] Yeah. That's gotta be an experience. Yeah.

**Bill** [00:13:45] So the distinction there is... the *intention* isn't to figure out whether or not it's too warm and to come to a conclusion about it and then say, aha, I've got it nailed. But... whatever is arising, you go from the experience... some kind of movement towards, it's not quite right. And then some thought that says this. And any piece of that. Even whoops.... I'm thinking... should I be thinking about this?

**LMC** [00:14:14] Should I change the thermostat? [laughter]

**Bill** [00:14:19] So from that point of view, just like when you talk about the recognition of a distraction. So, at any moment, the recognition of a distraction is... whatever happened to be there. It's like ooh! I recognize it as a distraction because it's not where I started, but it's....

oooh! So this is kind of like a continual recognition of what we would otherwise called distraction.

**LMC** [00:14:50] Yeah. Yeah, I think that's why we sometimes say... I would prefer to always say, but I'll say sometimes... that the most intense... experiences are usually the most valuable. Because we're magnetized by them. The things of like... I see this sitting on my table. A little piece of me that feels like... that's been there a long time, I should move it. There's no energy in that at all. It's just like flat. And, so it's a little hard to even recognize the experience, it's so subtle. So, the ones that really *grab* us that we don't even want to undo them... like great happiness and great sadness, for example. We actually... we often *don't want to fix* them. It's like kind of an immediate instant addiction. And then sometimes, if it's really awful, we put the responsibility on a third party. And now we *really* don't want to fix it. Now it's like, we want it to get hotter. And... unfortunately, we still haven't recognized it. So we will burn ourselves in the process.

[00:16:22] And yet, if you can imagine... very difficult circumstances where lots of very difficult things come... every hour, or every day, the ability to recognize them as they came... would be really helpful. Just... the ability to recognize them, it just goes. And following that, of course, there would be the, the added... important piece of it, which would be the ability to recognize the *nature* of that experience. But I think you can't recognize the nature of the experience before you are able to recognize that you're having an experience. So... that, that kind of leads us back to that same place that we were earlier today.

[00:17:19] And consistency is also a big thing. We often treat our meditation as... something maybe that I do in the morning. And that's good for the day. Kind of like you have an all-day vitamin pill [laughs] and you just take one a day and that's it. And that doesn't work with this. It's like, you can have... a very strong experience and a nice insight, but it does not inherently exist somewhere. So you have to continually put the causes of that thing in place, or it just is gone. And then, of course, as usual, we want to find out who did this to me? Which is... again, like in the seven-point mind training, putting the burden in the wrong place.

**Dora** [00:18:19] So, Michael... to me, it seems a lot like... or even completely like... the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness. Like, do you see it? Is there a difference? Or is that pretty much... what that is. To me, it feels like the same thing. Well, mindfulness of phenomena, of all Dharmas. Mindfulness of Dharmas. Everything. It's kind of all the other three together. And... it's really hard to do... like this is. [laughs]

**LMC** [00:19:14] Yeah. Yeah. There's that great thing that..., it's really humorous, but it's also kind of deconstruction in the practice of mahamudra. There's this thing of Four Faults of Mahamudra. And one of them is what we just talking about.

**Zopa** [00:19:42] It's so simple.

**LMC** [00:19:43] So simple, we don't believe it. The variation, that I personally prefer is it's so simple, we have no *confidence* in it. It's so simple we *do not* believe it's powerful. It's like, we cannot. And so... we end up not doing anything. Which is why it's said don't teach mahamudra to people who haven't been doing it and receiving the instructions and practicing and doing it all, so they can relate to that. Otherwise, we just end up in this place of... that's not a very powerful teaching. Which is unfortunate.

[00:20:26] And which brings me back to the place of okay... right from the starting blocks, you know, before the starting gun goes off, we have this thing of... we're having an experience waiting for the gun to go off. And *we're not present*. We're somewhere else... like the finish line. I'm going to win... this time. I'm going to win this time. And the *magic* is in... the recognition of the experience that's unfolding at that moment. And if you can do that *consistently*... like most of the day, let's say, let's just kind of go for the gold... let's say that you get good enough to do that... pretty much all day. You recognize... most of your experiences as they unfold. Not their nature. Forget that. You just recognize... its presence without calling it 'it', without calling it anything. That's not easy. That is a really big... that's a *big* deal. But... it's within grasp... in terms of conceptually, it's possible to understand it, because it's easy at any moment... to recognize an experience, right? Not difficult. You can even do it without naming and notice, like, whaa! I didn't name it. But... it's very difficult to... sit down with your calm abiding and recognize... just to *recognize* the presence of... each experience as it occurs. With nothing added on to it.

[00:22:09] So, I figure, the ability to recognize... three experiences every day... while we're out and around in the supermarket and driving the car... is pretty good. And if you can do three, you can make it four and five and six. And gradually that could become... the manifestation of the *basis*. The basis being the awakening mind itself. And our recognition of that basis then is... the key piece of the practice. So, keeping it simple, if we're going to bring all the pieces together, that's... somebody who's... studied and practiced for a very long time on that particular set of instructions. But we can make a move... which instantly brings a sense of... peace, peace of mind. A sense of... the liberation of any angst that we have... around our health, our relationships, all the worldly things that we engage in. To just be able to recognize the experience as it arises and let it go... in and of itself... is an enormous... Fourth of July fireworks show. You know... it's a really big deal.

**Student 1** [00:23:48] When you're saying recognize the experience as it arises, you mean... not pile a bunch of other stuff on top of it.

**LMC** [00:23:56] Yeah.

**Student 1** [00:23:57] Like keep it light. That seems so difficult. Because it's like every experience, even of taking a breath in... there's all this elaboration that your mind does... constantly.

**LMC** [00:24:11] Yes! That's true. And therein lies the secret in the value of strong experiences. So, like I said about this, [holding up leaf from bodhi tree] if I lose this, I will not break down and sob in the street, you know, and beat my head on the pavement. It doesn't rise to the occasion. So, that's why... in many practices it's said... the practices that liberate are the ones you want to be rid of. Not that you want to be rid of it like it's a piece of advice. But, the very thing that I hate, like I just fell in love three weeks ago and she left me. That is not what we're looking for. We're looking for something else. So how do we take the force and the power of that disappointment, that grief, and turn it into something that is our practice? And there, I remember the first time that Kalu Rinpoche said... that the most profound practice is... to recognize *every* experience that comes your way as a gift from the guru.

[00:25:28] So, you can't engage in that practice... if you can't recognize the experience when it unfolds. But you can see... that if you can *recognize* it... *and*... it's an unpleasant experience that you would *not* have chosen to have... but you... hold the view, for starters, that... I hold the view that this came to me from *my* guru, *my* teacher, and it was done with the intention for *my*

benefit... and therefore, it's almost like... you're required to have that view of it. That it's good, because that's the practice that we're all *involved* in. You could say... it's horrible. But what do you get for that? We already know that. We're skilled at that. So, instead of saying it's horrible, we say that *it's precisely what I need*... because my guru wouldn't have given me something that was harmful.

[00:26:38] So, if we can move up to that place... even just for the moment... just to see... and we come across, all of us every week, an experience which we would not say, "I'd like to have more of that!" We come across the experience where we think, I'm glad there isn't more of that! So instead of having that view... and repeating that to ourselves, the liturgy of... I hope I don't have more of that, I hope I don't have more of that... we embrace it as a gift from the guru.

[00:27:12] Now that requires a certain relationship with a guru for that to work really well. But... it can be practiced... before we know how it works. Because we already know... we might think, I'm not so sure that he sent me, or she sent me, this! But what have I got to lose? The box came. It was filled with nasty tasting food. So... you already have that. You already are having that experience. So if you *recognize* the experience, just the bare act of recognizing it. Not all the labels, the fine wrapping, all that stuff. Just the bare act of recognizing it. And then you can... give rise to the view... that it's a gift from my guru. Period. And I *accept* it as a gift. Which means ...it wouldn't have been given to me, if I didn't already have the *tools*... to work with this. And because it's a nasty gift, [laughs] therefore it's imbued with a lot of energy. And that energy makes it possible... to actually go into that view. And then we can feel a sense of... I did it! It works. I see. It's not what I thought it was. It's not what it could have been. And more... possible understandings of it also.

[00:29:02] And of course, the guru is in a certain way imaginary, here. As I could say, for example... it would be just as powerful... possibly even more powerful if I said... the person I appreciate the very most in this world is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. *That* person I trust. I could hold that view. And I could say, I embrace that person as my guru, even though I've never met the person or... that person has never given me any practices to do. But from seeing things, I have that appreciation. And so... I will think, that because of... the deep, clear, honest goodness of *that* human being... his Holiness the Dalai Lama, I'm thinking... I can imagine that these gifts come from that person. You have to try it. I think, honestly... embrace it, try it and see. Because so many of our practices are involved in... the way we nurture our relationship with our teachers. That's what's important... to us.

**Student 1** [00:30:28] Well, what I see as a great benefit of what you're suggesting about... thinking of it as a gift from the guru, because what my mind does, especially with a negative experience... is instead of sticking with the experience and really... kind of, just feeling it for what it is, it goes on to this... like, how did that happen? It happened because I did this yesterday and that caused this to happen. And then it's all my fault, or it's that guy's fault or you know, there's this like... flood of conceptualization about why I just felt really bad right now ...or good or whatever. But it feels like if you could just say... this painful thing is a gift from the guru. Then you kind of cut through that... imaginary chain of thoughts that just take you away from the... actual experience that you felt, you know.

**LMC** [00:31:20] Yeah. I mean you could try that.

**Student 1** [00:31:23] Yeah. [laughing] You don't think it'll work?

**LMC** [00:31:28] Well I think it... could work. I mean, there's no exact formula for that. Like, I remember Kalu Rinpoche saying that and I only... met him like less than a month before. And I just thought... that was a *really*... unusual... suggestion. That all my difficulties I could... embrace as a gift from him. That just seemed like so puzzling and so *intriguing* in some way... that of course, then you run out and you try it out. And in trying it out... it doesn't work like you imagined, but you discover something. You don't discover the *full* power of it, but you discover something. As I remember getting into my dad's car also when I was 8. I didn't have any keys. He didn't promise to give me the car. But... I sat behind the wheel and I kind of went "vroom vroom" and I steered the wheel and I imagined going down the road and all of that. Not the same... as driving the car. But there was a way in which it gave you some... sense... of what it is like.

[00:32:54] And so I think that sense... Kalu Rinpoche words... gave me a little thing to play with. And I very quickly found... wow! That's so interesting to feel... to recognize... appreciation arising for a gift. Now, it's a lot easier if it's a cake... than if it's something bad. But... the cake is okay. It's not like you can only appreciate really bad things. It's more like... what's really going on? Is the cake the important thing or is... who or what you're getting it from that's important?

[00:33:43] I think it's clear. It's the latter! The gift itself is like a token... in a certain way. No matter what it is. It could be a new Ferrari. It'd still be 'a token'. And so then, the real gold comes when... we have an experience that we really have an aversion to. And then we... pretend, at first... let me see how this looks... if I think of this as a gift from this person. Would this person give that to me? From one angle, it sounds like... that's kind of cruel... to give that. On the other hand... I'm going to have those experiences *anyway*. So, one thing that I need to do is recognize... that I've had the experience of working with it in a positive way... that leads to an increase in understanding and so on. Maybe more kindness and love and so on happens from it. And so then, the experiment continues.

[00:34:48] One by one, we work with those things. And... it may not be that everybody... after a period of time says, "Well, that was maybe the most important instruction I ever received." But some will. And if you do, but I don't... when I hear you talk about... how difficult this was... but you managed to embrace... the view... that it *was* a gift. Then I *also* feel inspired from it. So this is like the truth of interconnectedness occurring... when we can just make those leaps. And they're not a sense of self-aggrandizement because... it's not about... me. It's about... the others. ... Our endless sea of mothers is really... that's who it's about. And some of them appear here... from time to time and some of them appear in other places... [laughs] but it's easy to think... this is not about me. It's about... it's about those others. Okay?

**Student 1** [00:36:03] Thank you.

**Student 3** [00:43:49] It's kind of way out. Memorial Day weekend. Time to remember... the deceased. And I heard the term today... bardo beings. And the suggestion that somehow our practice... assists bardo beings. And that the room was full of bardo beings. And my question is... what is your sense of bardo beings?

**LMC** [00:44:40] Good question. ... So I'm just recognizing my experiences going by, from your question. And I'm seeing a roulette wheel spinning. [laughs] And I'm wondering... where this is going to land in that wheel. And when it landed... of course, it lands there because of my... proclivities... and my sense of... relating or not relating to various things. And I can, I can say two things, maybe... that are honest from my own side.

[00:45:58] One is... I think that many of the teachings on... death and dying... at whatever level and whatever stage of dying, might be happening... can be extraordinarily useful. And helpful. ... But... I also... do not find all of them helpful. In fact, I would say... I don't find the majority of them helpful for me personally. And I certainly don't deny... the truth of death... [laughs] that it's coming. So, it's not that. But I think that... I can say from my own side, there have been... for the last thirty years... teachings, which... I find really helpful. Some of them just extraordinarily helpful, like life-changingly helpful. And at the other end of the poll, I have found many teachings that... I have made an effort... to work with... and recognize, in some way, the benefit or whatever is there. And finally, I just decided this is not my practice. So that's not throwing away the entire Dharma. The Dharma and all of the teachings that we have... and certainly in this tradition... it's an *enormous* amount. But no one ever said... that there was a requirement that all of it be... important to every person. Or that every person would find a door into that particular set of practices. I've never heard anyone say that. And if they said that, I think I would just have to laugh.

[00:48:29] So, I think we need to give ourselves some space. It's kind of like... if you think about all the tools that were used to renovate this building in the last year, that was a lot of tools. But my guess is... there were a few tools that were never used. Or at least they certainly could have been, if in the larger sense of tools available in the world, tools that just were not appropriate... for the job at hand. And in a certain way, we are each a job at hand. For ourselves. While we talk about the importance of... the *basis*... of our practice, which is the awakened mind itself, already... primordially there. It never came. It was always there. So... that's a container... that is pretty big.

[00:49:35] And I've known so many people who will say... they feel a sense of... guilt even... that they can't relate to a practice that... they received instructions for. And maybe they even took empowerment for it. And it follows maybe a long period of trying to engage in that practice and not able to do it. And then finally, taking an empowerment thinking like, well, this is gotta help. And then it doesn't help either. And the system doesn't let us out of that real easy. So, I will say... to anyone... that there are times when... a particular teaching, having tried your best to get it, and I'm not saying you didn't get it, it may be the next thing you get, you know. But, I personally have a really strong wish that we support each other in these things in a way that allows us to... say... and from experience... I've tried for a long time... to find something of value in this practice... for myself or even something I could use for others... and I just can't find it. It does not negate... all other things. It's the natural... state of affairs, I think.

[00:51:05] I remember after retreat in... 1989, we asked Lama Tsang Tsing to... advise us in some way, how to decide... what we might practice after the retreat. And he was completely magnanimous about it. Like... some people don't practice at all. They leave retreat and that's it. Later on, you find out... looks like they never did anything. Others... practice a great deal. And practice *lots* of the practices they got. Others end up practicing just one... for their entire life. And... I'm finding myself drawn to that... more. And then he says, [laughs] but there was this man, this monk in Sikkim, who was renowned for practicing *all* of the teachings that he got on a three-year retreat, every day! And I remember us just feeling like, oh, come on. It's just like... you can't... that's not possible... to do that. And even if it was possible, like, what would drive you to do that?! And what he said was, he felt like... his relationship to the Dharma was... that he did not want to leave a single leaf unturned. And so he engaged... in all the practices, every day... from sunrise until the evening, every day. And he did that by... doing as much as he could of each practice every day. Some of them were just mantra recitations, some of them were full

on visualizations and rituals and things, and he just did them kind of consecutively all this time. And... then he said, what was expected... that he was renowned! Not just for... the bravado of engaging in all of these practices for so long, but that he actually was recognized by many great beings as enlightened. And that there were even signs when he died that that had occurred.

[00:53:43] But... for me, for example, just because I think it's relevant... I could never relate to it. I just couldn't come to it. It was not a judgment on the practices. It was just... we have to find... our place... in every one of these practices. The thing that works for us. We have to. And to *assume* that we have it... may cause us some... heartbreak later down. But assuming that we have it, doesn't necessarily mean that that's not a bad approach to start with. But... you know, it's like there's many things that we do in this life that we think we'll really like and then... we stop doing them because... we don't like it.

[00:54:38] Personally, I have no reason to think why there is anything wrong with engaging in practices and then finding that something else attracts me. I want to do that. So then maybe we do that. Now, there's also... in the rounded exposition of this, there is also a... a reason *not* to do that. And that is because... there, there is a real danger... in studying too many things. Having too many practices and *especially* having too many teachers. Many people would say even to have two... can be a problem. Because one of them gives you a teaching, the other... doesn't care for that teaching... and without even saying they don't care for it, they subtly communicate it maybe without even intending.

[00:55:44] Like just recently... Lama Tsang Tsing went out to the three retreat to give the next to the last teaching. And, he mentioned a... situation where somebody had come... and taught somebody... and many of us have this experience... [laughs] somebody comes and gives a teaching and everybody's kind of wowed by it. Wow, that is really a wonderful exposition. What a nice teaching. And then... somebody else comes a week later and says, that is a really good teaching. It's almost as good as the one we do at the monastery. So there's this subtle undermining... of that one. Which then can be again undermined gradually. So we end up with this sense of again... confidence isn't there.

[00:56:35] Confidence... in these practices... is so important. So important. I think it is more important than *anything* else. One of the practices is... our relationship with our teachers. That's *very* important. It doesn't have to be... I believe this person is the Buddha incarnate. But there needs to be a level of confidence that we recognize and understand. And the practices also... they function on the basis of understanding and confidence. Just like... the really terrible disagreement that I have on day one with somebody and it undermines a lot of things. And then I discover, oh, yes, this is the gift of the guru. And I'm confident. It's very quick to wash away all the problem. No confidence. It's like a dream. It's nothing. Doesn't work. So... I think our confidence is really important. It's important to nurture. Important to guard when we've got it. And carefully engage in... other practices because it's helpful just to understand what other people are doing. It doesn't mean that we have to relate to them in the same way that we would to our main practices. ... That's my personal opinion. I'm sure I'll be hung at sunrise, but... it won't be the first time.

***sangha*** [00:58:56] *dedicating the merit*