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*empathy weariness and 4 Immeasurables with basis of interconnectedness, deity practice with or without empowerments, **Carrying Practice**: habituating bodhicitta intention with many small events, **Carrying Practice**: mind training in the largest sense, paramita of concentration, dreaming or awake are both experiences, writing to become clear about our own questions*

Student 1 [00:00:57] So, I appreciate your conversation this morning about the Four Immeasurables. I want to say that first of all. And second of all, related to the notion of... accomplishing the benefit of others. Yesterday, my daughter, who is... I would describe as an empathetic person... to the point that they're often overwhelmed... by the needs of others. And yesterday... [my youngest kid] said to me, she was talking particularly about this one friend, "How can I... communicate that I just can't... do this all the time." So having some real empathy weariness. And I actually didn't know how to answer that question. So I'm asking this question on their behalf. You know what happens there... when you're overwhelmed by... caring for the needs of others. I don't know how else to say that.

LMC [00:02:12] I experience that regularly... [laughter] just saying. That's good. That's on the table. I think that one thing is... when we look at the Four Immeasurables or any other, like *all* of the mind training practices have this aspect in them, as you know, where... we are working with the principle of like, profound unbounded interconnectedness. Which has no beginning and no end! So, everything that we think or do or say... kind of changes the flow of that interconnectedness. So... just in our own minds, we can say... we can just put something there, it doesn't have to be... like we have resolved this issue somehow, and now everything is so beautiful. It doesn't have to be like that. It can just be... that... I make the wish that at some point... I could... do more. I could have more patience. I could... whatever it is. More effective somehow. Because that's another issue, is that we often feel like I hold the right attitude about it, but I don't see any results. And we know... the reason why we don't see results isn't that there are no results. There's results from every word that we speak to anyone that we speak to. It's just that... they don't create a mushroom cloud. [laughter] And we're looking for that!

[00:04:15] And we're always looking for you know, it's like I flipped the switch... for somebody that I don't like. I actually... found that I could... make... positive wishes for them. But now I'm standing back and I'm looking for the result and it's not happening. That's... our childlike behavior, really. If you were to do that a hundred times, there'd be results and we would *not*... probably see them. And if we did, we wouldn't give them much credence, probably. When actually it's a time when maybe we should jump up and down. Like, I've said something positive or helpful to somebody who... was negative towards me, let's say, and not much happened. And then something happened and it didn't seem to be connected to anything that I did. And then maybe I discovered that the problem is that I *wanted* it to be connected so that *I* could see it, that I could feel like *I* did something. And, and that we know... that's just self-defeating again. So... it's a real practice, right? It's not like magic. It *is* magic in a way, but it's the magic that we're surrounded by all the time. The magic of the confusion of the world and all these things. And it doesn't clarify... by virtue of some magic incantation, *usually*. [laughter] I don't know what it is. I'd share it with everybody if I did.

[00:05:59] There's something good about being able to make the aspiration. So, if she finds that she just can't do it, that's totally okay. And all you gotta do is just have the sense of... maybe next time or... there'll be a time when... it could. Right now I need to go for a bike ride or I need

to go do something else. There is no fault... in all of that. If the Buddha was here, the Buddha might say, we are still... inherently awakened. The issue isn't... that we are imperfect. The issue is that we have not witnessed it. We can't see it... yet.

Student 2 [00:07:21] Hi. So my question is, in the Vajrayana, they have the practice where sometimes you do visualizations of the deity, or yourself as the deity, and my understanding is that you're supposed to have empowerments to do a lot of those ones. What happens if you come across a deity that kind of... you just have a yearning to do that kind of visualization, but you don't actually know what the heck you're supposed to be doing. You haven't had an empowerment and you're the kind of person who, even though you know you're not supposed to do it, is a type of person who wants to do it anyways and see what happens. [laughter] Know you need an empowerment for, but you, and you don't really know how to get an empowerment for them. What do you do if you still are drawn to visualizing yourself as that deity? Like what, I mean, you can tell me not to do it. That's good advice, I guess, but I need to know more for it to be effective in my case.

LMC [00:08:17] Have you tried getting the empowerment? [laughs]

Student 2 [00:08:21] That's on the list. Or, you know, just even general advice on visualizations of deities, like, you know, off the cushion in general. I mean, I haven't really heard much about that in my...

LMC [00:08:38] So, are you saying that you're doing this... practicing, doing a deity practice?

Student 2 [00:08:43] Like before that Green Tara empowerment. I'd visualize myself as Green Tara or, you know, some of the emanations of that. And then there's that question of like, you know... that kind of thing comes up.

LMC [00:08:57] Yeah. You know, these things are not all equal. Not all equal. So, for example, and Green Tara falls into this category, at least to some degree, that there are certain deity practices, which... it's not so critical... you can do some practice of them without the empowerment. But you won't get the full benefit without the empowerment. But you won't hurt yourself. And, you know like, Chenrezig falls into that category. People often begin practicing Chenrezig without the empowerment. And in Tibet, Chenrezig and Green Tara were so ubiquitous... throughout Tibet, that if you were born there, you just grew up with these things. So you pretty much, it's almost like you *had* an empowerment by virtue of... It's very important to get an empowerment to any deity practice that you want to do or that, you know, maybe your teacher said it would be good to do. It's not only good to get the empowerment... in most cases, it's really *important* to do it. And even with Chenrezig, where so many people do it without the empowerment, so many people get permission to do it by a qualified teacher without the empowerment... everybody always says... it's better to get the empowerment. So as soon as you can, get the empowerment. And that goes for Chenrezig or Green Tara. Both of those practices were so ubiquitous... in Tibet, just by virtue of... being born there and growing up became... in essence, considered to be like having the empowerment. But for other things, it's more important to look into that carefully. And get permission to get an empowerment and then get it and follow through with the instructions, in the way that it's explained. Does that make sense? ... You didn't answer quite fast enough. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:11:56] You said like, hurt yourself? I guess, like, if you do some of the practices without an empowerment, I just, I mean, that's kind of... I don't know what that means.

LMC [00:12:08] Well, that's a good sign. [laughter] So... yes, it's like when we were kids, there were certain things that we were not allowed to play with... because they were dangerous. Matches and knives and things like that, maybe. And... in a certain way, some of the yidams are more powerful than others and in certain ways more dangerous. So you need to get an empowerment and understand a little more of what you're doing, gradually. It's a little more difficult and involves a little more commitment and so on. So, of course, then it's good to make sure that you get all of those things.

[00:12:57] With Chenrezig and Tara... it's like when Khenpo Rinpoche was here, we did the empowerment. It was quite... kind of a summary approach to the empowerment and the practice. And some people will go on to get a more elaborate empowerment. Others might just do the practice as they got it for the duration of their whole lives. And that's okay, too. There is no certainty that one is really... *better* than another for any given individual. And Khenpo Rinpoche said it was fine... to do that. But again, if you *feel* a real connection to Green Tara, looking to get a more elaborate empowerment, might be something you would want to do. On the other hand, you might just feel like Khenpo Rinpoche gave it and he's clearly qualified to give the shortened version. And also, I'll just go with that for a while. That's totally fine too. *Epecially* for those two, Chenrezig and Tara.

Student 2 [00:14:09] Thank you.

Student 4 [00:17:48] I have a question about compassion relating to current events, mostly, I guess. It's really easy to get into a way of thinking of... I'm compassionate. I love everybody. I care about other people. But there are certain people that don't care. And... I guess I don't know... the way to deal with those thoughts.

LMC [00:18:21] Yeah. I think we all share that nemesis. [laughs] Our thoughts. Yeah. ... It's not always easy to... remind ourselves in a compelling way... that there is... no... such thing as somebody... who doesn't deserve... loving kindness and compassion. Friendship, good relationships, positive circumstances. It's a kind of easy first step. Like there *is* nobody... who doesn't deserve that. Everybody deserves it. Now we could say... there are some people in history, who we know about... who it's really hard to think that they deserve... those things. That's a problem that we individually might find ourselves dealing with. There are individuals who deserve something really awful because they *did* things that were really awful. But that also, just from a kind of common human sense... that's precisely the cycle that we're trying to deal with. We're trying to get out of that... praise and blame... kind of thing. Where the praise is unrealistic and the blame is over the top. And it doesn't resolve anything. It just continually throws more fuel on all of that.

[00:20:32] So if you can start with something simple... that *works* for you in a given situation... where you can just give rise to some... seed... that is positive. Like, I wish that I had the *capability* to actually... help make this change, or to give something to somebody, or do something that would make a difference in their perspective, in their willingness to do certain kinds of things, that feel like they're really positive. Even though... you have every reason in the world to doubt... that your mere intention... is going to do anything. But, we also know, from the time that when we were kids, up, up to now, that... intention often doesn't seem to bear any fruit. But if you hold it for a little longer, it often does. It often does bear something. It may not be the mushroom cloud that I was referring to like, a really big deal. But... I think that there is a lot to be

said for... the greater ease and greater probability of result from... a large number of small events.

[00:21:55] Like, for example, develop the habit of saying something kind to almost everyone that you meet every day. Even you can say, "I know it sounds kind of phony. It's like I keep saying this and you're probably tired of hearing it. And sometimes I'm tired of saying it. But the truth is, I really wish that it could be compelling. And I really want it to come from my heart." Just that kind of transparency sometimes is also really helpful to people we know. And the people we don't know... just to say something nice... to them when we see them. It isn't just for the other person... who often will turn around and say, "Bug off!" you know. [laughter] But it still... it does something to our mind. I'm tired of hating somebody. When I actually could say to myself, with all the deepest authenticity that I *wish* that I did not and I *wish* that I was skillful enough to make a really positive and helpful change in some way. Those things do bear their fruit in time.

Student 4 [00:23:15] Thank you.

Student 5 [00:23:59] Building upon what she said.... so, I have a lot of the same issues she has. You know, how do you feel compassion for somebody... who makes you... cringe inside? And the way I've dealt with it so far is... I imagine, you know, the sea of samsara and everybody's swimming through it. And, you know, some people are farther across the sea than others. And those people that you have... you know, they're like just stepping in. But everybody's swimming across or however. So I imagine in my mind that... maybe the reason I'm not... obnoxious or... offensive like that person is, or like I see them is, is because... maybe in one of my past lives when I was... closer to the stepping in, I've learned that lesson already. And maybe that person is... in that position in this life to learn this lesson. And then in their next life, they'll have already learned it. And so... I imagine compassion, because everybody's at least trying to swim, you know. No matter where they are, they're somewhere on that path. And maybe... I've already been where they are and maybe, so... is there anything... how would I put this? Is there anything... wrong with that type of thinking or is there? Am I setting myself up for something by ...imagining that or... I guess that's my question. I just wonder... if I make up this little, you know, storyline in my mind... is that going to mess me up later?

LMC [00:25:48] You might have to confess to yourself later. [laughter] Otherwise, I mean, that's what we all do. We make stuff up. We're like, 'make stuff up machines' and there's nothing wrong with that in a certain way. You know, when we talk about the Vajrayana... making stuff up... is like, that's the professional vajrayana practitioner. We make stuff up. [more laughter] However, having *made* it up, that doesn't mean that we believe it... or that we imagine that it has somehow... independent existence... separate from our intention and our aspirations and all of these things. And sometimes we get confused by that! That we can have the experience that's, whoa, it's like, it's actually come into fruition, somehow. When actually that's just... not exactly what's happening. And then later, we're disappointed in that.

[00:26:50] A little bit tricky to go too far with that... but, it's totally within the realm... of what Buddhists do. That is to say, to... remind ourselves, for example... when we find someone who... doesn't like us or we don't like them for some reason, that... this is the nature of interdependence. It's helpful, I'll say it from my own side, because there's nothing wrong with what you said, really... but from my side, I think we could each share something about it if we had the time... that, I'm more inclined to think... that I can't see my past. I don't know what my past is. I don't know what my future is. But I do believe... that... even just sitting here and saying

something... seeds are being planted. It's almost like every syllable - seed planted, seed planted, seed planted. I don't know what grows from that seed.

[00:27:57] And if I, if I approach it from that perspective, I am likely to be very careful... about what I say. And mostly, I am... *careful* about what I say. The truth is that sitting here, I... filter about 90 percent of the things that I think I'm going to say... and move on. Because either I see somebody cringe out there or I cringe. And we don't what comes from the seeds. But generally speaking, we know... that if you plant seeds of kindness, it appears... that's helpful. There's *some* predictability and a sense that we have of it.

[00:28:44] But then we get into trouble from the other side, also. We think that because we were good last week, that therefore we should *never* have a problem in this life and people should love me. [laughter] These things backfire on us. And that's why you have a sangha, a community, who are all working on it... so you can commiserate with these things. [laughter] Kind of like, "Oh, yeah, that happened to me too." And then you get a, you get a larger sense... of the *potential* of continually... this is what we call mind training, in the largest sense. Everything that we do, that we speak, that we think, that we say... we are training the mind. Some people will say, "Well, that's called brainwashing!" And we could say anything we want. Yeah, okay. It's brainwashing. We've all brainwashed ourselves... for however many years we've been alive... *with* the help of our friends, our parents, our school teachers and so on, we come to this point.

[00:29:57] So, we will say... practicing loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, building a sense of equanimity for *all* beings... is very helpful. And, every time that we reiterate that to ourselves... and make the aspiration that we would fully embody that... we have just planted a full garden. And it will bear fruit. And we will have the chance, some of those things ripen fairly quickly, so we start to get a sense of... how to put those things together. The long term... we want to think about next lives. I think within the tradition, we honor the aspiration for better, helpful lives in the future. And there again, it's considered more helpful to think about it from the perspective of... how much more help we can provide to *others* in future lives rather than how much better *our* future lives will be. ... To the degree we can. [laughs] Okay?

Student 6 [00:31:23] Lama Michael, this in regards to your talk earlier. I'm not sure of how this will come out, if it will be a cogent question or not. Sorry. But one of the practices that I've done involves like giving and taking and you start with yourself and your parents and all. And you know, so... on some basis you have to kind of practice for you or you know, I think how it is is that, if you don't love yourself, how would you extend loving kindness to others? So that's one part, one part of the question is about the individual. And the other part... meditative concentration. right? And so... and I'm not sure, but I thought the idea was that you develop this ability to concentrate... to help... on some level, to help others. So, can you kind of explain how that paramita relates to... what you were saying about the Four Immeasurables?

LMC [00:32:35] The paramita of concentration? ... Well, your question seems very clear... so, therefore I am suspicious of my understanding. But I'll say anyway that, I think that... the paramita of concentration is fundamental to any deep understanding. In other words, if you're perpetually distracted... how are you going to go deeper into anything? Just like, you will go shallow into many things. Because you're continually carried away by... various distractions. I think that's fundamental to... pretty much all the things we do. Our meditation. Our study of Dharma and things. If we can't... bring *some* focus... or concentration to it, we're not going to deepen our understanding very much. Or at least it'll be... kind of compromised.

[00:34:00] That's, that's my sense of it, you know. We've all had the experience of... reading... a page in a book over and over, that we really wanted to read... but *we weren't there*. [laughter] We went somewhere else. And then somewhere along the way... we realized that we've been reading this but we didn't actually. Our eyes kind of saw it go by. And the paramita of concentration... if we get *good* at it, which we can... then, we're more likely to be able to... understand what we're reading... from a conceptual perspective, or maybe even understand instructions for moving into the *experiential* perspective, not just the conceptual... we're just more likely to do it. ... I'm not sure I answered your question. Was it the first part?

Student 6 [00:35:11] The first part was just kind of, you know, the giving and taking... and starting with yourself. And I think it's, they're both kind of related, right? Because you are developing... and you said, "*We develop*" this concentration, right? You know, the person 'I' the, you know, you or whatever. But, and I think what you're saying earlier is in part, it, like we do... at the end of the practice where... or, you know, the bodhicitta is to offer things up for the benefit of all sentient beings. But you really *do* need to develop those skills, kind of, *first* for it to have benefit for others. Or you just go, well, I mean, this is me... I go, well, I'm connecting to the Buddha mind now.

LMC [00:35:55] You know, that's totally fine. There's nothing really wrong with that. But it's not as effective as it could be. And by that, I think it's good to be clear... that, we *naturally*... want to engage in these practices in order to benefit ourselves. And there's nothing really wrong with wanting to benefit oneself by becoming kinder. If we actually... focus the kindness that we come to manifest... on the benefit of others, then... it's a lot more effective. Because... one of the main problems that we have... pretty much *across* Buddhist traditions, just take them all... the big issue is 'me.' Look at *me!* Love *me!* [laughs] You know, it's like... and we have a certain sense that... we have to *appreciate* ourselves. We have to appreciate our ability to engage in the practice. We appreciate our aspirations to benefit others. That's all totally within accordance of what we're doing. But the point at which we *identify*... I am now a *very* kind person, *waaaay* beyond anyone I know. [laughter].

[00:37:26] We have tripped and fell. And tripped and fell is totally okay... as long as we know how skinned our nose is. If we don't notice that or we think my nose is skinned because somebody else caused it, we just left the ring. It's fine. We all make mistakes. If we're not making mistakes, again, we're not looking. If we think we're doing everything just right... we're not looking. The one thing that we want to do... it's helpful to go back... to the big things and the little things. Don't get stuck in *one* spot.

[00:38:06] So the big thing is like the man who approached the Buddha, according to the story, and said, "What is the *difference* between you and me?" And the Buddha said, "None." Then he kind of answered the question, which was... the difference really is that... we are both the same. We both are endowed *fully* with awakened mind. The difference is, I see it. You don't. Beyond that, there is no difference. That is *such* an important thing to understand. *No* difference. That is to say, you are 100 percent a buddha. The only difference, you don't see it. And so, all of the practices that we engage in are really meant to bring us to the place where we see it. And seeing it is actually also not it, because when we see it, which is *actually* quite possible, like we, there are there's probably many people in this room have *seen* it. Sometimes we don't know we saw it. Sometimes we see it and we know it. And then we go to our teacher and say, "Hey, did I *really* see it?" And sometimes you can say, "Yeah, looks like." That's okay. Then we become attached to it. I saw it! Now I'm, now I'm *this*, not *that* anymore. Now I'm *this*.

[00:39:31] So, all of those things are what the tradition is about. Kind of gradually you focus. Then you get lost and you bring in again. Then you get lost and you relax and you discover it there and then you think that's it, but it's not. So you focus. [laughter] You go back and forth and back and forth. And in the midst of all of that, we have a great attachment to our discoveries. We have a great aversion for realizing that we didn't make the discoveries. In other words, we are *confused beings*... still working on it. But we gain a deep appreciation for the path. And the secret at that point is... once we have that appreciation is... you must never abandon it. Ever. If you don't abandon it, you will accomplish it.

Student 6 [00:40:29] Thank you.

LMC [00:40:30] I'm confident that's the case. I wish I could say, I know that firsthand. [laughter] I'll send you a card when I...

Student 6 [00:40:41] Don't. I might I might get very attached to the card, so...

LMC [00:40:43] [Lama Michael laughs as he says,] Next! ... Yeah. We're just about done. If there's one more, we can do it.

Student 7 [00:41:15] Okay. I have a question. During the Rinpoche's visit, and... he did not say exactly this way, but he said something like... there is no difference between the dream, you know like, the dream we have at night, and... what we experience while we are awake. And he did not say exactly this way, but something in this context. And... I don't understand ... what that means. When I heard this, what immediately what came to me is that... Oh, my God, I'm so fool! I take everything seriously... while I am awake. You know, like happening. But, when I dream something at night, it's just a dream. But that's beside the point. So I don't understand exactly what that means. How should I understand? Please clarify this. [laughter]

LMC [00:42:58] [Lama Michael slaps his forehead and laughs] I love your boldness. [laughter] You are definitely bold. Yeah. I remember a very similar situation once where the Dalai Lama had said something and we didn't understand it. And somebody said, would you please clarify what he said? And, at *that* time... those people were intelligent, they said, "No way!" [laughter] And so, I'm just barely vacillating off of that. ... Generally speaking, it's not a good idea to clarify Khenpo Rinpoche or somebody of that quality and character and understanding... to clarify... that. But, I will say *one* thing I think is embedded in that. Whether you *dream* an experience, or whether you're *awake* and you have an experience... they are both experiences. And they are both, almost for sure, endowed with confusion.

Student 7 [00:44:27] That's it?

LMC [00:44:39] You need more?! [laughter] I know... we want to be free of the confusion.

Student 7 [00:44:51] More confused. [laughs]

LMC [00:44:51] Yeah. You know, the thing about confusion is... I remember... *first* coming to the Dharma with Kalu Rinpoche. And, at that time... I neither felt confused nor clear. There was just a sense of curiosity. Like, who is this guy? I was not a Buddhist. I had *no* interest in being a Buddhist. So I was curious. That curiosity... was very helpful... because I understood that I didn't understand. That I wasn't confused by what was going on... I was just curious... about it. In time, that changed. And then I wanted some other understanding. And that brought about exactly

what you're talking about. Then I wasn't sure. Is this confused or is this clear? And so on. Back and forth. And... I think we have to also acknowledge... that there's no way to avoid that. It's not ordinary human parlance that we're dealing with when we're talking about... and I suspect every truly authentic spiritual tradition would say this... our ordinary conversations and relationship becomes confused... when we see more of it. When we see more clearly. But we don't see it *all* clearly. We see some of it clearly. Some of it's still confused. Then we're confused by how come some of it's clearer and some of it's not. And so it gets mixed and mixed and mixed.

[00:46:37] And again, I just want to say... that's why we have sangha. And that's why we invite people like Khenpo Rinpoche to come. Because then we have... you know, we see someone who is clearly... *more* clear... than I am. And then I listen in a different way. And then, if I meet with him personally, I ask the question and it becomes more clear. ... *All* clear doesn't happen. My guess is, that even Khenpo Rinpoche would say, "Not all clear yet." I wouldn't be surprised. The truth is, he would never say, it's all clear. Whether or not it really is all clear or not, we're not going to find out. But we have the tools to work on that and... the confusion doesn't go away.

[00:47:32] It's kind of like, you get the power tools and all the saws and the hammers and the nails like we were talking earlier. That does *not*... you don't have a house yet. You got nails and hammers and things and you don't know how to build that house. So the first one you build falls down on you. And you have to just keep going and working it and learning it... and you get insights and... ordinary insights are precious. Oh, I see! The real problem is every time I sit down, I'm trying to accomplish my own benefit. And actually, it turns out... to accomplish the benefit of others is actually joyful and *easy*. Because... I'm not responsible for the result in the same way. When I sit down and practice and *I* expect... to feel better and be peaceful and *nice*... and then I'm not... I feel ashamed. I feel like I'm at fault. I'm not getting it. All of this happens. But if I just *think* about individuals that I know and encounters that I've had and I just make the *wish*... that some small thing that I might say or do would be helpful... and I imagine that it's helpful... it very often is.

[00:48:53] So I'm not looking for enlightenment. Not looking for *my* enlightenment. I'm clear about that! That ain't going to happen. That enlightenment will not come, by virtue of... looking in the dark corners and so on. But the joy of... being able to do, to just be able to *hold* a view... of wishing that somebody... was free of this angst or this problem or... and then you see, over time maybe, that they do become free of it and then you feel joy about that. There's many small things like this add up.

[00:49:34] And in the meantime, more people will visit or you will go and you will meet people. And it's helpful to write your questions down, I think. Many people have told me this: that they'll write a question down like where you said that he said, it's like no difference between the dream and what afterwards... you write that down. And then over maybe a period of two years, you revisit it. You put a few more questions there with it. So it becomes more, the *question* becomes clear. Then, when use state the question, oftentimes people will state a question... they're not clear... about what their question is. And so, if you can make your question clear... you're more likely to get... a more helpful response. And I'm saying that partly because many people had personal interviews with Khenpo Rinpoche. All the retreatants had personal one-on-one interviews with him. And each one of them, we had encouraged them... write your question down. Elaborate it. Even like five pages, like whatever it takes. Write your question down. Now, you've been in retreat all this time, write your question down. And they did that. Everybody said... it was so helpful. And Rinpoche said it was so helpful to have a *clear* question that had been like... carefully considered and thought out. So rather than wait until the next time that

somebody comes, start taking notes on what you know about your own mind. Explore it *yourself*. So by the time you come with a question, you've written it down and all ...you can even give the question written. You don't have to even remember it. It's very helpful. ... Having said that, you do a pretty good job of it. [laughter] So, okay?

Student 7 [00:51:35] Thank you.

LMC [00:51:42] So we're finished! Let us dedicate the merit. Another act of taking what we have done and offering the benefit to all sentient beings.

sangha [00:51:59] *dedicating the merit*