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the special tool for accomplishing the Dharma is seeing every experience as gift from guru, developing equanimity with our experiences, nourishing our compassion

sangha [00:03:26] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:05:26] Again, as we... make some gentle effort... to bring awareness to our experiences as they unfold... there are various... potential obstacles which arise. And also... various opportunities. And over some time... it's helpful to gradually... become facile at recognizing these obstacles and opportunities.

[00:06:37] Back in 1974... when Kalu Rinpoche... one of the great meditation masters of the century, came... to North America... one of the things he taught was just what we're doing now. Practice of calm abiding. And along the way... while I was having trouble remaining awake... falling asleep, so boring... placing awareness on our experiences. And the experiences weren't even very interesting. ... And at one point, he said... memorably... the problem is... that your experiences... are not strong enough. And those that are strong... you avoid embracing them in your meditation. And he talked a little bit about the thing that we call kleshas, which are the conflicted emotions. So, when we have kind of negative emotional states, we say those are the kleshas. And usually we try to avoid those things just as ordinary human beings. We'd rather not be in a conflicted, emotional state. So, we just avoid it. Or we don't pay any attention to it. Or we push it away. And so, it was slightly shocking... when the old man said... "In order to really accomplish the Dharma... you have to have some... special tools." And the special tool that he... suggested at that time, was... every experience that you have, you treat it as a gift from your guru, or your teacher.

[00:10:02] It seemed rather... *astonishing* at the time. But as time went on, it became very clear... that we are continuously... for want of a better way of saying it... *making ourselves*. When we... have conflict... and find ourselves in various habitual patterns of judgment... I think it's not so difficult to understand that we are... establishing important patterns in our mental states. ... *All* the time. Every time we have a thought and we have a relationship with the thought and we respond to it in some way, positive or negative, we are setting up causes and conditions continuously. This is why it's important... to pay attention to our experiences. And especially... thinking that every experience that arises is to be taken as a gift... it's really to be taken as an opportunity.

[00:12:09] We sometimes make the *mistake* of trying to... even out... our experiences. Or, rather than bring our awareness to... a disagreeable conflict of some kind... we back-burner it. We put it aside. When actually... that's where the gold is. Exactly the thing that we don't want... is precisely the thing that will bear the most fruit. The example that is sometimes used... is manure. [laughs] We know that... you grow... vegetables and sweet fruit... by the use of manure. If you don't use that, you don't get much... fruit or vegetables. And in the same way, to avoid... the most *ripe* situations for our practice... is fundamentally the same thing. We don't get what we *could* get... by virtue of avoiding using the tools we have for those situations. So Kalu Rinpoche's statement like, take all experiences and *especially* he remarked... the most difficult, painful experiences, as a gift.

[00:13:58] So the way that works is that... we never want to take... the difficult experiences as a gift. Partly because we're not so sure that we can make something good out of it. Part of the problem is that it's scary. So, the idea of taking difficult experiences as a gift is partly... an issue of... who's giving you the gift? So... if you can *think* to yourself that it's a gift from the Buddha... and you can feel that that really is the case, then your fear is sublimated into the practice. To think that it's coming from... one of your teachers... may work, but only if your connection and relationship with that person is such that you're confident that they would not do something to hurt you. Because being hurt is what causes us to avoid working with the difficult situations, which is where all the benefit lies. If we just continue to... admire ourselves... [laughs] for being good people, for being meditators and so on... not much happens.

[00:15:49] So, in this session we're about to do... if you *can*... hold the view... that each experience that arises... is a gift. From the Buddha, a gift from your guru, your teacher... it really doesn't matter who it is, but to take it as a gift is a very powerful... way of relating to the experience. And they don't have to be negative gifts. They can also be very sweet, wonderful gifts. But if you *only* focus on those... it's just like ordinary life. You're constantly choosing between people you like and people you don't like, and so on, which also... is not very powerful, from a Dharma perspective.

[00:16:57] So, sometimes you just recall the negative things and see if you can... kind of stoke... the fire. Like, get yourself just *slightly worked up* with something that's negative and then just place your awareness on it and let it rest. ... And see what happens with that. And sometimes it gets bigger and sometimes it gets smaller. But the point is, is that... we begin to develop a sense of equanimity in relationship, not only to others, but in relationship to our own experience. That *whatever* experience arises can be taken... as something positive in the context of our practice.

[00:18:02] So, you can begin as we did before, by... resting your awareness on the movement of your breath. And then... as the breaths go on... perhaps you become bored. Then the issue is, can you place your awareness on the experience of boredom? And if you do that, and the boredom dissolves... then maybe after a while you remember something unpleasant. And can you place your awareness on *that* object? Whatever is unpleasant. And just rest your awareness there. ... There is a deep benefit from this if you do it enough. It... *nourishes* a sense of compassion. Because once you see that what troubles you... is actually not what it appeared to be... you realize that... it's very difficult for people to embrace difficult situations. And so, you have a natural sense of growing compassion and understanding of the situations that *others* find difficult to deal with.

[00:19:38] So, we'll take this session and do your best to really, it's best to.. just take whatever experience arises. It's not necessary to *look* for experiences, in case you didn't notice. They never stop. Day and night. We even say, dead or alive. The experiences flow continuously. That is the nature of mind. Of course, those experiences inspire in us a sense of aversion, a sense of attachment, a sense of being drawn and repelled and all of those things. So our job... as aspiring meditators and aspiring bodhisattvas, is to look at the experience that arises and just pay attention to it while it's there. And notice that it vanishes on its own. And there'll be some more this afternoon when we come back... on the subject of vanishing on its own, but for now, just bring your awareness to the experiences as they arise with as much equanimity... and *gratitude* for the gift!

[00:21:00] *period of meditation*

sangha [00:42:40] *dedicating the merit*