

## 2018\_09\_23\_am1\_Shamatha\_LMC.mp4

*taking refuge in our awakened nature and not only experiencing this but experiencing as fresh each time, relaxing even when mind isn't still, importance of curiosity, developing skill to rest our awareness on experiences as they unfold*

[00:02:01] Morning. ... Can you hear in the back? Let's see, I guess a better question is, is there anyone who can't hear? [laughter] Briefly, our... schedule this morning... includes... approximately forty-five minutes of... shamatha, or calm abiding practice with... some... brief instructions. I'd like to say... some brief instructions that you have never heard before. I like to say it whether it's true or not. And then we'll have a... break of fifteen or twenty minutes and we'll come back and... have an open conversation. Meant to be an opportunity for you to clarify... your understanding of the practice... that we're engaging in this morning. But beyond that... clarification of the entire path. Whatever you would like to raise, it's an opportunity to do that.

[00:05:18] So, first of all, a couple of important points that we... often raise... but generally speaking, we do not pursue those points... deep enough, well enough, regularly enough. Because we have the... deep assumption... which in one way is completely correct... that we already understand it. So, in particular, I'm talking about the... practice of turning our minds to a refuge in the... Buddha, which you can think of as the... progenitor of the entire tradition. In other words, that person... who delivered those teachings that became codified into a tradition of Buddhism... that we now practice.

[00:06:59] So refuge in that person can... feel a bit... meaningless. Or maybe, at best, quaint. Given that, I know that we... often fall into that mode of thinking, it's important to occasionally remind ourselves why we go for refuge. Why we go for refuge to the Buddha. And why we go for refuge to the Sangha or the community of practitioners. That would be *us*. ... Why we go for refuge to the teachings.

[00:07:59] Primarily, we turn our minds to refuge in the Buddha... as an alternative... to our usual refuge that we take... have been taking for... many decades... which would be a refuge in our sense of self and our attachment to it. Refuge in our friends, which is not really anything wrong with that. Refuge in our careers, refuge in our country, refuge... you can just make the list yourself. ... Mostly... when we go for refuge, even without any understanding, we do have a sense of... the things which are good to go for refuge in. ... But often we are missing... the single most important and valuable... source of refuge. ... Which is our... awakened mind.

[00:09:58] So, we will ask the question, why do we go for refuge to the awakened mind... before we have accomplished the awakened mind? ... And one very nice answer to that... is that we already are in full possession of the awakened mind. Not recognizing that fundamental truth... it's difficult to go for refuge... in the awakened mind... when we have not... yet experienced it, knowingly. So, the Buddha has said we experience the awakened mind all day long and all night long. But merely understanding that in a conceptual, *affirmation* way... clearly... it doesn't get the job done.

[00:11:28] Yet it's not a complete failure, otherwise no one would be here. ... When we go for refuge to the Buddha... we are meant to... have an experience. So, maybe we just raise the aspiration of I would... like to go for refuge to the Buddha. But I don't... actually know what that means. But let's... run a short experiment. You want to go for refuge. I mean... at least we have

the sense, no *harm* done in going for refuge, it appears. ... So, that's really the minimum. You're sitting here. Okay, no harm done. Which actually is not nothing because we are routinely in a place of... going for refuge in our attachments. Going for refuge in our... judgments about others, judgments about ourselves. So, those are really *harmful* things. So, even if we have *no* idea what refuge is, at least it's a few minutes of doing something that is harmless. But of course, we want more than that.

[00:13:30] Refuge in the Buddha we can think of as a *view*. So, in our... tradition of Buddhism, as we practice it... in this lineage and in *really* most of the lineages that we're familiar with... holding the appropriate view when we practice any meditation... is critical. It's not critical in the sense that it's harmful, again, if you don't hold the view. It's just kind of like... when you were very young... and maybe... your father let you sit in the car behind the wheel. I personally remember sitting behind the wheel and thinking that was very cool. The car didn't go anywhere. So, I imagined that it was going places and I would go vroom... [laughs] and imagine it was moving and I would turn the wheel. At some point, we get tired of that. How come when I'm behind the wheel, the car doesn't go anywhere?

[00:15:02] So, in this case, the antidote to the car which doesn't go anywhere... of many antidotes, really, we... are advised to hold a view. In this case, we hold the view... for starters... that turning our minds to refuge... is to turn our minds in the direction of... what is already there. That is to say... we are each fully endowed... with the awakened mind... of the Buddha. Now this is not some kind of spooky thing... that we are endowed with the awakened mind of the Buddha. ... It's really simple. Captured by that... story, one of my favorite very *short* stories of... in ancient times, a man approaching the Buddha in the street and asking him... *honestly*, what is different between you and me? And the Buddha answered, so it is said, no difference. Exactly the same. If there is a difference, it is not a difference in the awakened mind. It is a difference *in*... whether or not you have recognized it. And so, the Buddha is said to have said... perhaps the difference is... I recognize that awakened mind and you do not. But you are not any less endowed with the awakened mind than I am.

[00:17:22] So, the *view* that we need to hold to nurture... our sense of moving in the direction of recognizing it, is first of all, to just hold the view... that you *are* endowed with it. And you don't need to even *believe* that you are endowed with it. In fact, personally, I think belief is a little bit of an obstacle. Belief tends to solidify things. *Now I know what the truth is*. But knowing what the truth is conceptually... it's kind of like an aluminum nickel. It isn't really worth much. But like on a sunny day when you put glasses on... to shield your eyes from the glare... you're not fooled into thinking... that because things are darker, the sun has gone down. You understand that the glasses... change things. They don't really change... the sun or the brightness of the light, but *they change your experience* of that.

[00:19:04] And so, in the same way, when we talk about view, and we really should talk about it much more than we do... we hold views as a matter of... practical support for the meditation that we're engaging in. So, in this case, we want to turn our minds to refuge in the Buddha. And in order for that to be *effective*, we have to have this *experience* of turning our minds to refuge in the Buddha. Merely having a conceptual idea that just reciting a few words is going to make that happen... if that worked, we would all be enlightened already since we have said those words so many times. So, when we hold a view, in this case, we'll just work on this one for a few more moments... I turn my mind to refuge in the Buddha... holding the view, holding the attitude, holding the assumption that actually I *am* fully endowed with the awakened mind. The only thing standing between... my understanding of that conceptually is to turn the *experience* on... and to

recognize that awakened mind. ... No necessity for complication. No matter what practice we engage in, that's what it all comes down to.

[00:21:06] So, you can engage in enormously complex practices, which quite a few people in this room have done... it can be very helpful... or not. But no matter what, it's always about... the *experience* that comes from holding the view... that I am fully endowed with the awakened mind. The issue is not whether I have that or not. It is about whether I *recognize* it or not. And that is it! It all comes down to that. So, if we can *not* lose track of that, we can continually bring ourselves back to the place where we need to be. The first most important means for recognizing the nature of mind is to acknowledge and hold the view that I am fully endowed with it already. When we say I am fully endowed with the awakened mind... if we allow ourselves to actually, for the moment... nurture a sense of confidence that it is there. Even if the backdrop is... you're faking it. But nowhere in our tradition do we say... that you need to fake it. That it *is* there, and that no matter who you are or who you have been or will be, you are fully endowed with it. It is *only* about recognizing what you already have.

[00:22:58] So, when we turn our minds to refuge... hold the view... I turn my mind from all of my worldly concerns. My attachments, my aversions, my hopes, my disappointments... my joy... my kindness, my friends, all these things. ... Turning my mind from all of those things to refuge in the Buddha is turning our minds to refuge in our *own* awakened nature. When we do that... each of us will have a different experience. Because we're different people. We have different pasts. Even if you do this every day and go for refuge, every day you do it... it's very important to recognize... that going for refuge today, you have never done before.

[00:24:24] Even if you recite it a hundred times and hold the view that I'm going for refuge in the Buddha again, every recitation is unique. Isn't that obvious? Should be obvious. But it's obvious mostly from a conceptual perspective. So, once again, we are *missing* the experience. We *must* have the experience. And the experience every time... really, needs to be *absolutely* fresh. Never having occurred before. Nor will it ever occur again. This is kind of the mental framework within which... we turn our minds to refuge in a way which is fresh and new every time. So, we'll start by going for refuge together, reciting the liturgy three times.

**sangha** [00:25:55] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:27:48] The meditation we call calm abiding... relies mostly on the ability to relax. It does not rely at all upon having a mind which is still. Definitely does not rely on a mind which is empty. ... Everyone here who is still alive... can vouch that they have never found an empty mind. Nor will that ever happen. But to be able to *relax* with the mind... whatever is going on there... whether we are feeling at peace, filled with angst, filled with loving kindness or hatred... makes no difference. The important piece is to develop the ability to place our awareness on the experience that occurs in the mind continuously... without effort. Though there may be a little effort in the very beginning. We bring our awareness to the experience that we're having... in this moment, because there is no other moment... and we rest on awareness there, on whatever the experience is. ... That is the analogous piece to the dark glasses in the sun. Bringing our awareness to our experience, whatever it is. If the experience is that we wish we had another experience... that's just another place to rest the awareness. If your mind is filled... with joy... or angst... or judgment... the view is... it's just another experience.

[00:30:33] It's important not to be fooled by the awakened mind. [laughs] Fooled in the sense of thinking... that an awakened mind is a still mind. We may find our mind is still from time to time,

but... mostly, we will say, kind of rare. My guess is there is no one here who has not tried to still their mind. Kind of like talking a mad elephant into being still. So, we can say many things about the stillness. We can talk about... the emptiness of experience. Which is to say we recognize... the lack of reality in our angst or in our judgments or in our... internal conversations. But every one of them is an experience. ... And since we're meditators... a sense of curiosity about the mind is more important than what we witness there. More important than... being able to sit still... is to bring your curiosity... to all of the experiences that are continuously unfolding in the mind. ... We say the content of the mind arises continuously. Unimpeded. Never stops. ... Has been doing that since time way before we were born. ... Actually... beginningless. All the experiences that we feel... have no beginning. Nor do they have an end. And if you've been watching... during your life so far, you will notice... so far, that appears to be the case.

[00:33:37] So, now what we want to do is... we want to bring our awareness to whatever experience we're having. ... And to recognize that experience, not its name, not its size or shape or its duration. Just to recognize the experience. I can say, well I'm feeling pretty good today. But now we've skipped what we wanted to do. We want to bring our awareness to... that *experience*. And that experience... will not last long. So, we don't have too much time... to accomplish this. Experiences generally arise and disappear within moments. They're like bubbles... on the surface of water. So, our objective is to place our awareness on the experiences as they unfold. ... Not to control the experiences. Not to judge the experiences. Not to be happy with the experiences. But also, not to be unhappy with the experiences. We want our awareness to *rest* on our experience. Because... the experiences are what... we continuously have. So, if we are to become *intimate* with ourselves... in the context of our meditation, we must develop the skill of being able to rest our awareness on the experiences as *they unfold*.

[00:35:41] That's a very profound... way of practicing shamatha, calm abiding. *You* may not be calm... or have a calm experience... of the mind. But you *must* be able to relax... and rest your awareness on the experiences. And when you find that the mind has gone off... which will happen, you know, every... second [laughs] regularly... you just bring your awareness back to whatever the experience is at that time. Don't put your mind back on the experience that was there before. It's gone and you will never see it again. That's a view to hold. Hold the view that your experience that you just had; you will never have again. No matter how pleasant or unpleasant it was, you... just clear, you'll never have it again. So, our objective is not to... *stabilize* the experience. That's a hoax. Somebody we all know, would probably, you know, if they had the wherewithal, would say 'fake news!' [laughs] But not to worry, there'll be more right behind it.

[00:37:18] So try this. Settle into your place physically. It really doesn't matter... you could be sitting, standing, lying on your back. It doesn't matter... really, fundamentally. You may find it very helpful to sit cross-legged in meditation. You may not find it that way. Or more likely you may find it very helpful today and not helpful tomorrow. We are concerned about this moment and the experience that's arising and our mind settling into the place of just having the experience. Period. ... That's it. It's up to you now.

[00:38:04] *period of meditation*  
**sangha** [00:47:49] *dedicating the merit*