

2018_09_30_am2_QA_LMC.mp4

the practice of bodhicitta as method to work with strained relationships and working with view that every experience is gift from teacher, discussion of inclusivity of Buddhist practice

LMC [00:01:12] Our intention is that everyone can hear. If you can't hear, would you raise your hand? Stand up, shout back. And so, for those who are not familiar with what we're doing... and for those who didn't leave, not knowing what they were doing... this is, after our meditation on this morning, we have a kind of open discussion. So, you can raise questions, make comments... and we'll entertain almost anything. We haven't found something we weren't willing to entertain yet, especially ourselves. So, as you wish. Can be things that came up this morning and it could be things that came up last year... or just something you read in a book and you're trying to get some... insight which you may or may not get from here. But... we'll continue with this until... when do we end around, around 11 o'clock. Okay? Ball's in your court. Oh, yes. You must wait for the microphone to be delivered. Because if you don't have it, then all the people who might be watching today on the streaming won't be able to hear you.

Student 1 [00:03:09] So, lately I've been noticing... the way that I hold the past against people. I can think of a number of situations where some conflict has arisen, and... it got resolved in some way, you know. Not like we really worked it all the way down to the bottom and came to a place of total transparency and reconciliation. But, you know, you kind of do good enough and everybody wants to move on and you move on. But it really feels like some seed has been planted. And it's not like it's active every day and I'm thinking about it all the time. But then something will happen and it's right there. Like the second... that some new friction arises with the same person. Then the narrative starts about this *old* thing that happened that wasn't really ever resolved. I'm just, I don't know, I'm just wrestling with this idea of... how it is, I never really let these things go. Or I never really see through them. And so they still have a kind of power over me. And I'm wondering how we *do* that? How we clean those things out... so, that we can actually interact with people in a fresh way in the moment with what's arising right then? Instead of... resting in some old... story about... often it's some little thing that just didn't work out in the way I wanted it to work out. And yet it, it, it arises and colors the present.

LMC [00:05:49] [laughs] Yes. Mm hmm. It's actually, I think... way more than an interesting question. [laughs] It's like, it's fundamental... to our relationship with others. And fundamental to our relationship with ourselves! Because we do the *exact* same thing with ourselves. Normally, we just call that holding guilt. Or attached to our personal image of ourselves... long after we have last looked into a mirror to see what's really there.

[00:06:46] So, I think we can talk a lot about simple antidotes to... letting go of our opinions about others, which is the same as letting go of our... *history* about others. But most of the antidotes and the little tricks are not so powerful. It's not like you worked in the garden and you got your hands dirty and you went inside and you wash your hands and you felt like my hands have never been dirty. It's like they just feel clean again. It's really hard to do that. And I think that actually, in the deepest sense... so, let's go there first... to the, to the really profound sense within the tradition.] How do you deal with... all the things that we hold on to... which really means, in a deep way, *identify with* in some way or another. I identify myself as being this person. Or that person as being this kind of person. And I used to like them, but now I don't like them because *this* happened. And so, we're just constantly putting random ingredients into the soup and then wondering why it doesn't taste good. You can't remove the ingredients from the

soup. So, that metaphor has always worked for me precisely because of *that* little piece. You cannot remove... the things you put into the soup easily. Once the soup is cooked, it's like you either like it and you eat it or you don't. And *don't* often means you abandon somebody. ... Which starts the whole thing going once again.

[00:08:52] The *deep* antidote, in my... experience... is a deepening understanding of and practicing of bodhicitta. And again, I mentioned this before, but... I mention it to myself every day... so, I'll mention it to you again. Way back in the early 70s, meeting Kalu Rinpoche, there were half a dozen things that he said that were so poignant... you just couldn't forget them. *I* couldn't forget them. Maybe others did, or they remembered other things they couldn't forget. But one of the things that... became a kind of... piece of the Dharma that I carried... was his suggestion that every experience, positive or negative, that you have... you hold the view that, *that experience was given to you by your teacher as a gift.*

[00:10:15] And of course, many of the experiences we have, we don't like! [laughs] You know, like you want to say, I don't eat chocolate cake! But this is different. This is more in the genre of... if you want to overcome... your aversion to something that you've been hanging onto and you can't figure out how to let go of it, to imagine that it is a *gift* that has been delivered to you specifically from *your* Dharma teacher. Whether that person is enlightened or just starting, whatever. It's nice to think they're enlightened because you can kind of take it easier. And so, you say... it's a gift from my teacher. And then there's a couple of caveats with it. The *reason* you have that gift from your teacher is that... *that's* the gift you need. So, it's not random, like just anything. Though in another way, it *is* random. It's our experience is random. Our experiences often feel random as they arise. But here we're talking about actually assigning the *intention* to that teacher. This person cares about you enough to give you *this* gift. And they know you well enough to know... that you are going to be *able* to work with this to the place of it bearing fruit. So, there's a kind of partnership in all of that. Which we know anyway in our relationships with each other, as ordinary people... we have a kind of... when we talk about a community of Dharma practitioners, we talk about supporting each other and working with each other in a certain way, which is kind of like... not quite completely steeped in worldly stuff. There's like an element that's like just outside of that.

[00:12:21] So, those things that we hold against each other. ... It's rare... in my experience... that we even ever *want* to give them up. It's like we prize them. ... But we also know that it doesn't help. So, you're saying that you would like to be... rid of those things. I don't think that we can intentionally... clean out the closet. That's what we'd *like* to do. Get all the silhouettes of the people who we know, who we think we understand and, and we relate to those silhouettes so that we don't have to relate to the person. And... it doesn't go away by virtue of that.

[00:13:30] But *if* we... embrace the practice of... aspiration bodhicitta... to start with... just the aspiration that I would like to be *free* of... all of my opinions and judgments about... others. And maybe I'd like to *start* by... being free of the judgments and opinions about myself. Because you can't really do this if... you're doing it to yourself. It's really more difficult. Because we *believe* it when we do it to ourselves. [laughs] The belief is really hard to give up. So... to give it up... I think it's easier... to focus on others. Kind of in a way, I mean, it's not... immediately obvious that that would be true. But I think when you... practice... *a lot* of relative bodhicitta, which is the *aspiration* to accomplish the Dharma... that we might be... an example... first, for others that they might also practice. ... And that by virtue of accomplishing the Dharma ourselves, that we might be able to be a cause... for... *all* beings to be free of suffering. And sometimes we can add onto there... free of the suffering that they never deserved. ... And still don't.

[00:15:35] So, that's not always easy. I think that that piece is really apparent. There are people you don't want to hold that aspiration for. When you try to hold the aspiration, you choke! And things just don't feel right about it. So, we have to actually have a kind of universal, this is where the equanimity piece comes in, you have to have a sense that... there is no one who deserves to suffer. No matter what they have done. No matter what they've said. Because... if we held any other view, we will also be... drawn into that vortex. You cannot escape it. So, to hold the wish... and to hold the aspiration that I would do whatever I possibly could to relieve beings of suffering. And not just the person I like next door who is suffering, but... naturally that's where we start. Because... we just can't go for the big thing at first.

[00:16:47] But knowing what the big thing is and hearing the teachings on it and relating to it, we can develop... first it's the wish. Like, I wish I could do that! And maybe we meet somebody, and there are many examples in this tradition and in similar traditions where we meet somebody who does that and we have the experience firsthand. We just meet them and we realize they care deeply about us. Even though they never met us. And so, we can have the sense that I see it can be done. And then we can start to do it.

[00:17:24] It's best done secretly, you know. Best done secretly. Because if we make it apparent to others... now we have stepped into the realm of self-aggrandizement. So, we have to make it a kind of secret. And, as often as possible, raise the view. Like this person... who has harmed me in some way or said things about me or whatever it is... we have to... look at that and realize, that their suffering comes at a cost to them. ... Often a really deep cost and they don't know how to get out of that. So, they get stuck in it. Then we're all affected by that. What we would like to be is all affected by loving kindness, joy, equanimity, compassion. ... Those things when... practiced diligently and continuously, which are so easy. ... It's so easy to hold that view. If we hold that view enough, we start to get a sense.... I see how this works. I see how this works. Then I want to do it more... and more and more. If you can, I think that... the bodhicitta is actually... the most powerful. ... What do you think? That's it, that enough?

Student 2 [00:19:40] Um... I'm just going to state what my experience was, and I would like you to sort of break it a little bit. Recently.... I was with a dear friend who has brain cancer, and I haven't seen her for a while, but I got asked if I could come and do some respite for her partner. And I did. Brain cancer is causing dementia. And so, she's... not very present. Yet she, she does have enough... what's happening for her, is she also can just... do what she thinks she should be able to do and can't. But I was aware, in terms of being with her, I really just couldn't be with the silence. I tried to do a little tonglen and I'm like.... okay. And mainly then I came to just understanding, okay, I understand... her suffering, and I would just like her to be free of that. I know that some of the... one of the things that happened is it definitely reflected very close to me in terms of... that whole process of dementia. Because I've been with many people who've had it, but they're in their older times of their lives or, you know, their 80s or 90s, where she is my age. So, she's like 60 something. So, I knew, okay, this is perfect practice time. And I'm like, oh, never mind that! So, help.

LMC [00:21:57] That's what you said?

Student 2 [00:21:57] I understood there was a part of me that just thought, I can't do this. It's not... because I couldn't handle the silence.

LMC [00:22:14] [after a period of silence...] How was that? [laughter] Was she handling it?

Student 2 [00:22:40] Um... it's hard for me to actually say. I don't know.

LMC [00:22:44] Did you ask?

Student 2 [00:22:48] I did not ask her about the silence.

LMC [00:22:52] Something simple like, would you like to talk? Would you prefer to be quiet or shall we talk about something?

Student 2 [00:23:02] I know one of the, in that regard I knew one of the things that... is happening for her is basically she's put in her chair and she watches television. Which was sort of... *interesting* for me. Thank you. I did not think of asking her that particular thing. I did share with her one time, I'm very happy to be with you. And she gave me a very nice smile, you know. One of the things that did happen is I was just... in the other room, and she's now can only be in a wheelchair. She does not have enough strength to walk. Well, she ended up getting out of her wheelchair and falling and then her wheelchair, part of it fell on her. And so, I you know, I went in and I said, ooooh, okay. And it was very interesting trying then to work with her in terms of getting her up. And that we did have this continual sort of little give and take. So, that I mean, I understood it was something that we were both sort of involved with. But I appreciate your question. I did not ask her about this. I should have just asked her. That would have been good. Thank you.

LMC [00:24:34] It's hard, if you're feeling uncomfortable, then it's hard to ask.

Student 2 [00:24:41] Well, it just didn't occur to me. And that would have made so much sense. Because one of the things I was aware of is it's like, okay, I go to silent retreats and that's what I like. So, why is this so different? And I understood one of the reasons it was so different is because I hold... well, definitely I hold the opinion on a retreat that everyone there wants to be there. Which I was very aware she was not wanting to be where she was at.

LMC [00:25:11] Yes. ... Is that enough for now?

Student 3 [00:26:14] My question is about refuge. And I think about this a lot. So, when I was a little girl, I was Catholic. Went to Catholic school. I said the rosary every night. I went to confession and was very open to dying right after that because I knew I would go straight to heaven. There was also... another one of those, which was, if you can say the act of contrition, when you know you're dying, you would also go straight to heaven. So, I practiced a lot. "Oh my God, I'm ... [rapidly said it] I could do it very quickly because I really wanted to go to heaven. And I really wanted to be with God. Like I just... that innocence of all that. And I remember my mother and I, every time there would be an accident or anybody would be in pain... we would both say a Hail Mary for them. And so Catholicism was a very important... refuge in my life. I went for refuge in the confessional. I went for refuge... with communion and went for refuge saying the rosary. And... now... well, you know, then I read Siddhartha years later and that was the end of Catholicism.

[00:27:49] So, now, there's this practice and... we say, "may I and all beings go for refuge to the sources of true refuge." And every time I say that, I want to say, 'may all beings go for refuge to the sources of *their* true refuge.' Because I remember that one of the things that really used to bother me as a kid... was... I don't know if it is explicit, but it was implicit that Catholicism was

right and other religions were... wrong. Or they didn't, you didn't get that, um... they weren't... I was going to say easy access to heaven, but that wasn't there. That they weren't... that Catholicism was right. I won't even say anything else was wrong. It was just the Catholicism was the right religion. And we all know that there are people all over the world... who are deeply devoted and believe so strongly and that they take refuge in whatever... beliefs and traditions. And they find great refuge in that. And... I guess my question... is when we say that, do, are we saying... "to the sources of true refuge" that *this* is the only source of true refuge? Is that implicit? Is it implicit that when we say... "may all beings take refuge in the in the sources of true refuge" that the true refuge is the one we're talking about, that we're all sitting with?

LMC [00:29:50] I think you'd have to answer that yourself. I think that... probably, each one of us, at some point we heard about refuge for the first time. And then we got explanations and teachings on refuge. And some teachers may have been more... on the side of... this is somehow exclusively correct. I have met teachers who are in that place of feeling like there's a kind of *exclusivity* about the profundity, about the way that the... system works, the practice works. And I think that's just always the way it is in the world. They'll be people who feel like there's an exclusivity in a certain sense of... we're more right than somebody else is. All I can say is that's not *my* sense of it.

[00:31:10] And the practices where we... imagine when we go for refuge, for example, we imagine in front of us, extending beyond our ability to conceive of how much and how many... all sentient beings. Not just those who are living... at this time, but all sentient beings... beyond the boundaries of time and space. That they are there. I've often taken that as... this is an *antidote* to exclusivity. You can *not* hold the two at the same time. It's like, they just don't fit together. So... I think some people, for example... can't do... refuge easily. For various reasons, they can't go for refuge easily. Some people can't do it because... maybe they can't chant it or their voice is hard to mouth the words and all. And I think that it's our obligation... if we are teaching the Dharma, I think it's our obligation to... make it accessible to whoever wants to practice. Whatever it takes.

[00:32:31] So, in *that* way, that's an antidote to exclusivity. Which personally, I have to confess, I hold as a positive thing. Exclusivity is an antidote to diversity, [laughs] you know, it's the enemy of diversity. And in my own experience, in my own life, diversity has been the greatest source of joy and growth. So, I can't go to places... in my mind or... in teaching the Dharma, that excludes anybody for any reason whatsoever. And therefore, the teachings on... aspiration bodhicitta and *engaged* bodhicitta, are both... things that I personally appreciate because they not only don't *require* exclusivity, they actually nurture a sense of openness and inclusiveness. So, I can't really say... when you say, 'is it supposed to be this or that?' I can only say that from my own perspective, I am not capable of making this or that.

[00:33:53] When I think that all sentient beings, I love the prayers that have this... intention in it, there is no such thing as a sentient being who deserves to suffer no matter what they've done. That, to me is an inspiration to like, put that in my mind stream. That's the piece in the mind stream that I *want* to have. It feels like it's in accordance with this tradition, which I deeply appreciate. So, I can only say, the answer is no, it's not exclusive... from my own perspective. And I know other teachers who I admire, great teachers, who hold the same view. I *also* know... great teachers who do not hold that view. If you're at a crossroads... and somebody switched the sign so they point in the wrong direction, which I relate to because I used to like to do that when I was 15, [laughter] I just thought a little confession would be helpful [laughter] and... are we getting close... to something?

Student 3 [00:35:52] So, um, I hear you saying that... and I've always felt this, that when we say that, that it includes all beings... that there is not any exclusion.

LMC [00:36:08] There is no exclusion.

Student 3 [00:36:08] That part I get. ... Well, I'll go back to Catholicism because maybe there's something about that. So, people who are Catholic go to heaven. People who aren't Catholic... don't get to heaven. Because they're not Catholic. So, heaven exists for Catholics. So, it's like saying may all beings be Catholic. And I'm wondering, are we saying, 'May I, and all beings be Buddhist' so that we can all attain enlightenment.

LMC [00:36:47] You could hold this view. So, for *those* beings... and we're not all exactly the same... for the simple reason of the truth of... the unbounded web of interconnectedness. We're not all the same. In fact, from one moment to the next, none of us is the same as what we were in the previous moment. So, for *some* beings, we could say it's just totally skillful! Some beings will be able to work with... I can do this because... this gets me into heaven. And if I did something else, I wouldn't be able to. And I feel sorry for those people who can't get into heaven. So, that's okay. You know, if that works and it doesn't come to the place of... we have to kill all those people who are not Catholics. [laughter] Which is sometimes where people go. So... I think that's another issue.

[00:38:06] So, just the issue of like, could I just... have some appreciation for... the only true path is A, B or C, whatever it is. And I can't say, in a kind of broad way, that feels to me like it's really in accordance with some Buddhist place, that there is something that is... '*The Path*'... that, that nobody else has. Or this is the only way that you can accomplish this or that. And again, I have to recall, like I think we *each* need to find... a place that we feel comfortable in, that we feel is valuable, that it works. So, I'm talking now about within the context of Buddhism. I think if you're going to be a Buddhist... or a Catholic... we need to find a spot that works for us. And, we could say a spot that works for me... that is in accordance with bodhicitta. So, maybe we study bodhicitta and we think is a really good aspiration to hold. That *all* sentient means become free of suffering, even if they... committed atrocious actions in this life. Even now in this *life*, I would wish that they would be free of suffering.

[00:39:38] But if you can't do that, then do the next best thing. And if it's something that does not harm others, which I think the principle of ahimsa, which is to be like, harmless at the very least... is in accordance with our tradition. Kalu Rinpoche once, I just say there's one last thing here, he said that... the entire Dharma is contained in every piece of the Dharma, without *any* exception. If you can *deeply* relate with *any* piece of the Dharma, you can discover the whole path through that piece. Now, I wish I could say... that that's been my experience. But it's been my experience to *some* degree that things unfold by virtue of following what is an inspiration. So, if I feel inspired by a piece of the Dharma that's authentic, I often find when I go down that way, that I find other jewels, other things that are good.

[00:45:12] So now we're going to... dedicate the virtue and the merit of coming together and engaging in this conversation, which... hopefully is helpful.

sangha [00:45:34] *dedicating the merit*