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witnessing the union of emptiness and appearance, **Carrying practice**: placing awareness on experience e.g. an itch or one you hoped you'd never have, **and Carrying Practice**: practicing with short times many times, **Carrying Practice**: transforming difficult situations with view that it's a gift from guru, **Carrying Practice**: (**adder**) habituate short time many times, ordinary mind and the unbounded view [**includes adder to 1st Carrying Practice**]

Student 1 [00:02:34] You mentioned something earlier about... realizing or recognizing what we're doing. And so, my question is about that. I have the idea, maybe a mistaken idea... that less is more, that what we're doing is 'not doing'.

LMC [00:03:01] What? Say that again, what you're doing is *not* doing. ... Oh, I see. You mean to say... what you're doing is not what you're supposed to be doing?

Student 1 [00:03:14] Well, that is also true, but... [laughter] but what I mean to say is, kind of... my sense has been that 'not doing' is what I'm learning to do. I don't mean not meditating and not practicing, but I mean not striving, not having a project, not, you know, having an ultimate goal for that project, kind of not... doing. And so, when you said... something about realizing what we're doing. Seemed like there was some, you know, substance in that, I wondered... if you could talk about... what we're doing?

LMC [00:04:11] Of course. We can talk about... everything, as we know! [laughs] But, in this case... when we started and the instruction for the meditation was to... place your awareness upon whatever experience was arising... there's a non-doing *there*. The only doing, really, is placing your awareness on the experience. So, of course... your experiences occur all the time. So, in terms of that particular meditation, you could do it all the time... because there's a continuous flow of experiences. Most of us, having practiced shamatha quite a bit, we are... sometimes painfully aware... that the experiences never seem to die down. They're just always there.

[00:05:18] But also, when we read in some of the more advanced texts, for example, the more advanced instructions are... that the mind itself is just... continuously creating experiences. It's just always there. So, in some way we... sometimes make the mistake of *thinking* that in our meditation, the mind should become still. And... that may be a false expectation. Maybe better... to acknowledge from the get-go that... this is not likely to be the case. So, this is, if I can just kind of like... *touch* on an important distinction that we could find useful to make. The distinction between the mind, the nature of mind, the mind, which is a completely non-physical thing from a Buddhist perspective... and the brain, which is a completely *physical* thing. So, when we meditate, of course, we're using *both* of those things. The brain and the mind. But usually... we get confused by it. So, we tend to simplify the practice a little bit where we... try to place our awareness on something and focus on it and hold the awareness on something so that the flow of the distraction slows down, at least, if not completely becomes still. But the *complete* stillness is really quite rare. Because, again, the nature of mind is actually more movement than it is stillness. ... Why are you looking at me? [laughs]

Student 1 [00:07:38] Why wouldn't I?

LMC [00:07:40] Oh, that's good. Somebody was. [laughs]

Student 1 [00:07:50] So, if I get caught up in thinking I'm... kind of doing something, you know, and... it has a particular... end point to it. And I need to do it well and I need to be involved in this project that I'm doing... I get, I get a little... *off*, you know?

LMC [00:08:19] Yeah. Make a distinction there. Our life in what we call samsara, just kind of the worldly environment that we live in and swim around in all the time... yes, we have projects, we have commitments, we have all sorts of things that we're involved in. That's a different situation. So yeah, it would be really good if we could carry our practice to all of those situations. That would be spectacular. But actually, for most of us, it's, enough to be able to sit down and just learn to put all of those projects aside. And the best way to do that, in my experience, is... whatever you sit down with... whatever your experiences, when you sit down, put your awareness on that experience. If it's disappointment, put your awareness on the disappointment. If you feel angst because you're not doing something that you think you should do, put your awareness on that experience. Not on the *conceptual* side of it. Like... oh, I have this angst now. I should be doing this. That's not putting your awareness on it. That's actually... you're being run by it.

[00:09:34] And there's a sanity... let's start first with the *insanity* that we all are so familiar with, with all of our myriad projects. There's a certain way in which... those projects have a certain sense of insanity from time to time, at least. Like, it's too *much!* On the other hand, maybe we have jobs and we have to get paid. So, if we're not doing what we're getting paid for, we're not going to get paid. So, we go through all that! So, in *this* case, we can treat our meditation as a break. I can step out of the world of doing... into the world of... just placing my awareness on the experience itself. Not placing my awareness on what I'm *doing*. But on the *experience*, that is just arising in the mind at that time.

[00:10:35] You know, in the very first... probably less than a month of meeting Kalu Rinpoche, he said exactly this thing. And it really stuck in me. But it took years to figure out what it was that he had said. Because... everything was in Tibetan, or it was translated in a much more coarse way than what we get today. You know, we, you get somebody like Eric Triebelhorn today translating. We didn't have anything like that at all... 25, 30 years ago. It just didn't exist. So, the translators were okay. It was a lot better than nothing! But... it still was not what we get today.

[00:11:20] So, it's helpful to clarify what it is that you're looking at here and what you're working with. And... the nice thing about... well, let me say what Kalu Rinpoche said. He said... amongst many things, he said, if you can find *one* thing in the myriad of practices that... and he always talked about, of course, Tibetan Buddhism... primarily, if you can find *one* practice that... works for you, that feels really helpful and positive... you don't need anything else. He said if you pursue that one thing, you will discover the entire path from it. And I think what he meant was, is that... your curiosity will lead you to investigate and to get more teachings and, and gradually it'll fill out... and you'll have a more robust approach.

[00:12:30] But I think he *also* meant that if you can *actually* become inspired by one thing and stay inspired with that one authentic piece of the Dharma, that you *would* discover the entire path from that one thing. It's kind of like... one drop in the ocean... is the essence of the entire ocean. So, one drop's not going to satisfy our thirst, but we're not talking about thirst and eating and all of our ordinary activities. We're talking about doing something which is fundamentally extraordinary... among human beings. Which is to stop... doing what we're doing and let our

awareness rest on the doing that occurs naturally in the mind all the time. The kind of experiences that can continuously arise.

[00:13:26] We don't do that. We don't have the experience of doing that. So, because we don't, we have to create a Dharma center... where you can go and that's your job there. Is to do something different. Place your awareness on what is naturally arising and occurring. If we could do that on our own, we wouldn't need to come together. Though we might do it for the benefit of others, hopefully. But really... if you can just meditate enough to get a break... and you *witness* that break... and you have the experience of it and you put your awareness on that experience, the likelihood that you will continue... is very high. If you don't do that, the likelihood becomes very low.

[00:14:19] So, it's common for people to say, "I used to meditate more. And now I haven't meditated for years." That's not uncommon because... they kind of lost the method. They gave up part of the support, which is a community. You know, you actually need people in a community like this who will say, "How's your meditation?" So, when you say, I haven't meditated in three weeks or three months or something, that somebody... who's your friend, will say, "What the hell's the matter? What do I need to do to help you do that?" It's important to have friends who share the practice so that... they will help you. They will notice and... they will say it looks like you're indulging in some kind of thing that is not helpful. And then you feel, because they're your friend, you'll feel like it's important for you to pay some attention to the advice they give you. Does that make sense? Okay.

Dora [00:15:38] I have a follow up question? I think it's a follow up. Anyway, it seems me there's difficulty in that instruction, place your awareness on your experience as it's arising. Aren't there... a hundred experiences arising... at any given moment for us? Our bodies are experiencing different things. We're seeing things. We're feeling things. There's some wisp of some memory. There's a current thought. There's all these things. So how do we not... it doesn't quite feel right to sort of, you know, do we, do we pick the most... do I pay attention now to the most salient one of those? That doesn't seem like the right instruction. But I'm not sure what you would say about that. I feel like... as I use that instruction, I'm confused as to... yeah, whether I'm to pick some... some experience in particular, or... sort of be there with the wash of the hundred things and not put particular attention on any one thing. So, can you expand on that process?

LMC [00:17:18] I'm not sure that it's true... that there is a myriad of experiences occurring simultaneously. So, I remember once, I think it was at time that we had Khenpo Tsultrim [Gyamtsso Rinpoche] teaching... that he mentioned something that I'd heard before. Which was, that even though... we can have a long list of things that we're trying to accomplish, that from the perspective of the flow of experiences in the mind... they're like single file. It's like there's one occurring at a time. And they may be coming quickly... but there's only one occurring at a time. And, if we can stop and put our awareness on any one of them, then the *salient* experience, which is really helpful, is that, that experience... vanishes. So... I think the common teaching on that is... the experience dissolves into the emptiness that was always part of it. So, it was never *separate* from that. And we talk so much about emptiness without actually getting down to like, well, what good is it for me? [laughs] And that particular teaching, I think, is actually *very good* for us... to relate to. It's easy for us to confirm... that an experience arises... it's there for some period of time, but it's also kind of like a bubble... then it's gone. And so, the explanation of *that* was... that *is* the dissolution of that experience into emptiness. The 'into' is a little bit... like not right. Since the emptiness was always there... with it.

[00:19:19] But sometimes, I've heard it, and maybe you have too, heard it described as... the emptiness and the appearance are actually... they talk about it in a way as if they were separate. But we know they're not. They're actually not separate. They're *exactly* the same in the sense that they are... actually, to say they're the same is not quite right... the emptiness and the appearance... are co-emergent. They arise at the same time. They dissolve at the same time. They don't necessarily dissolve predictably... instantaneously. But if you put your awareness on it, and this is the benefit of getting good at putting your awareness on experiences, you will witness the experience dissolving. ...] So, normally we realize... ooop, it's gone. Kind of like a bubble... it pops. We didn't really see it pop, but we noticed that it wasn't there anymore. So, what is helpful is... to place our awareness on the experience that's arising so that we can actually *witness* it dissolving. So, the description that, that I found most inspiring is... the awareness resting on the experience. And... the experienter [laughs] witnessing the dissolution. That *is*... witnessing the union of emptiness and appearance.

[00:21:06] So, I think that requires a little bit of... developing the ability to rest the awareness there. It has a little bit of a sense of trying to place one marble on top of another one. So, as soon as you put your awareness there and relaxed, it feels like the marble rolled off. And now we're in another place. But just like when we practice shamatha, we *can* develop an ability to rest... with an experience that's arising. Without trying to interfere with the experience, without trying to get it to do something, or to... get distracted by... what it is we feel we *should* be doing with that experience.

[00:21:57] So, I think, this is just that a wholly separate thing when we sit down and do normal shamatha... when I say normal only in the sense of the *usual* shamatha, is we put our awareness on an object like this little thing that you put liquids on, right? But if I put my awareness on this... this does not attract me. It neither repels nor attracts. It's irrelevant. It doesn't have any sense of... interest about it. But let's say that I'm angry... and I put my awareness on the anger. *That*... has a certain power to it. Maybe, like we are sometimes, we are *attached* to being angry. We *want* to be angry. We don't want to give the anger up. It's like it's morphing into *righteous* anger. And we refuse to give it up. It's *very* difficult to put your awareness on that. But *if* you can put your awareness on that... and witness the disillusion of it, you are witnessing something... really profound.

[00:23:19] I can say, from my own experience, it often leaves me with this sense of... I want to do it again. I want to do it again. I want to see it again. I want to do it again. And yet... it's not easy to find situations which *feel* inspiring, like putting your awareness on this. [holds up the coaster] So, it dissolves. So what? It doesn't... compel us in a certain way. But if I'm living in a space of white anger... and I see *that* dissolve. That's a big deal. We *feel* the big deal-ness of it. It's very clear. Like a certain sense of like, whoa, I've never had that experience before! I put my awareness on this thing, which... is not good. I lose my friends because of this thing. I make myself sick because of this thing and I put my awareness on it and it just dissolved. It's important to recognize... that is potentially... a big insight. ... And if you can do it once, of course, you can do it again.

[00:24:41] So that's, I think, the primary thing there of Dora was the issue of... too many things all at once. And... I don't know whether everyone experiences it or not, but when Khenpo Tsultrim made that comment about... really, just one thing occurs at a time. That was a very helpful... instruction... to then look at the myriad of things arising. And then I realized, oh, I'm actually not in the meditation. Now, I've moved into the project... somehow. Which is so easy to

move into and forget... that you were actually trying to put your awareness on an experience that was arising. Not what you're gonna say on the phone call you're just now about to make.

Student 2 [00:25:57] Yeah, I got a lot out of what you just said also. And I'm finding that... my own problem with the instruction and observing is that... I'll go along and... suddenly, I realize that I am no longer focused on the experience. And that somewhere along the way I dropped off that ship completely. And now I'm picking it back up again. But I did notice that what I was focused on is gone. But I didn't see it in the *exact* moment of its disappearance. And it seems to me that what you're pointing to right now is that *exact* moment when it disappears. If you can see the exact, precise moment that it disappears, you are witnessing the union of appearance and emptiness. Is that correct?

LMC [00:27:01] Yes, but it's not surprising that we see the *absence* of the experience, in other words. Or the appearance changed into something else, which is to say, we didn't see that process.

Student 2 [00:27:27] We didn't get that exact point.

LMC [00:27:30] Yeah. I don't know that the exact point is necessarily important.

Student 2 [00:27:32] Really?

LMC [00:27:32] I don't know. It may not be. I mean... somebody asked whether or not that it was authentic... if you just *recalled* an experience. And I think there the answer to that one is *really* simple, that... the recollection itself is an experience. We are so trained in the *conceptual* aspect of these things. We're all like... too well educated. [laughs] And so, we're so *used* to... conceptualizing these things and putting them together. And in this particular case... I think what we want here is, we just want... to see the experience. If I have an itch, for example, and I say that because... I itch a lot, so... the itch is actually kind of simple. I got an itch. So, immediately I have this sense of I could scratch it or I could look at it. [laughs] Right? And looking at it is actually the more compelling thing, if it *occurs* to you. Because, one, it's absolutely not harmful. Secondly, it's definitely irritating. And therefore, it's the perfect place... to put your awareness.

[00:29:07] Especially things... this instruction from Kalu Rinpoche that he gave earlier on... at a slightly later date, which I can't place at all, but it was I think literally hours later... somebody was asking about it and he was talking about the awareness on an experience. And one of the things that he said, which was... at first... totally... I couldn't see like what he was talking about. He said the *best* experience to put your awareness on is an experience you hoped you would never have. [laughs] Because... if you can *put* your awareness *there*, it's almost like... if you can put the magnet close enough to the refrigerator, it will leap out of your hands and *stick* to the refrigerator. You'll have to get pliers to get it off. And in this same way, if you can place your awareness on an experience that you hoped you would never have, or some negative thing that you really don't want to work with, the likelihood is, *that* will work the best. Whereas, see, this doesn't work. [holding up coaster] It's not a magnet. It doesn't work.

[00:30:31] So... the best thing is the thing that you find... not *necessarily* challenging. It could be really pleasant! But the challenging thing has the benefit of... I want to do something about this. And I want to do something about it in the context of my Dharma practice or in the context of working with difficult situations. We don't feel inspired when... you know you're having a very pleasant experience and you're thinking, well, I could do this. And it would probably disappear.

Oh, that's great. [laughter] We don't think that. We think, no, I need to find something really that's unpleasant because I want to get *rid* of it. And so, that doesn't work either. We just replace one thing with the other thing.

[00:31:21] So, I think really, that the profundity of it is... all day long, you're out in the world, or you're at home and you're working, you could take... literally 10 or 20 seconds... every 10 or 20 minutes. And just stop for a moment. And see... watch. There's a continuous flow of experiences. Just flowing down all the time. They don't necessarily have names like pleasant, unpleasant. They don't necessarily relate to memories that we've had. But memories are totally okay. Especially if it's a memory you never wanted to have. [laughs] Or a memory you'd hope to get rid of and here it is again... so that you can put your awareness on that thing. And Kalu Rinpoche saying it was particularly compelling... because he was a compelling personage. So, when he said it, it seemed like... that's what it is. You want to place your awareness on really difficult states of mind and experiences that are occurring. ... I don't know what else I can say about that.

Student 3 [00:32:54] Say I was experiencing from... something that had just happened... a feeling of rejection. It seems to me that if I... focus my attention on that, I'm just going to feel it more deeply, which is something I'm not going to want to do.

LMC [00:33:08] That's right. [laughter] Anything else you'd like to say about that? [laughter] Well, the thing is, you see... like, of course you don't want it. Nobody wants that. But you get it. And having *gotten* it, so then... in that same, like short couple of weeks where Kalu Rinpoche... he gave the advice, which is really difficult. Which was... when you have a really difficult experience, or difficult situation, you transform it by... holding the view... that the experience you're having is a gift from the guru.

[00:34:03] So, now... if you don't have... let's just, you know, literally translate the word guru into teacher. Somebody who is, who maybe you have some appreciation for, not necessarily really *high* appreciation, but that's even better. Because then you can come to the place of... the one thing I know is this person would never hurt me. Everything I've ever gotten from this person has been helpful and beneficial. So, that makes it easier... to hold the view... that the negative experience I'm getting is a gift. So, it's a gift because... I have the ability to work with it. I have the ability to rest my awareness on it and discover its actual nature. Whereas, if I didn't have the instruction and I didn't have that relationship, I would just be pissed off at somebody. And we all know how great that is... and how *useful* it is, right?

[00:35:05] So, I think these kinds of instructions, are literally meant to be... points at which we can enter into authentic practice. ... And difficult... experiences are great entry point. Because when we have those difficult experiences, we always want to be rid of it. And it's rare for us to have a sense like... I know what to do with that. I know *exactly* what to do with that. And after you do it, like literally two or three times, you start to have this sense of... why am I not just doing this all the time? Paying attention to the experiences that just flow from the mind continuously? You can do shamatha. You can do Green Tara practice. You can do vajrayana visualizations and all of these things. Every one of them embodies an experience. ... And we're meant... to place our awareness on *that* experience. That's always a piece... of the practice. It's never a practice to avoid the experience. It's a practice to see the nature of that experience. You can't see the nature of an experience you haven't had. It's difficult to see the nature of an experience you throw away. So, one of the benefits is... you get good at placing your awareness on the experience; you stop throwing these things away. They're valuable. And it's not

dangerous, right? The worst thing about it is, it's not easy. And it's actually, mostly, not easy to remember to do it.

[00:37:05] We used to joke a lot... about trying to bring our meditation into our... mind as many times in the day as we can. And people get inspired by that. They really wanted to... like, I'll do it every day. I'll do like, you know... I'll remember to do one... breath, placing my awareness on the breath just that much. And most of the people, with full intention of doing it... and the *time* to do it will come back at the end of the day and say, I completely forgot. Completely forgot. Okay, try it again tomorrow. The next day, I completely forgot. That's the norm. We just completely forget. So, developing the habit... of recognizing experiences as they arise... is not so easy, but it's not dangerous.

[00:38:05] And every time that you do it, you have an insight into something that previously was just a passing experience. Perhaps as useless as... trying to put your awareness on something that has no power. But it may be that you had a big disagreement with somebody. And in the process, you had a little space in the day. And instead of just completely reliving the disagreement and working out the arguments so that you win this time, and all this stuff that we do. [laughs] Instead, maybe you took the time to just... redo that. And look at the *experience* that you were having... and watching it dissolve. ... I think it's fair to say, most people will not have that experience in their entire life. And they'll never know... what they missed. So, I like to say don't normalize... the habit... of forgetting to practice with all of your experiences. That's really like discarding the most precious thing you have.

Student 2 [00:40:09] I feel a little bit selfish asking another question, because there's so many people here and I wish everybody was asking questions except me. However, I'm wondering if you could say where does ordinary mind, the *tha mal shé pa*, come into this? Because it must. Otherwise, why did Rinpoche say for us to think about ordinary mind or say it, or whatever?

LMC [00:40:40] Who said that? Think about ordinary mind?

Student 2 [00:40:41] Khenpo Lodro Donyo. When he was here, he talked about that. And then, Mark Eichstaedt reframed our, our beautiful, uh, *tha mal shé pa*. And so, we have it as a reminder of something important. And now I'm wondering, why is that important?

LMC [00:41:04] Why is ordinary mind important?

Student 2 [00:41:07] The phrase ordinary mind set apart in... *tha mal shé pa*. Why is that important? And is it connected to this discourse?

LMC [00:41:21] Well... [bends down to look at his watch, laughter] actually, I think that we *are* talking about ordinary mind. We are talking about ordinary mind. So... the place that we tend to land in... when we're engaged in our meditation practice, we're looking for the profundity of it. Like, I should be really *struck* by something profound because I'm trying to rest my mind, which almost never do... and... we tend to manipulate our meditation in ways that sometimes we fool ourselves. The reason meditation is difficult, is not only because we tend to not have the discipline to do it, but also because even when we have the discipline to do it... we are looking at the basis of the entirety of our experience.

[00:42:36] If you give that just a moment's *conceptual* thought... you can see that what we're really doing is... we're trying to get to the place where we can see... that our experience does

not... happen *to* us. That it is not something that somebody else *did* to us. Or even that we somehow did to ourselves. But that the nature of mind itself is such that the experiences continue to flow... always! And... as good Buddhist's, which I don't recommend being... [laughs] necessarily... we elaborate [those] two steps further, the experiences flow from the nature of mind... continuously, dead or alive. So, dying doesn't get you out of it. The experiences flow... dead or alive. And there is a great benefit to holding that view... that the experiences that I have now... did not begin with this life. They began in an unimaginable previous point. Or even more accurately... there was no beginning. Just like there is no end.

[00:44:24] So, one way that we talk about this *tha mal shé pa*, ordinary mind, is just that that *is* the source of... all of our experiences. In other words, *it's ordinary*. We're always looking for something *special*... by virtue of our meditation, somehow. When actually the special... is the experiences that we witness... and work with as they arise. Ordinary experiences.

[00:45:03] The special experience is like Kalu Rinpoche saying, the experience that you never wanted to have. And now you have it! And even though you never wanted it, you're clear that you're having this. And you place your awareness on that experience with no... ulterior motive, other than just *seeing* the experience. And seeing the experience... no hope... of it getting better or getting worse. No fear... of it getting better or getting worse. Just... resting the awareness on that experience.

[00:45:51] So, I think we can talk about ordinary mind. It's kind of... not so interesting because it's ordinary. So, the nature of mind, whether we are just gossiping with our friends or we're witnessing the experiences that are arising... ordinary mind, just references... whatever you're engaged in. And it's fundamentally the same mind. It's not like we have... different minds.

[00:46:27] I think the more important thing is can we rest our awareness on the experience? That's where we witness it... experientially. So... otherwise we sometimes spend too much time trying to understand things conceptually. And, in this world, as we all know, you can buy as many books as you can afford... on virtually every profound subject that there is to have a profound subject about. And after reading all of those books, it's doubtful, that would have, in the end... been very helpful if the meditation that goes with it... had not been engaged in. ... All right?

Student 2 [00:47:18] So... I'll just say one last thing, and that is, I understand from what you've just said, that ordinary mind is a source of continuous great opportunity.

LMC [00:47:35] Yeah. [laughs] And it's also... when Kalu Rinpoche said, the best gift is the experience that you hoped you would never have... I remember having this sense that... what he was saying was, don't blame someone else for your experience. But I think it's actually more profound than that. The, I think the advice really was more along the lines of... if you *really* want to get at the nature of it, you have to take full responsibility for the experience. And the best way to do that is neither grasp nor reject. Just place your awareness on the experience. Don't hope for it to remain. Don't fear that it will go away. There's another experience right behind it anyway. [laughs] And so, the actual *practice* of placing the awareness on experience... is possible... twenty-four hours a day, every minute. It's continuous. Including sleep. Including dying and including death. So, death is probably a good place to conclude our... [laughs] conversation. So, we'll dedicate the merit.

sangha [00:49:20] *dedicating the merit*