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Carrying Practice: daily karma with connection between mind speech and action, meaning of taking refuge, calm abiding as resting without encouraging or discouraging any experience, benefit of many very short sessions

[00:03:30] So, here we are on the last day of the last year. ... Every time we have... a new year and an old year coming together, it's an opportunity to... check in. ... Most important for us... on this first session and through the very end of this year... is to pay attention... to what we do with our lives and... what we say to each other... and in a certain way, even more important, to pay attention to what we think. For what we think... ends up being what we say. And what we say ends up being part of our actions. So, there is nothing too subtle to pay attention to. All of it becomes... of great importance, over time, for each one of us... individually and also as a community. It's so important to pay attention to those things.

[00:06:17] So, first of all, we have... the recitation regarding... our refuge. And the meaning of that refuge is especially important... at this time, because of the New Year and the fact that we will have a Refuge Ceremony... it's especially important that we take this day and this particular session to put our attention on refuge. So, when we get to that tomorrow, those people who are staying or taking refuge... just to launch that a little bit in advance... a good question to ask when we decide to go for refuge or we're going for refuge, to ask the question, "What is it that we're taking refuge from?" ... And of course, in general, we can say that the object of taking refuge, and what we're taking refuge from *is*... all of the things... that lead to our suffering and discontent. All of the things that lead our friendships and relationships to be damaged. ... In a sense, going for refuge is just nothing more or less than... deciding... that we will *not* take refuge in the things that bring about suffering for ourselves and for others.

[00:08:59] So, when we recite the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer, it's so important not to do what we so *easily* do, which is... to fall into a place where we just recite the words and move through it as if it was... a chore... that you were having guests, so you needed to make your bed this morning... in case they saw it. The refuge is the basis for the entire path. If you remove the *intention* to go for refuge to the Buddha... our own awakened minds... and refuge to the... community of practitioners... the sangha... ourselves, each one of us. But most especially, refuge... to what we call the... Enlightened Sangha. Those individuals who are... more or less enlightened, beyond what *most* of us are at this point. And the teachings themselves, which are the basis for our practice... are the third thing... that lifts us out of the causes of suffering. ... So, when you recite it try to hold your mind on the Refuge Prayer. Let the meaning of it just sink in. Nothing to really *think* about, but more something to... rest in. So, we will together recite the prayer this morning three times.

sangha [00:11:34] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:13:28] Our first session this morning... is the practice of what we call shamatha or calm abiding. ... The title of the meditation *really* doesn't capture much. ... Anyone who has sat down to practice... calm abiding... has probably discovered at least once or twice... or much more... that calm abiding isn't. [laughter]

[00:15:05] Our minds tend to be... like machines that pump out experiences, whether we want them or not. ... The objective in calm abiding is not to *force* the calmness, which... if you've tried

that, you also discover that does not work. Whether our minds are busy with... conflicted emotional states or memories of what we did last year or what we hope to do this year and all the rest... our *objective* in calm abiding... is neither to encourage nor discourage... all of those experiences. ... If your mind is in turmoil... our objective is to rest in the middle of that turmoil. If you're happy this morning, the objective is to rest in that happiness. If you're angry, rest in the middle of the anger. Neither encourage nor discourage. Calm abiding, at its very best... is the finely tuned ability... to just... relax... and rest your... mind, your brain... in the middle of whatever experience... you are having.

[00:16:58] period of meditation

[00:25:38] So, when we're... new, or fresh... in our meditation, whatever the meditation is... it can be helpful... to interrupt our meditation... by just moving our bodies a little bit, for example. Or even getting up and moving around. ... And another method... for interrupting, which I will say is meant to be synonymous with *fresh start*. When we're beginning... and let's make sure we understand that beginning lasts for at least a couple of decades... we need to engage in the practice over and over and over again... and not try to go too long in one session. So, what you *can* do is... you can break up your session into smaller sessions.

[00:27:42] So, when you sit and relax and... rest your awareness, just on your experience as it arises... can be helpful to have a *very* short session, like less than one minute. Even 30 seconds. Because it's possible to be successful in 30 seconds. It's not so *easy* to be successful in 30 minutes. So, if you just interrupt your practice occasionally... perhaps by quietly reciting a line in the refuge prayer... and then settle back into your meditation, the mind relaxed again. The conceptual mind speaking to itself... "*shut up*" we say to ourselves over and over... with all due kindness for ourselves. You might do... a dozen shamatha meditation sessions in the half an hour, approximately, of sitting here together. And that would be a good thing. Because probably when you added up the time when you were really still, it would add up to more, having broken your session into many pieces. And gradually, over time, a *long* time, really... will get adept at it naturally without effort.

[00:29:49] period of meditation

sangha *[00:41:02] dedicating the merit*