

**Carrying Practice:** *changing relationship with all beings with view: every day I meet saints, working with our habits, **Carrying Practice:** habituating positive activity e.g. everyday make someone new smile, **Carrying Practice:** habituate recognizing our confusion by placing awareness on experience*

**Student 1** [00:00:29] Lama Michael? Thank you for that suggestion, the reminder this morning that we do... for others. That that's primary. But then... I'm sitting with it and the question arose... not for the first time, and that's the... tricky balance between... the intention and the desire to work and benefit others, and yet aware of my... lack of wisdom, my lack of energy, my lack of skill. And then seeing how that gets an extra big question of how to... work to benefit others. And will my action benefits others. And when I get sick, I'm extra tired, extra exhausted, extra... there's an extra lack of interest and motivation that's exasperated by being sick and exhausted, and... but it's *always* a tricky balance. Even when I'm *not* sick. About... where is the edge of my capacity and my ability to work for others without... exhausting myself or being so far beyond what my wisdom is? I always see it as a tricky... balance. And I'm probably tilting toward... benefiting myself and taking it easier. ... So, the question is, do you have some tips? [laughter] The question was obvious to me, but I don't think I got around to asking. Do you have some tips?

**LMC** [00:03:48] Well, listening to your... litany of shortcomings, [laughter] I'm not sure they're all shortcomings. So... if you're sick... physically, mentally... disturbed by whatever it is that's there... it's fairly easy to recognize that we don't feel good. That's usually the easy part. And we have an aversion to it. We wish that it would go away. And maybe because we meditate, we might think that we should be able to banish it... easily. But of course, it's more complicated than that, usually. But I also think that when we recognize that we're having... some kind of a difficulty... we recognize that we would like to *rise* to the occasion and be... something that we feel like we're not. But if we look close, we might actually see that... we have more than what we *think* we can see.

[00:05:23] So, if you're feeling bad, it's not so difficult to imagine that you're not the only one. If you really think you're the only one, that's a *different* problem. So, if you imagine that others have the same... 'illness', at whatever level it is, whether it's physical or mental or just being unhappy today, then... you are in a position to remind yourself, can even be habitual, to remind ourselves that, probably, given how many people occupy this planet, there is probably at least... a few tens of millions of people who are having the exact same experience I'm having today. Probably not the same language, but otherwise the *same* experience. I feel sick. I feel discouraged. I feel unhappy. My friends have left me. My mother has died. You know, whatever it is, it's always there. And so, the *first* thing is to recognize that... that what we have as a malady is actually shared by... a *great* many beings. So, we may not be able to say *all* beings, because we do want to feel unique in our own suffering. [laughter] So, it's important to recognize that, too! Because that's the way that we hang on to our suffering. I would like to give up everything except the knowledge that I am uniquely suffering. And we're not! So, there in comes the... the fact that... we have *relationship* with other beings because we share this kind of general malady.

[00:07:36] So, I have to tell a short story about this that some of you have heard, but it *truly* is one of my favorites on this. And when I first heard it, I thought that it was just life changing. It's a

story about Mother Teresa. She was... having an interview with some man who asked for this and she was talking with him. And in the process, he said... that he just thought that it was absolutely extraordinary that she would *sacrifice* so much and work so hard... for no money, for no gain, for like, all of these things... like what saints do, you know? [laughs] And he said, "So, how do you *do* this, exactly?" And she said, "It's actually really simple. Every day I get up in the morning, as you said. And I do go out and I do work with the sick and the dying. But I have a slightly different approach. I get up and I go out in the morning and all day long I meet Jesus." And I thought to myself... how different my personal life would be if every day that I got up and went out... and met Jesus, I'd probably be in a different tradition at this point. [laughter] So you know, not to say that you're not all Jesus, but... it was such an extraordinary... it was like a light switch, sort of like. You know, you can say you're going out to meet sick, dying people in the cold and in the filth, in the dirt and all these things. Or you could say, I'm going out to meet... Jesus. And it helps if that particular saint was also crucified. So therefore, you have kind of an extra support for it.

[00:10:04] But I think we actually can... do something similar to that. Her comment was an inspiration. Not in the sense of, well, I think I'll abandon my current spiritual tradition and go somewhere else. But rather that, it works that way... no matter what! Because most of us find the sick and the dying on the street pretty difficult... in the heat and the cold and the filth and all that. We don't rise to the occasion that these people are actually saints and we're taking care of them. But she had obviously been doing it for so long that... this was the meaning in her life. Go out and work with these people. So, every day I meet Jesus. And I just thought... [strikes his forehead] *that* is extraordinary. I would follow *that* no matter *who* it was. And we each have that! That *exact* same formula we each carry with us. And we, to the extent that we can get up in the morning and feel enthusiastic about even just coming to meditation... and thinking that coming to meditation, I will hold the benefit of others beyond my own. Even if I feel sick. Even if I have a fever, no matter what it is, I can come and sit for an hour and think... this, my *entire* intention here... is to benefit others. So, how do I do that?

[00:11:51] And if we ask how we do that over and over and look into it and inquire, we come to the place of... yes... the benefit that we get ... relies upon... our relationship with all sentient beings. And therefore... my *relationship* with all sentient beings is pretty much determined by... my thinking about, my imagining about, all sentient beings. What I *could* do, what I *would* do if I was there, if I could be there. If I could have *that* kind of a relationship and... *soak* in that... kind of thing. Where I hope that... the practice that I do today... benefits all sentient beings by just my making the *wish* that it would benefit all sentient beings. And then when you meet somebody that you know or somebody that you *don't* know and you make the wish while speaking with them, that the benefit that you are wishing forward would *take root in them*. Nothing more than that. But I think if you do that... enough every day, it does bear its fruit, inevitably. Okay?

**Student 1** [00:13:18] Yes. Thank you for the reminders. And your Mother Teresa story also reminded me of the first teaching I ever heard from you. You started the day by saying you were walking down to that local place near Monroe to get coffee and everyone you would see, or pass, you kind of asked yourself, "Are you the Buddha? Are you the Buddha?"

**LMC** [00:13:48] Still asking. [laughter] Yeah.

**Student 2** [00:14:02] Kind of to tag along on [her] question. I know that we're supposed to dedicate the merit of our practice... in *all* situations. After we've made an aspiration to help the poor, the hungry... ourselves, in moments of sorrow and distress, but I always forget to do that.

Now what? Can I sort of like do it once a week and sort of have a blanket covering? [laughter] I'm serious. Because I forget all the time. But I know it's important because... what does that do? Does it create a container, that stuff doesn't leak out or what? And if that's the case, what would be like, say, I'm going to dedicate the merit every... time I come to meditation... here. Would that work?

**LMC** [00:15:09] It's funny in our... in our kind of standard set of teachings... on our practices, we often... think about... undermining habitual patterns. So, we all... *soak* in our habitual patterns. And when we love them, we're not interested in doing anything about them. And when we're... not loving them, then we would like to be rid of them. But the more that we've soaked in them and reminded ourselves of them and nurtured them, the more difficult it is to step out of the habitual patterns. So, I think that as ...these things *stick* with us to the degree in which we have nurtured them as habitual patterns. It's not so easy to just abandon habitual patterns. But what you can do is you can create other habitual patterns that actually are just totally okay. Kind of like, maybe Mother Teresa did that. [laughs] It's like the pattern was so there... that there wasn't any question about whether I should do this today. Whether I felt good enough today to do it. And so, because of that, the benefit flowed more easily from it. I think we can do the same thing exactly. So... if you can think of something that's good to do and then engage in it in a habitual way... remind yourself, I'm gonna do this today. Let's just say *once* every day... something.

**Student 2** [00:17:16] Dedicate the merit?

**LMC** [00:17:21] Dedicate the *outcome* of what you did. So, what might that be?

**Student 2** [00:17:28] Well, maybe it's not anything specific that I did, but... like, I'll think about when I'm painting the Tara painting, I'll think that this will benefit beings. I'll give this image away to anybody who wants it. And then I forget about it. And I don't think to dedicate the merit of that wish. So, I guess...

**LMC** [00:17:54] You don't think about dedicating the merit?

**Student 2** [00:17:55] No, no I don't. [laughs]

**LMC** [00:17:57] That's just, that's... habit.

**Student 2** [00:17:58] So, would that be okay at the end of the day to say, oh, I'm going to dedicate the merit of everything good that I did today... for the benefit of others?

**LMC** [00:18:08] Yeah. Or you could... every five or ten minutes... dedicate the merit of what you're doing.

**Student 2** [00:18:19] That might have to change what I'm doing. [laughter]

**LMC** [00:18:27] Yeah, yeah. [more laughter] But that's good, too!

**Student 2** [00:18:42] That's a little too much sainthood for me.

**LMC** [00:18:45] Well, who said anything about sainthood? ... It's the same thing as the story of Thomas Merton meeting the young monk. Goes to Thomas Merton for an interview. And then Merton says, 'So, what are we talking about?' And the young monk says, 'I would like to ask you

what would be the best way to live my life?' And Merton says, 'Oh, I thought you were coming for something really difficult or serious.' Which was something of a joke, but not *really*... of a joke. Because then what he said was, 'You want to live your life in the best way? Then live your life in order to become a saint.'

[00:19:42] So, it's just what we're talking about. Like, you keep doing the positive things... you feel are really positive... mentally, physically, and interface with others... and those things naturally grow. They don't shrink. What we do over and over again... grows. Whether it's negative and horrible or saintly and wonderful. But the habit... is what makes it possible to ride on it. Because once we have the habit, we then are kind of continuously remembering, continuously even just noticing that it's in our mind... going. We don't have to try and remember.... what was I going to do today with that? It just happens. We *all* do that... unconsciously. All the time. So, the only difference here is... take *one* thing... and do it over and over again... for the rest of your life.

**Student 2** [00:20:52] Such as dedicate the merit.

**LMC** [00:20:54] Dedicating the merit is great because... we say, a positive action done... is good. But a positive action *dedicated*... for the benefit of all sentient beings is kind of like... the ball keeps rolling on its own. The dedication of the merit is the *wish* that it would keep rolling. That it would keep bearing its fruit... continuously. And so, when we say that... what I do is, is I'm trying to like, continually do those positive things and add to it... I hope that... my ability to do that will grow in this life and in future lives. So, the more we *do* those things, the more we don't have to remember. It's just part of our continuous mindstream. And it's *not* just a negative habitual pattern. It's actually a *positive* habitual pattern that... you don't *want* to turn off. You want it to go even more. And then it's just easy, it's easier by virtue of the habit.

[00:22:21] It's like that piece from, I can't remember the name of the Lama who gave me this thing of... every day, every day, make an effort, without exception, to meet somebody who you don't know, that you never met before and *make something good*. Say something that makes them smile or laugh or something with the *wish* that it would be the seed for something really positive... indefinitely into the future. And then just let it go and move on. I think that has been a very moving and helpful practice. Well, it moved me from the place of being a profound introvert. You can't *do* that and remain an introvert. I mean... nothing wrong with being an introvert, but being a recluse, you can't do it. You have to open yourself up and make yourself available to others.

**Student 2** [00:23:33] Thank you, Michael.

**Student 3** [00:23:52] Okay, I have an issue with... I know that your practice always ebbs and flows, ebbs and flows. There's peaks and valleys, peaks and valleys. What do you do if you get stuck... in the valley? And you think, well, okay, my life's hectic, it's chaotic. I got a lot of going on. And you're caught between being... you know, a friend to yourself and saying, Okay, cut yourself some slack and Okay, get with the program. You're just lazy. So... how do you how do you work through that? Is that clear, or no?

**LMC** [00:24:42] I think it's clear since, you know, if you speak, then I hear it and I look for it in myself and I usually find it. So, I'm lazy. I know, I know... how that works. [laughs] I know how to hide it so it looks like I'm doing something. [laughs] And all the rest of the stuff. So, just looking in the context of our Dharma practice. Generally speaking, it's been my personal experience...

that it's not helpful to force myself to do something that I don't want to do. So, that *always* feels like that's number one. I want to be inclined to do something that I *wish* I was doing. Instead of forcing myself to do something that I wasn't interested in. Even though I thought it was good. So, finding something... that can, every time that it occurs to you, be something *positive*, I think, is one of the tricks. Though of course it really isn't a trick. Because this is just what we do all the time. So, if we can recognize the way that our habitual patterns roll out, how they form and... how they fundamentally lead us in whatever direction we're used to going in... then we actually have found a big a big secret. Because if that habit leads us in one place... and we don't like that direction or that place, all we need to do is just change the habit a little bit. And it will start to slide in another direction. Does that make sense? Kind of's not bad. [laughter]

**Student 3** [00:27:00] It kind of makes sense. But how do I put it? Okay. I *want* to practice. I have the urge practice. It's not like I say, I *should* practice. I think... I *want* to practice. I want to sit. And I want to... I want to sit on the cushion, right. For however long until I feel like I need to get up. But there is like a mental block. I *want* to do it. I know it'll feel good, but there's like a mental block. Does that make sense? Like a resistance. And then I just... you get overwhelmed and then you just shut down. Does that make sense?

**LMC** [00:27:48] Oh yeah.

**Student 3** [00:27:49] So that's where I am now. And I'm thinking, well, is it because my life is chaotic and I just need to... you know, just weather the storm until my life is calmer? Which, you know, could be... never! Who knows? Or do I push through it? That's my question. Have I just confused you or did that, did my rambling make sense or... no.

**LMC** [00:28:27] I don't need your help to be confused, actually. [laughter] I'm a professional. So... yeah. You know, we're dealing with a myriad of approaches. We're talking about it from a lot of different ways. And not just today, but over many months and years going back and forth and working with these things. And I think that is, for most of us, the normal... approach. And that we *have* to do that because... actually, we *are* trying to... bring some kind of an antidote to our confusion. So, *one* thing that is really helpful to recognize... is that we are confused. Sometimes we so badly do not *want* to be confused that we convince ourselves that we're not. And that can also be a problem. Then we don't recognize it when it occurs. So, the confusion itself is not such a big deal. It's really more that we tend to nurture it in the same direction. So, we keep making more of it. What if we found... a way... to work with that confusion, which was positive?

[00:30:11] Like, for example... when you feel confused, that is not a conceptual event, is it? I mean, we sometimes are confused. Like if I make a little list for myself of things to do and I have the sense there's something missing in the list. That's a kind of a conceptual thing, mostly. But let's say that the confusion that you experience is actually... *just* an experience. It's not conceptual. It's an unpleasant experience. And you don't care what name you put on it, it still remains an unpleasant experience. And so, one thing that you can do... is sit down... where you're alone... and you sit just long enough to have that experience and to recognize the experience. And then... with *intention*... you bring your attention and your awareness *to* that experience. In the same way that if I said, [while holding up a sheet of paper] I have a message for you here. Why don't you read it? Come and get it and read it. And so, already there's an experience that you're having by just even faking it. Just saying I have a message for you. So, you *want* to come and read it. Because somebody is saying come and read it! Right? And so, you do that. But if you recognize your confusion, you have another *want*.

[00:32:05] And so, we talk a lot in Buddhism about... the problems with wanting. But some things are also *important* to want. Like clarity instead of confusion. It is *okay* to want. Because it will motivate us to *do* something. So, when you *recognize* the confusion, you actually have... a jewel in your hand. And the way you can recognize that jewel is by... *without* judgment of any kind... just recognizing the *experiencing* that you're having. Which maybe you can't even put a name on because it's not conceptual. So, if it's *utterly* not conceptual, you can't put a name on it, but the experience is still there. So, you put your awareness on the experience and just rest with it. And if it only lasts for... five seconds... that's okay. Because... you'll have another opportunity... shortly. [laughs].

[00:33:20] And at that time, then... you need to develop this habit. When the confusion arises and I begin to recognize it, I need to... find a place... physically, maybe... where I can just sit down... and just put my awareness on that experience. For as long as the experience is there. And then it naturally dissolves at some point. And maybe you don't feel any more clarity, but you don't feel confused. And so, if you need to do that 20 times a day. That's a great way to spend your day. To bring your awareness to a sense of confusion.

[00:34:06] Most people *are* confused. Most of us are confused about *something*. And we don't know what to do with it. So, instead of actually... putting our awareness on the confusion, which could lead us to actually realize the *nature* of the confusion, which would be really helpful... mostly what we do is we blame someone else. Someone else did this. Someone else said this about me. Someone else told me to do this about them. This is spinning around all the time. So, to just *stop*... and put the awareness on that... is a *profound* practice. If you were to do that five times a day for fifteen seconds *each*, for a year... your entire relationship with your experience would be changed.

[00:35:08] And that's not because we need to be profound meditators. The problem here is, is that we don't sometimes have enough confidence in that approach to do it more than once or twice, which isn't enough. I mean, we *got* to where we are... by repeating something a million times. Not by... yeah, I was angry once. That doesn't affect your whole life. If you're angry every minute of every day, you are really over your head... drowning... in something. If that happens once in a while... it's no big deal. The benefit is if you're angry *really* all the time, chronically... now you have a challenge that's worth... picking up. And you have the tool! If you can just put your awareness on that experience. The awareness will be fragile. It'll roll off. It won't stay. But in the moment that you just place the awareness there, kind of like putting a marble on a marble, it's going to roll off. But you don't care. What you care about is... you put the marble there and you let go of it. And it's the putting it there and letting go, which is where all the important stuff is. It will definitely work if you do it just continuously, numerous times every day without fail, 20 times a day. How long does it take? Five seconds. Ten seconds. Just stop and do it. Thank you.

**Student 3** [00:36:56] Thank you.

**Student 4** [00:37:13] Good morning. My impression of what we've been discussing is that the experiences we've been talking about are personal. Personal thought, personal action, personal view. And you've asked us to be aware of these experiences. And... my awareness is that these personal experiences take place in a context. And while, all experience ultimately is personal, they really cannot *escape* the context. And I wonder what the Dharma can inform us about... how we place our awareness on this context. On the historical, the systemic, the institutional

problems that we have really screwed up so badly. And it's very acute for me because... I see there's very little time left. Both personally and for our planet.

**LMC** [00:39:03] Well, you've certainly *enriched* the question. [laughs] Could we make that into something positive? Like, in other words, I think... we could all agree that there are certain puzzles... both personally and globally... that need to be explored and some action done in some way... if we care to extend the time when something *could* be done about it. But I think that it still comes back to... the point where we have to recognize... something internally. Of course, all of our experiences are contextual without exception. Even if we don't *recognize* the context, there is one. There's *always* a context. ... Let me ask you a question. When... the things that you just raised arise, like what do you *do* with them? How do you work with them?

**Student 4** [00:40:41] Well, I've been active politically and environmentally. But at this particular point in my life, I realized that the horizon for outcome of those types of actions is really beyond my lifetime. And I've decided that I'm going to do things in my lifetime that I can really experience directly, personally. And... I still feel that, uh... I guess... I feel a sense of... longing for some kind of guidance about how to... engage with these... critical issues. Even though, you know, I may not be able to see the fruit in them. ... And how to share that... with others.

**LMC** [00:42:08] Yeah. Well, you're opening a... a large conversation, of course. And to some degree... I think that these things can be, the various contexts, can be integrated to some degree. And to some degree not. And so, partly I think I'm on the same page with you in the sense that... we are of a certain age, so, we don't have another 50 years maybe to get good at doing something. But... then the question arises... so, what are you going to do in that time? So, I'm with you on that. But it also depends upon... I have to go back to the place... and speaking with this woman back here earlier, that... I think the starting point... from my own experience... is the place where I recognize what is happening in my *own* mind, in my own consciousness. And whether or not that thing is positive or not and whether or not it has any... potential... in it. I can't answer any of those questions if I don't place my awareness on the experience itself. Because... that's the point at which I see... where the confusion comes from. If I have some kind of puzzle that I would like to resolve... in the context, like what we're talking about... where the answers are not particularly... satisfying and in some way, not particularly meaningful even. But the *experience* is compelling. And... learning to place our awareness *on* that experience... *without* trying to... conceptually analyze that experience is what I think is the most profound thing. Because mostly we don't do that. Mostly we relate to our conceptual understanding of it.

[00:45:09] We're surrounded by our conceptual understanding of a myriad of things because... that's where we've put a lot of our energy... in going to school and getting educated and developing the ability to talk about and work with all sorts of experiences. And yet we find ourselves in this place of... we should be smart enough to figure this out. I mean, there just is no... obvious reason why we haven't figured those things out. And I think the reason is because we are actually... not intimate enough and in the right way with the experiences that we have. And not being intimate enough in the right way with our experiences, we therefore do things which are not in accordance with what we wish... they were.

**Student 4** [00:46:33] Thank you. I think that... we may have *thought* that we had figured things out. But I think what you're asking us to do now is to bring acceptance to realizing that we have not.

**LMC** [00:46:54] Well, I think that's true. I think in a certain way, the cart's before the horse. It would have been nice if we could have... put the awareness on the experience from the time that we were 10 years old, where it was just a natural thing. So, that we weren't, didn't find ourselves wound up in... all sorts of conclusions that are not helpful. Like what you did yesterday to me is ruining my life. That kind of thing. Politically and socially and all sorts of ways, we... do not take full responsibility for our experiences. Which means that we are a victim of our own experiences. And what we want to do is, we want to... they're *our* experiences. They don't belong to anyone else. We should have full authority with them. If we knew how... to *take* that authority, we would be in a position to work with those experiences in a way which currently we're kind of dumbfounded by it. And the world looks so obvious, like what needs to be done, in many ways. I mean, I listen to the news too. So, if it looks to me like... how could we be so stupid? And I don't personally know anyone who doesn't say the same thing. How could we be so stupid? But of course... we're stupid. Because if we weren't stupid, we wouldn't be in some of these situations. So, the most powerful thing that I know is... if you can place your awareness in the moment that the experience arises, if you can place your awareness on *that* experience and just let it rest there... the experience doesn't last. No experience lasts long unless we like, keep pushing the button and making it go. It comes to a natural end. And we have an interesting insight at that point.

[00:49:14] If we are very careful and we develop the *ability* to place our awareness on the experience... two things happen. One is... we *recognize* the experience non-conceptually. We just see it. We feel it. We know it, what it is. That's number one. Number two is... the experience dissolves. Especially if we're not in a hurry. Especially if we're not *looking* for the dissolution. The experience just dissolves. And when it dissolves, we are recognizing a very important thing about the nature of our own minds. Which is... what we can call The Union of Appearance and Emptiness. With the union of appearance and emptiness, we have the ability to understand more deeply what it is we're working with. And so, little by little, one by one, we have that experience. Union of appearance and emptiness. The appearance is just the experience. We don't... have to make experiences, right? They just occur all the time. And we normally... stick to, "Oh, I like that!" And we try to hang onto it. And that other thing I don't like. So, we're trying to get rid of it. But of course, it's sticky. So, it doesn't go away. So, *just*... the ability to place the awareness on the experience and *that's* it. *All* by itself... it's grand... step to take. Now that won't fix the world. It won't fix global warming. But if enough people did that, it would have an *effect* upon those who are currently around long enough to not be so stupid. ... That's my two bits. I'm sticking to it. [laughs]

**sangha** [00:51:47] *dedicating the merit*