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**Carrying Practice:** simple daily bodhicitta, tonglen is a complete practice working with unbounded interconnectedness and 4 Immeasurables

**Sally** [00:21:16] I'm sure you have something better to say about this, Michael. [orig. question: Milarepa, Buddha and others who leave home to seek solitude and practice. And the contradiction with doing no harm.]

**LMC** [00:21:41] You mean about abandoning your family?

**Sally** [00:21:51] Yes. The spiritual injunction to *abandon* people. Which is how it often appears to us.

**LMC** [00:22:04] Yeah. I think the contradictions in the... most difficult practices are actually where the fruit lies.... There's teachings on the issue of leaving your family to go off to the mountains. And those teachings do not always recommend going off to the mountains. For the very reasons that we have already mentioned this evening. That there can be a certain way in which that... *exodus*... is actually selfish. And if that's the foundation of the practice, you have placed a big obstacle in front of yourself before you entered that phase. So, it, it begs the question, then how do you do it? Who are you going to abandon? I think the answer is you can't abandon anybody, of course. So, who are you going to pick? The very person you would pick to abandon is exactly the person you must *not* abandon. So... the question endures. So, how do you enter into something like a prolonged meditation thing? Not just three years, but maybe 30 years? How do you do that? And accomplish the fruit of it without leaving... your family, who maybe depend upon you in other situations. So, it's fortunate if you're in a situation where your family would *encourage* you to do that. And it's really, really something that they feel strong about at the same time that *you* feel strong about it happens. That's good fortune!

[00:24:19] Finding a way... in the context of the world... to devote a substantial fraction of your life's energy... to practice *without* abandoning others is something of a puzzle. The one way that you can approach it is... highly meaningful. The *downside* is only subject to... the probability that you will not remember to do it. In other words, a simple practice done on a daily basis... can be more than enough... to enrich our lives substantially. The only thing standing in the way is that we forget to do it. So, for example, if you said... every day I'm going to remember *one* person who I can remember who is suffering, or dying, or just depressed, or in a difficult situation. Every day I'm going to remember *one* person and make the *wish* that... they would encounter the means by which they would be free of that discomfort. So, that seems like a really simple thing every day. But those of us who entered that sort of thing... day after day, you come home at night and you ask the question, how many did I do? And it's *none*. You just can't remember... to do it. So, the other analysis of that is if you can do it... once a day, or once a week, or once a month, or maybe even once a year... you have made an enormous... result happen by just being able to do it.

[00:26:25] So, I give you a personal... example, which many of you know. There's a lama up on the Canadian U.S. border. He spent some time in San Francisco many years ago and I spent some time with him. I appreciated him because he was crazy. I mean, he acted crazy. And the 16th Karmapa loved him. So that was helpful, also. Well, this man loves this guy, so, it has to be... that something's good there. And... so, I spent some time with this guy. I met him in San

Francisco later in... a park. And... we were talking about things. And it was a long conversation, but the crux of it came down to... try to do one thing every day... without fail... that benefits others. Not just the *wish*, but something that actually benefits others. And so I remember saying like... "I don't know how to do that! Like every day... to go out with the intention of doing that, like, how do you do that?" And he said, "Just do it. Just go do it." And he pointed across the street about two or three blocks... there was a Safeway there. And he said, go into that store... *and* don't come out until... you have given somebody something." He wasn't talking about money. He was talking about some kind of... a non-substantial gift of some kind.

[00:28:23] And so, so I did I went into the Safeway. Feeling really kind of stupid. Like, what am I doing... here with this thing? [laughs] And so, but I really admired this guy. And I'd spent enough time with him to see... that actually he had such a strong practice that everything he *did* was imbued by his meditation. And so, I went in... and just kind of stupidly wandering around, like, how do you do this? And I came to a woman who was maybe 50 years old and she was looking at boxes on the Safeway shelf. And I said, "Excuse me, can you help me? Can you tell me where the soap is?" It had no meaning whatsoever. It was just like.... grasping for anything. And so, the question seemed at least harmless. [laughs] And so, she said, "Oh, yeah, it's around the corner. And I'll show you." So, she took me around the corner and we had about probably 20 words between us all together. And then it was done.

[00:29:36] And I remember thinking, well, at least I can say thank you. So, I said, "Thank you." A little more than I normally would. And I left. And... day by day, I did not forget. In fact, I can say that this was way back... it was at least 20 years ago. I have not forgotten... one day. Not one day has gone by, not [that] I went to Safeway, but when I intentionally... *did* something... that felt like it would be positive for somebody else. Like that person was *right* there. And so, a short... twenty-second conversation, sometimes a one-minute, sometimes a five-minute conversation. Somebody that I didn't know; hadn't seen before. And... of course, the gift was... received. Always. And the benefit was always mine.

[00:30:52] So, I always had... something to give to somebody else when it came time in the day or when I ran into somebody on the street... who asked for directions or some such thing. It was always possible... to give something. And some of the times were just extraordinary. And they would never have happened because I was basically a hardcore introvert at that time. And so, also, I overcame that which I considered to be a positive thing. To not be so introverted that it was not possible to actually have a conversation with a stranger.

[00:31:35] I think that we can do a lot. We can practice... our formal meditation. But there's been times in my life where I felt like the informal meditation of *intending* to meet people and give them something... was more important than the formal meditation. But of course, the formal meditation makes it more interesting, also. And the informal, makes the formal more interesting. So, in that way, we get a *gift* from every person that we meet and have an exchange with. With the background *wish* that may this encounter... bear fruit... in this person's being. So, in other words, it's not about me. It's not about the person who's saying it. Fundamentally... it's about the person that you're there having a connection with. It's for *their* benefit.

**Student 5** [00:38:37] I'm going to ask another question. It's kind of a technical question, I think. But it's been something that I've been thinking about for a while. Can other people do tonglen for you and have it be effective if they tell you that they're doing tonglen for you? [laughter] I ask because I've had the experience and I was a little startled.

**LMC** [00:47:12] I think tonglen is probably one of the most misunderstood practices that we have. Because... even when you do tonglen on another, it can very easily be... used in a certain way for oneself. And actually, it's a *radical* practice to... offer all of the things that you have... that you value and that you would not like to be *relieved* of. [laughs] And *yet*, the practice is... not to *abandon* the things that we think are really valuable. And, yet not to... misuse them in certain ways. So, a misuse is... to build a sense of self-aggrandizement, for example. To become... too proud. Not able to take full responsibility for our actions. And when we do positive things, it's also important to *acknowledge* that that was a positive thing. So, sometimes that's misunderstood. Like we really don't want to acknowledge that we did something that's good. It feels kind of... like Scrooge. There's something wrong with that. But if you don't acknowledge it, there's a certain problem with that! Pretty soon you lose... the ability to do the thing that you found really uplifting beforehand.

[00:49:01] So, I think it's really at its heart, it's really a very kind of *complete* practice... that contains all of these different elements. And the *root value* of all of it... is the unbounded interconnectedness. Because that's actually what we're working with in the tonglen. And in every other practice that we do also... is that we are working with unbounded interconnectedness. So, for example... if I had something that I could offer to you that was positive, whether it was a word or financial aid or whatever it might be... and I felt like it actually doesn't really matter whether I offer that to you or not. For whatever reason, I don't *connect* the benefit to the other person with my *intention* to make an offering. So, the offering might be... my intention is... that I will I will take on your suffering, which is the classic tonglen practice. Even if I don't see your suffering, I understand that you have a sense of... personal identity. Like who you are... in this world and in all of the things that you do.

[00:50:43] And we know that that sense of personal identity is a double-edged sword. Both edges cut. [laughs] And so, we would like to be... fully awakened. Able to *really deeply* make a wish for others without any thought of return whatsoever. But we can't quite do that as long as we don't recognize that... our *intentions*, regardless of what we actually do, but our intentions actually play a very deep role in our own spiritual awakening. We can't *DO* that... when we're looking after ourselves. So, I think one of the things that we've been talking occasionally here about on tonglen mornings sometimes, is the issue, kind of the conundrum that... it's not possible to accomplish your own benefit. Simply *because*... to accomplish your own benefit, you have to *think* about doing things for yourself. And that's precisely the way that we get ourselves into deep trouble. [laughs]

[00:52:08] And conversely, it actually is not *necessary* to give away all of our belongings. Even though there are many great examples in history of that happening. And it may be really a good thing to do. But not everybody can do that. But what we *can* do is... we can give up our self-aggrandizement. We can give up our sense of *being* somebody who's better than somebody else. All of those things, we can give that up. And we can notice that we gave it up. And there's nothing really wrong with that either because it's moving in the direction of... I benefit somebody else... because I do not *appear* better than *they* are. And when I do not appear better than they are, they are open... to all sorts of things that they're not open to when they feel like they're relating to somebody who's so much more than they are.

**Student 6** [00:53:37] Which I guess is why it kind of rubs us. There's a sense that it kind of rubs us the wrong way for that reason. To hear somebody say, I'm doing tonglen for you. Because

the actual cause of happiness is not doing something to feel good yourself. It's the actual cause of happiness is to do something for somebody else.

**LMC** [00:53:59] So, what do you do then?

**Student 6** [00:54:01] I would *not* say that.

**LMC** [00:54:02] When *they* say it to you, what do you do?

**Student 6** [00:54:07] I appreciate your intention.

**LMC** [00:54:09] *Rejoice!* I mean, they could have been hoping that you were dead [laughter] or some such thing. So, we rejoice in the... in the Four Immeasurables... where we have a, loving kindness and compassion and joy and equanimity. And the joy piece is often misunderstood. Because we have a certain sense of... well we're dealing with *compassion* here. And compassion means they're *suffering*. So, where does the *joy* come in? And the joy comes in... when something is done, like a practice, a meditation of some kind... which is helpful for another. So, we can have that, too. We not just see it in somebody else. We can actually have the sense of... let me give you an easy example... that actually is very potent. You could sit in this room and you could see that someone... said something to somebody else, which was an act of kindness. Like the person that they were saying that, too, was maybe somebody who they had a big disagreement with. But in the moment that you're looking at it, you see that *actually* they're making a little change in a certain direction. And so, you see *that*... positive influence and *that* becomes the cause of joy. So, the joy is not something separate. It's *witnessing*... the cause of joy... amongst others. And there's so many examples to that also. So, I think in the context of taking and sending... the practice of those Four Immeasurables is really profound. And the fourth one is the equanimity, which is the basis of the entire path. So, there's a lot crammed into a fairly small space. But all of it is totally easy to comprehend. Nothing esoteric. It's all like right on the surface.

**Student 6** [00:56:33] Thank you.

**LMC** [00:56:35] Good work. Yeah.

**sangha** [00:56:53] *dedicating the merit*