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awareness and benefits of curiosity and view of seeing things as fresh, Kalu Rinpoche's teaching: the best experience to put your awareness on is an experience you hoped you'd never have, ultimately we wish to put our awareness on awareness itself, Kalu Rinpoche quote on the flow of continuous experience whether we're dead or alive

Student 1 [00:02:45] I would love any tips, it feels like I am constantly asking this because I constantly struggle with it, I would love any tips for... being aware... of the experience or the emotion... but maintain the awareness... a nanosecond longer than I can. Because as soon as I bring awareness, there's two things that happen. The stories and the labels come rushing in. And also, as soon as I'm aware, the experience changes. Like the sobbing stops or the anger dissipates or the cursing fades away. So, the emotion changes as soon as I bring awareness. Sometimes drastically. But also, more troubling is the story and the labels that *immediately* start. And I would love some tips to forestall the labeling and the stories and the judgments. Even when I let go the judgments, the label and the conceptual doesn't stop. It's like as soon as I bring awareness, the labels start.

LMC [00:04:30] [chuckles] Isn't that kind of everybody's experience? I mean, not to make a distinction, you know. [laughs] I mean, that's what we do! Our minds are filled and flowing and things happening and memories and... all sorts of emotional states mixing together. So, I think I think it's good to note that actually... there's nothing really particularly *special*... about that or unusually bad... somehow. It's just... that's what the mind does. It does that. And it never does it the same twice... ever.

[00:05:24] So, the thing that you liked yesterday, you may say I still like that thing, but actually if you *look*, it's not the same. So... the issue really is not to figure out a judgment for it. Of somehow like that was good or not good, or I would like to have more of that or less of that. Those are the things that we're trying to *use* in order to train our minds... to just be still... with whatever experience is occurring. So, you don't need to... think about whether or not you should be angry or less angry or any of that. It's not important. So, it can be important. That's another practice. [laughs] This is really about the embracing the full experience. Whatever it is. Your back hurts, your toe hurts, your head hurts, whatever it is. And you're pretty sure any way... that it's not going to last. Whatever the experience is, it's just not going to last.

[00:06:41] More interesting... I have to say from my side, is that... the curiosity piece. What will be next? Because... I've never yet guessed what will be next. And having lived for a long time, a lot of things... arose over and over and gradually it became clear, not a single bit of it repeated itself ever. And that, I think, is an important help... in the direction of being curious about things that are worthy of being curious about. Like what is my mind doing when I'm not trying to do something... is a worthy thing to be curious about. What is it doing? And mostly, if you look... it's really boring. [laughter] So, fortunately, other people can't read our minds.

[00:07:49] But all the things that arise and disappear and come back again and... especially strong negative experiences, we tend to... kind of inadvertently hang onto them in a strange way. Not that we want to, but that we can't let go. And so, then a strong curiosity... can be really helpful by looking at that experience and asking the obvious questions. Have I seen this before? Is it exactly the same? If you keep thinking that you're seeing it the same way, then you really need to look at something a little different. Because it seems clear... at a certain point... that

nothing has *ever* repeated. And so, it's a pretty good judgment that probably nothing ever will. It just is always different. But we tend to want to stamp it... that's anger. [bringing his fist down hard onto table] When actually that particular experience has never occurred before. It's more *useful* to have that... kind of discernment that... *this has never occurred before*. So, the other way that sometimes in the Dorje Chang Thung-ma, that prayer... where it says it's like everything that occurs is *fresh*. Maybe that's a little more... workable... to think of it as fresh.

[00:09:21] But it doesn't address the issue of... has it ever occurred before? "Oh, here it is, I'm hungry again." That's so natural... we just take it for granted that... I'm hungry again. But what's the 'again'? You're not eating the same thing you ate yesterday. You're not having the same feeling you had today. You have a hard time finding anything at all... that's *like* what you had that other time. And the other times, now that I think about it, weren't other *times*. They were more kind of like a *mush* of experiences that ran together. So, when we start to put the pieces together and ask the question, what's really going on here? It's *always* fresh. And there's a benefit to holding that view... that it's always fresh.

[00:10:16] For one thing, if you hold the view that every experience I have... has never occurred before and never will occur again, it helps us to let go. It helps us to acknowledge and to... have an appreciation for whatever is occurring now. And it also helps us to understand our relationships with each other. Does the fact that you are angry and threw something at me yesterday... doesn't mean any more than just that! But we normally take it to be a... huge thing. We build a mansion out of it and live in it for a while until it dissolves in our memory. We miss the opportunities to have that sense of... fresh. Oh, that was an interesting experience? I don't... feel like I ever had that experience before. It's something that we rarely have... that experience. When... we are, by virtue of being alive in this body, continuously invited to have that experience of... all things are fresh. There is no such thing as a repetitious event. ... Anyway... take a year or two... look into this. [laughs] Okay?

[00:11:15] omitted teaching by Jeff and other comments

Student 2 [00:18:49] Part of this question, I think was answered already... in answer to [her] question. When I was contemplating... recently, I've developed a little bit more stability in my meditation, and that's made me very happy because... it feels good. And... during this contemplation of feelings, I felt pride. I liked the *label* Buddha or Buddhist. And I felt very proud as a Buddhist to get so much out of being Buddhist. And I was very proud and I was better than those other people, and those other people, you know. I was very, it was very wonderful. [laughter] And there's this part of me that was like, oh, crud. When is this... little bubble going to pop? I don't want it to pop because I know what happens when it pops. It's very painful. So, there was all this emotion, all that, and, um... and yet... it *is* true that I'm happy that my meditation is stabilized and all that. And I identify as a Buddhist and that works for me right now. And I know eventually I'll have to give up being a Buddhist, because in order to get enlightened, you have to be, give up everything, right. But it was much more stable than I expected it to be. That feeling. And I think it's because partly I was, I was *thinking* more than experiencing the feeling.

[00:20:31] When I truly meditate on how all those kleshas, it's usually... I try to identify where I feel the klesha *in my body* because that really helps ground it. And that works for me, in terms of experiencing it, rather than slapping a label on it. And that lasts for a couple of seconds. And then, of course, my mind starts slapping a label on it. But in this case, I think I just slapped a whole bunch of labels on and I was off in my head. But I was a little worried about... how I come

down from that nice, puffed up... partridge propped up bird... spot before it bursts... and I'm in a lot of pain. Any way of coming down from there? Thank you.

LMC [00:21:47] So... what would you like from that?

Student 2 [00:21:58] I was really frightened, a little bit frightened, while I was experiencing this and thinking... this bubble is going to burst. And I was waiting for my experience to... because usually when I... feel my emotions, I experience them in my body and they do tend to dissipate very quickly. In this case... it didn't. And I think it's partly because I was hanging onto it intellectually rather than experiencing it in my body and letting it go. So, when I formulated the question, it was about, oh, dear, how do I let this go so that I don't have the... big crash? That would be painful. ... On the other hand, it may be pointless because you may have already answered the question in what you told other people. It wasn't really a new experience. It wasn't a... anyway. I think you may have answered the question on what you told her... to a great extent, but...

LMC [00:23:04] That was too easy. [laughter] You did all the work. ... I actually think that... your 'processing' on that verbally is not bad. That's just fine. We have to be careful not to get snagged... in our... sense of what is right and what is wrong. So, when we actually are sitting in something that *approximates* meditation... and [laughs] we're just having this sense of experiences arising and falling. And then we have an experience of, let's say, being really angry or some other really charged emotional state. We tend to want to judge that state. But actually, if you just *noticed* that that was going on... the job is done. There isn't something else to do with it. Like you want to capture it and... change it, somehow. Convert it into something else. And that's actually more of a mistake. At the very least, it's just more activity. Whereas maybe just before that, your mind was actually resting still... on that thing. Except for a kind of slow background sense of there's something wrong here. When, it is actually nothing is wrong.

[00:25:02] So, I know that you and I have talked about this from time to time. I think that you could say that... when ever your awareness is resting on an experience, for whatever length of time, something between a fraction of a second to an hour... anywhere in there... in the moment when you are *clear* about the experience that you're having... and your mind is just resting with it, that is the place to be. That's where the insights occur. They don't occur somewhere else. They don't occur while we're... conceptualizing and trying to put the pieces together to see whether they work or not. It's actually better to just rest in the confusion. If it's confused, that's fine. Just rest in the confusion. If the clarity is there... don't do anything. Because... anything you do will, will erase the clarity. So, once you've figured that out, then you just develop the habit... of resting with the experience that's there. It doesn't matter if you *hate* somebody... and that's the experience that's arising... you *will* discover another thing when you rest your awareness on that sense of not liking something intensely.

[00:26:36] That phrase from the old Kalu Rinpoche back so long, that I really appreciated his... statements around the importance of finding *something* in the Dharma that sings to you. That really works for you. That you have this 'ah ha!' on a regular basis. Even if the 'ah ha' is... oh, I always screw that up. It actually doesn't matter. It's like you have some sense of the flow... and you're able to put your awareness on it, even if you don't like it or even if you really like it or even if you are really attached to it. Whatever it is, your awareness is there in that place. That... is what all of the instructions are pointing towards, no matter what the level is. Bring your awareness to the thing. Rest it there. It's kind of the grand starting point, if you can do that much... the rest will unfold.

[00:27:38] So, then Kalu Rinpoche said, if you can do that much with any piece of the Dharma, you, you may be thinking that you need to know the entire Dharma. But actually, you will discover it through that one piece, which seems so clear and so helpful. If you never did anything else *but* that... the entire thing would unfold itself in time. I wish I could say I've had that experience. [laughs] I can't! But I think that it is so. In small ways, when you practice, you have that experience. Just recognize it.

Student 3 [00:28:42] I think this is along the same lines. I don't have any difficulty, whether I'm in meditation or doing something else, of recognizing that my thoughts are... just play of the mind. That's... logical to me now, and I see that. But I have this huge resistance... in letting go of my prejudices and my shoulda, woulda, coulda's, and... I want that to be right! You know? *That's* where my, my hurdle is. On the one hand, I can see how fallacious my... thinking... is. And on the other hand, I don't want to let go of that. Because I like being there in that monkey mind. And so, what do you do then?

LMC [00:29:42] You just stay there and like it. [laughter] I mean, if the bath is warm and you're cold... why would you get out?

Student 3 [00:29:55] But it's not... I can see that it doesn't really help... to continue all these... prejudices that I have and these labels that I put on things and these storylines that I tell myself, I see that it doesn't *help* me to do that. And yet I don't want to let go of that.

LMC [00:30:20] Yeah. So, I mean, you got plenty of time to change...

Student 3 [00:30:25] I don't have plenty of time! I'm seventy. [laughter]

LMC [00:30:35] I mean, that's the definition of prejudice... in a certain way. It's all of our preferences. All of them. From the minuscule to the really big life changing ones. There's still just preferences and prejudices. And we get fooled by all of that on a regular basis. So... from a, from a meditation perspective... all you need to do is recognize that. The recognition of that... what you might call a prejudice. The recognition of it. To see it in action. That *is* it. There isn't something else to do. What we want to do is we want to wrap it up. Whoa! I saw it really clear. Now I need to put it in this nice basket with some shredded colored paper [laughter] and presented to myself as a gift. But actually, you already got the gift. So, the rest of it is flotsam and jetsam. It's not the real thing. The real thing is in the moment that you see it.

Student 3 [00:31:46] I get that, I get that. What bugs me is that I go back to my old ways of behaving.

LMC [00:31:53] No, you don't.

Student 3 [00:31:54] Blaming and judging. I do.

LMC [00:31:56] No, you don't. [laughter] You go back to *new* ways of judging. [laughter]

Student 3 [00:32:10] New ways of blaming and judging.

LMC [00:32:12] Yeah! It's not like you don't get anything out of that transformation. ... There's nothing wrong with all those prejudices and things. The problem is when we solidify it.

Otherwise, it's like, so what? So, I have a preference, you sit down for lunch and you look at the menu and some days you think, like, I just can't decide. So, you ask somebody there or your friend. What are you eating, and all. But it's not like... the end of the world. It's not like you're gonna even eat that thing that you ordered. It's possible that you would get up and leave without it.

Student 3 [00:32:56] So. it's okay to hate something as long as I realize that I'm hating it?!

LMC [00:32:59] Yes. ... I mean... there has to be a value... even to hatred. Because it's an intense experience. And that was the thing which... a couple of times here, we've talked about... that statement from Kalu Rinpoche. You find an experience that you can rest your awareness on and that is a very helpful experience. That's kind of like the pinnacle of shamatha. The problem is, is that we come to this place of... we're already prejudging the experience before we even get to putting our awareness on it. And so, what he said was... part of the problem is... see...I have a leaf here. Now, I could say, put your awareness on this leaf. Would you say that this leaf is so captivating that if you put your awareness on it, it'll be easy to just rest it there for an hour? Probably not. But, you know, it's a bodhi thing. And it was connected with the Buddha and all of those things. Maybe it would be more interesting if this was *actually* held by the Buddha. If you believed it... that that was true, you'd probably find this leaf more fascinating.

[00:34:24] So, he said... because the best thing to place your awareness on... is an experience which is endowed with some power. So, the experience itself, unlike this leaf, which is really not endowed with any power unless we give it that power. But... when it comes to things like hatred... that is all on us. We are making that thing. And it is *totally* powerful. If you hate someone, it's powerful! We all know that. We've all had that kind of aversion/ attachment thing and it's very powerful. So, *if*... this is why I think... hatred is not bad. In and of itself is just an experience. And the *value* is that what we're really saying when we say hatred, we're saying, that experience is powerful! It's so powerful, I hate the experience. Maybe you don't want to hate somebody. In which case, now you lose the power. So, he was saying... if you really want to... learn to practice shamatha... put your awareness on something that is endowed with some kind of power, some kind of magnetism... gets you. And then he gave the comment, which I think is worthy of memorizing. He said, the *best* experience to put your awareness on is an experience you hoped you would never have.

[00:36:02] So, that immediately gives rise to like, hmmm... what experience would I hope I would never have? Well, how about... being run over by a car on the way home or being strangled by somebody who grabs you in the night or a really awful dream that just plagued you for days. Thinking about these things gives you a source... of kind of a magnetic thing. It draws you to it. So, if you *want* to put your awareness on an experience... and really have the *experience* of putting your awareness there... have an experience and put your awareness on an experience which is powerful. Because you almost *can't* move your awareness from it. Whereas this [holding leaf] I can hold my witness there for 20 seconds. Starts to drift... at that point, you know. But if someone is beating me up... I don't lose the experience. The problem is I don't put my awareness on it either. [laughter]

[00:37:17] But you see, it doesn't help... for the experience to be so blasé that I don't put my awareness on it because it just doesn't have anything for me. Like, so what? That's the problem when we used to put a stone or a stick here and put our awareness on it. And we do that for weeks and weeks and we'd say like, well, you know, so in the beginning I couldn't do it for more

than 10 seconds and now I can do it for fifteen. It's still in the so what bucket? We want to be able to put our awareness on our experience and *it stays* there.

[00:37:52] Ultimately, we want to be able to put our awareness on the awareness itself. That's like putting a marble on a marble. It is really difficult. But *that's* where the gold is. So, we need to kind of move in that direction. And if what we're doing is not getting the awareness clear enough... to have the experience, then we need to work on getting that awareness. Getting the experience that will... not be so *horrific* that we can't do it and not be so dull that we just don't care at all.

[00:38:31] If you fall in love, put your awareness on that experience. If you hate someone, put your awareness on that! If someone is threatening you, put your awareness on that. These things, will get your awareness there. And then you can have the experience, I see what happens when I put my awareness on something and it really just *stays there effortlessly*. ... Then we want it. And when we want it, then we'll do something more to kind of get it. Rather than it just being in the category of... you want to meditate? Then you need to learn to rest your awareness on something. That's not enough! Somewhere along the way, we have to get... the link going to it.

[00:39:20] I've had that experience, too. Like for years, I mean, like 10 years, I would say... my sense of stability of putting my awareness on something, went from literally single digit seconds to maybe two-digit seconds. [laughs] And the only thing that was good about it was I thought, well, at least I'm trying to meditate. But at a certain point, maybe it's even fair to say, because we're Americans, which translates into because we're impatient... it comes to a point where just feeling like... it's good because it's meditation. And meditation is better than beating people up or yelling at people or doing all these other things.

[00:40:11] But actually, it doesn't often rise to the level where you feel, on a daily basis or even on a minute-by-minute basis during the day, even better, where... the next thing I'm going to do is put my awareness on this experience. And then you do that all day, every day. You're always doing it. We're having a conversation. We're having an experience. Are we putting our awareness on it or just sort of like swimming around in the experience? We want to come to the place of... we settle into it and we *have* the experience and we see the *nature* of that experience, which is just one step away from seeing the nature of mind itself. We're just right next to it. Our problem is, is that we just haven't quite figured out how to put our hand on the door and open it. Just next to it.

[00:41:11] But that's... a lot better than putting our awareness on things that have no meaning to us at all. And so, when we're done, we feel, well, I'm a good Buddhist. So, I did my meditation. I don't actually know what the hell I got out of it. But anyway, I'll do it some more. I'll keep trying. At some point, we either give up... not because we're stupid, because we're smart. [laughs] It's like, if something never works for you, you need to do something else. And we're smart enough to know we need to do something else. The only question is, what is the something else? So, I think it's clear when Kalu Rinpoche said... place your awareness on the experience you hoped you would never have. That is really a ponderable!

[00:42:09] I hope I'm never caught in the jungle and torn apart by a wild animal. So, if I think to myself, huh, I wonder what that would be like? [laughter] Already... just knowing that it's *not* happening, but trying to think like, what would that be like... to be chased by a big cat and then knocked down and then torn apart? It wakes you up. [laughter] It wakes you up. And there's a

certain kind of fascination with it. Well! One thing I'm really good at... is planting the emotion of aversion in my mind. And strong aversion is an experience to put your awareness on. And the next time that something happens *outside* of you, that gives you a strong sense of aversion, you have something... functional... to do with it.

[00:43:17] There's no cat chasing you. You already know that, so it doesn't feel like it's actually dangerous. You're trying to actually have the *feeling* of feeling scared. ... And then you discover the value of that thing when the mind, like, kind of sticks to, like one of those, you know, magnets on a refrigerator that you have to go get pliers to take it off of. This is *that* thing. This is that thing. You want it to be so strong that you can't leave it alone. Not in the sense of, you know, thinking about it and giving rise to fear and all that. You want it to just be so strong that it just [slaps hands together] connects. And the mind just rests there. And now you're in a place where *you actually can see the mind resting*. And that's, we need to be in that place. Then... we're right next to the fruit.

Student 3 [00:44:19] But I guess I suffer from the illusion that if you could, you know...

LMC [00:44:26] You're just like us.

Student 3 [00:44:27] Deal with that... cat! You know? Deal with that enough... it would let up after a while. You know, it would stop hounding you. Coming back... and it must be annoying.

LMC [00:44:41] Every time the cat saw you after that it would meditate. [laughter] ... It's a different game, you know. ... You have to admit that would be interesting.

Student 3 [00:45:05] Thank you.

LMC [00:45:06] And you can't, you can't completely discount the possibility that the cat would meditate. I have known at least 10 people who think their cats *do* meditate. So.

Student 4 [00:45:32] I don't know if we actually have time to answer this question, but... so, I have the opposite experience where when I think about the thing that... I least want to happen, the thing that I hope would never happen... I've had so many traumatic things happen that I just end up getting flashbacks and re-experiencing it and I *can't* get any distance from it. So, that's the other extreme. So, I'm just curious... what then?

LMC [00:46:10] Mm hmm. Good question. Yeah. ... It seems that what makes sense maybe is... what we generally do in our meditation anyway. Which is we have experience when we sit down and meditate. The only value of having an *intense* experience is that it gives us... a more compelling way to relate to the meditation itself. But if you're already having intense experiences, then that practice is not necessarily the one for you. You know, it's not like every practice works for everybody. Which is why there are so many approaches to this in the Dharma and all of the different traditions and lineages.

[00:47:47] No one has ever said that one needs to accomplish all of those things. You actually only need to accomplish *one* of them. But, but it isn't necessarily obvious which one will fit. And I think that's actually a little bit accurate. That... *fit* in the sense of... we're all different. We all have different experiences in *this* life and we also have all different experiences from all of our previous lives that don't fit into our *memories*. But we say... another quote from Kalu Rinpoche... the experiences that we have now are connected to the experiences that we've had before this

life. And during previous lives and into future lives. And then the funny statement he made was... whether you're dead or alive. It was a *funny* remark. But when you looked at him, you realized he wasn't smiling. And so it was, it was more like... yes! The view is... whether you're dead or alive. The flow of experiences continues perpetually. So, each time that we sit down to meditate, we're really just kind of dipping into... the flow of experience.

[00:49:15] So, if we can... if you already have compelling experiences arising, you could... hold the view while you meditate, that the experiences that arise are just experiences arising. They've been there forever. They'll be there into the future. They do not have a beginning. They do not have an end. ... It challenges us because... as good Americans, we have this sense of everything has a beginning. Everything has an end. So... we don't need to throw that away. But it's helpful to hold the view, kind of the lens through which we watch our experience, like we were saying earlier, no experience occurs twice. if we think about it a little bit... that seems obvious, doesn't it? Just seems like... well, of course! We really mean to say... that it's kind of *like* another experience. Not that it's the *same* experience. The egg I ate for breakfast today is not the one that I ate the day before. But I might say something that sounds almost like I believe that.

[00:50:32] So, we need some manner, some way in which to get our awareness... onto the experience... whatever the experience is. So, if the experience is too intense... then we need to use another experience, on the way... to the one where we kind of get better and better at it. So that we're not continually trying to remember... to meditate for another ten seconds. Though, ten seconds is fantastic! If you could do it 100 times a day. And we have 100 times a day at our disposal every day. I look at this thing. [printed schedule] This is supposed to remind me of the times. Because I have trouble remembering the times. And when I don't remember the times, then I just... run the meditation as long as I feel like doing it. And that invariably gets me in trouble. So, this is my little safety note here. [umdze rang bell] Perfectly timed. [laughter]

[00:51:48] So... I think, just in a nutshell, if we have experiences that are difficult already, the way to work with them is... acknowledge them. Understand... if you're not superstitious about it, which we may be sometimes, if we just understand that the experience is a fleeting thing. And if it lasts longer... we're playing a role in that. So, we put our awareness on it. Understanding that it'll come and go and sometimes it'll be a little more intense or not.

[00:52:29] But one experience that you can make... so, this is what I would say in relationship to your complaint about it... try to come to the place where you understand, you have the experience that... the experience itself in the beginning may feel like... you didn't have any role in it. It just happened to you. I think we all have those experiences. I ate the egg and then I got sick. So, I think that happened *to* me. But if you can get to the place where you can see the experience, rest your awareness on it, and you understand that actually, whether you *intend* to or not, you are kind of in the driver's seat... making that experience change and fold and move. ... Does that feel risky?

Student 4 [00:53:33] I think as long as I'm grounded in the present, it doesn't.

LMC [00:53:38] Yes, but that's the only place we need to be in, this whole game... is in the present. ... Is it okay? It looks like you're pondering it maybe a bit and that's okay. Maybe you can start there... with it and move carefully. Okay? Can we... dedicate our merit?

sangha [00:54:19] dedicating the merit