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*rest awareness on flow of experience, **Carrying Practice:** habituate being 'present' by resting awareness on experience, **Carrying Practice:** habituate awareness of awareness by practicing awareness on experience, important we remember the community gathers for spiritual rather than social*

LMC [00:01:12] So, this session is meant to be... an open conversation. And... in fruitful conversations... I think, in my own experience, I would say... fruitful conversations generally involve more questions than answers. But you shouldn't take that as an injunction against having answers. So, whatever you would like to... talk about or what questions you might have about anything whatsoever. There's no promise of competence of any kind. So...

Student 1 [00:02:32] Lama Michael, I was thinking about your instruction. The instruction was to place your awareness on... your experience. And... the experiences that arise... just to place the awareness. And I started getting into thinking, you know. I guess I'm not quite sure what that looks like, to place my awareness on an experience. Because then quickly I start just thinking and then thinking about....

LMC [00:03:34] Yes. That's kind of our cultural curse, you know. It's like we're not used to resting in an experience. Unless the experience is unusually painful or pleasant. But actually, there is never a moment... I mean, one of the teachings in our tradition is, is that there is no such thing as a 'break'. There's no beginning to experience and no end to it. So... we're not used to that. We're used to having an experience that begins and ends and then it's just kind of in memory. And then we hope for something in the future. But every last thought that we have is actually an experience.

[00:04:23] So, the degree to which we can actually rest our awareness *on* the experience as it occurs... there's an element of sanity in that, that we're not disconnected from it. When we go into the conceptual thing, the experience takes a back seat. We start analyzing the experience. So, we're not actually *having* that same experience. We're still having an experience! But we're a little divorced from what we started with because now we're thinking about it. And who caused this experience or did I eat something that wasn't good or something like that. And we miss the actual experience.

[00:05:09] And it's not easy to rest with an experience. But fundamentally... if you look at all the myriad of practices that are in... really *all* of the traditions of Buddhism... the nature of the practice itself asks us to rest our awareness on the experience that we're having. And the practice itself is often designed to evoke certain experiences. And it's common, for a certain period of time, that we actually can't do it. We actually don't know what it means to rest our awareness on an experience. And so, we *talk* to ourselves about the experience. Which... moves us away from the experience and into the conceptual, which is fundamentally weak. It's weak and it is also, I think, many times, troublesome. You know, the reason I'm having *this* experience is because *this* person said this thing to me. And now I'm not sure that I like that person anymore. So, we go down that route. We're having more experiences, but we're also getting farther away from where we started. So, it's more helpful to hold this view... that no matter where you are, no matter whether you're young or old, whatever it is, there is no such thing as an *end* to the chain, the flow of experience.

[00:06:58] I always like Kalu Rinpoche's old thing in 1973 when he said... he was talking about this experience. And he said, there's no beginning and there's no end to it. It does not have a beginning. There was never a time when it wasn't there. And there is never a time when it's gone. There's a beginning and an end to our *awareness* of it. Our awareness comes and goes. But the experience never stops. It's like... a river. ... Just goes. All the time. And then he added the phrase that I have enjoyed for the last 30 years. After he said that, he said whether you're dead or alive. [laughs] And at that time, since I hadn't heard anything like that *ever* before in my life, I thought that was a wonderful ponderable for a period of time. In other words, even you die... the experience continues. Pleasant ones, unpleasant ones. It doesn't come to an end. So, it raises a lot of questions, which is nice. [laughs] Is that okay? Thank you.

Student 2 [00:08:40] Maybe following up to that... I've had different teachers suggest different ways... to kind of bring it back from thinking. And I've heard you share several ways, but I'd love to hear more ideas about... bringing our awareness to our awareness and... not using words to do that, I guess. ... So, I've had some say, you know... feeling your breath, the sensations or... put a quarter of your awareness on your breath and the rest to maybe sensation, sounds everything. Or maybe you're just following sounds or.... and I wonder sometimes I jump around to different... different ways within one session. And I wonder if you have.... I don't know, I'm babbling now... thoughts?

LMC [00:09:53] That's what we do. [laughter] ... If we look at the beginning of our understanding of meditation... I cannot ever recall a time... when, I mean anyone who's been practicing a long time has heard beginning instructions over and over and over. And... those instructions, I mean, if we look at it to try to see like, what's the common thread there? What's, what am I really getting here? And in my experience, it's always been... when I look back at it more carefully, it's always been about... the flow of experience. It's *always* been that. And sometimes it's been that by... you breathe... and you watch the breath. And then you start getting instructions like... you follow the breath coming in and you follow the breath going out. It's experience again.

[00:11:16] But personally, I just find it *useful* to note that it's an experience! That is to say, *I'm having* an experience. And when I notice that I'm having an experience... my awareness is *there*... with the experience. If I don't notice it, then I'm not aware of it. It's just that's simple dichotomy. Not complicated. And we *trick* ourselves sometimes into... having the experience of irrelevance. That is to say, okay, so I'm breathing. So what! What's next? I mean, I want to do something... profound. [laughs] Following my breath is kind of like... what? Well, of course I'm following my breath! But actually, it's not 'of course'. We actually don't follow our breath. We're totally asleep. And we breathe while we're asleep. But mostly we're not aware of that. What we don't see is that we often... are not aware of our breathing while we're awake. Sometimes we even have conversations without knowing that we're having a conversation.

[00:12:32] So... the fundamental basis of meditation is to raise our awareness to a heightened level. ... Not so that we can analyze it properly. We're going to do that anyway because we all got this education. That's what we did in school, right? Starting with two plus two and things like that, we became really excellent at *conceptual* things. We did *not* get trained in how to rest our awareness on our experience. Or even on our breath! Which is the basic, most simple shamatha, zhinay, calm abiding. Resting your awareness on just the flow of a breath going out, coming in. That's the beginning place for *so* many different practices. And it's not easy to do because we have not trained ourselves in it. So, we don't get to the place where we really *need* to go in order to really have the sense of the practice... inundating *all* of our experience. Our bodies. Our connections with friends and other people... relies upon our ability to be present.

[00:13:58] It's another catchphrase in Buddhist lingo... to be present. It really means not to just be present, obviously, we're all present. I don't see you all disappearing and then appearing again in and out of sight. Present means that you are *aware*... of the experience you're having. So, if somebody else walks into the room, they are included in the awareness of the experience. And the conversation then that ensues is also imbued with a sense of presence. If there's three people, there's a sense of presence. It's *rare* to have three people 'present'. Though their physical bodies may be in the room [laughs] they're not likely to be present. So, I think there is, there is something fundamental there that we can work with any time during the day... or night.

[00:14:55] Any time during the day, if you develop the habit that... every five minutes during the day, I will notice my experience. I will notice my experience. And I remember when I had a job in San Francisco... and I had finished a long retreat and I was doing my best to try and do practice while engaged in a job where you were expected to *produce* something. So, how do you actually... get your practice in there? I thought, well, I'll take my lunch break off. But that didn't really work. What finally worked was, is that I had to walk by this window about 50 times a day. And I decided that every time I walked by that window, I would turn and look out the window for like 30 seconds. And just... follow the experience of whatever happened by virtue of what was outside the window. Without naming it or analyzing it. Just to do *that*... much. And nobody really cared. It wasn't like somebody was saying, "Hey, what are you doing, looking out the window?" So... that *could* have been the case, but it wasn't. So, it was actually kind of perfect. I had the opportunity to look out the window and bring my mind to my experience right then, 100 times a day. And at a certain point, it just started. I didn't need the window.

[00:16:26] So I think... we have to do things like that. We have to find things in our environment and our habitual patterns during the day where we can kind of link into something and then, like, nurture it also. Don't just take it for granted. Like, well, this is like changing my relationship with *all* things... by virtue of... being present. And we're present when we rest our awareness on *whatever* experience we have. I think that's what we call being present. I mean, I can have a conversation with you and think about a conversation I had with somebody else. And we know that, when that's happening. Like... we're not connected here. And that's what we all want. It's not that we're particularly attached to a particular conversation, but as human beings... it's our connection with each other that is important. And the instructions for our meditation practice, *all* of those instructions involve some kind of connection with others.

[00:17:39] I think we all find when we *go* to those practices, if we haven't worked with them, they actually don't work for us either. We just end up on the same distracted state we were always in. So, to find some place... where we can connect... daily, momentarily. That works... for me, for you... personally. Like, taking the lunch break didn't work. I would go out and sit outside somewhere and somebody I knew would come along. We'd have a totally different conversation and it would go by and it was pleasant, but there was no presence... with it. What do you think? ... Say something. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:18:37] I had an experience just now of feeling very connected and present... with you... in just this conversation. Which was... very helpful. Just in that alone, without analyzing it, just that... being here and being aware of my body and all of us here and this. There's a way to kind of... I feel sometimes, outside of and inside of an experience at the same time and... that's the only thing I have to say about that.

LMC [00:19:18] Yeah. It doesn't need a name or anything, a box of any kind.

Student 2 [00:19:24] Yeah. I really appreciate all of that.

Student 3 [00:19:51] Some of the more popular... Buddhist... people talk about mindfulness. And it's kind of a common knowledge, mindfulness. How does that compare with... what you're talking about... experience?

LMC [00:20:24] I don't know. [laughs] It's like... my brain first goes, as so many times it has, with just the word mindfulness, like... it's kind of an inclination to kind of start there. I'm trying to understand what mindfulness is. And before receiving any instructions, just having read the word mindfulness somewhere, it seems right off like, like I know what it means. But when I look at it, I realize that I really *don't* know what it means. And... it's had many descriptions... that I've heard. Some of them I wouldn't necessarily call... presence. ... Mindfulness can be like... I remember once at the Zen Center in San Francisco, I met somebody there that I knew, and so we were washing dishes together. And the practice was to be mindful... of washing dishes. And I remember having a conversation about what does that mean? About, I mean, there's a dish and I'm watching the dish. What's the mindful? What does that mean? And... I move in circles... around it. Like, what is that? What are we really talking about here?

[00:21:56] And the truth is... it seemed kind of helpful for a while and then it didn't seem so helpful. The difficulty is, I think no matter what tradition it is, the difficulty is in maintaining that thing. So, personally, I find the use of the word... '*presence*' more useful. And I don't mean that there's anything inherently better in it. But the mindful piece felt like... just be present with what it is you're doing. Just pay attention to what you're doing. But it didn't necessarily *include* the added piece of... resting your awareness on the *experience* of washing the dish.

[00:22:45] And somewhere along the way... and I just mean, this is a personal thing, that the experience felt to me... important... when I could place my awareness *on* the experience *while* the experience was occurring. As opposed to... *remembering* the experience. Or trying to hold the experience after the experience ended, or something like that. But those are all things that we engage in. If it was easy, I mean, just to be... humorously clear, if it was easy, we'd all have accomplished it. And it's not easy... to do. I think that it's not easy to do in experiences which are *too* challenging. Like maybe a friend passed away. And I'd like to be present. And it's just really hard because that person was a friend and they're gone and you were close to them. And... on the other hand, when it's too easy, the thing that you're working with is so mundane and not particularly interesting. It doesn't grab you.

[00:24:05] So, another word that Kalu Rinpoche used once in 1973 was... it's best if you rest your awareness on an experience which *magnetizes* you. He used that expression, which I just could never forget. Rest your awareness on the experience you hoped you'd never have. So, in other words, that sounds like, and I think it was meant to be, a *challenging* experience. Something *very* challenging. And so, if you could rest your awareness on *that*... the awareness would probably [pounds fist into palm] *stick* to the experience. And therefore, you could have the experience of being present in a way that might not happen... in something that didn't have any power in it.

[00:24:56] So, the breath, for example... it's my personal opinion [laughs] that the breath, as long as I am breathing, well... the breath does not have much power. I have to make an *effort* sometimes to put my awareness on it. But if somebody is holding my head under water... that's a powerful experience. If you *could* put your awareness on that, that could be a profound

experience. But of course, you're struggling because... the experience is too powerful. So, I think both ends of that, the experience that's *too* powerful and the experience that just has no power at all. We're looking for something that has... I don't know what else to call it, except some power in it. So that it magnetizes you when you get close to it. You start putting your awareness on it. You can feel that your awareness is there. It's not like drifting all over, you're really with that thing as it occurs.

[00:26:13] Those two examples are not maybe that good... but I've found it helpful, for example, physical pain... if it is strong enough but not too strong... is a good one. It has power. So, if instead of like just... ergh... trying to like... think it away... somehow, or hope it will go away somehow, or make an appointment with a doctor and then like feel a lot of angst over it all the way, even the angst might be just right. Because conceptually you could understand the angst. Actually, it doesn't fix anything. And also... it isn't making it any worse. It's just there. And as long as it's not imminently life threatening, I'm just driving to the doctor and my leg hurts. So, that might be perfect... because it's not really threatening. It's just uncomfortable. So, it could be a starting place for putting our awareness on an experience which... we would normally wish I didn't have it, but you could have the experience of... this is perfect! I put my awareness here. I'm having the experience of the pain, the discomfort. But it's not overwhelming. It's not like somebody sawing my leg off. So, I can put my awareness there and have the experience of... being completely present with an experience as it unfolds.

[00:27:58] And I think that is so rare that it's worth looking for those things and trying and experimenting with it. ... Missing an appointment is a good one. [laughs] You can kind of make a list of things that would be magnetizing in that way. I would rather have an experience of being present with this thing, which I'm going to experience the unpleasantness of it *anyway*... so, I may as well have the benefit of bringing my meditation practice to it. Just to be present with it. And actually, appreciate it. Okay, I missed the appointment. Now I got to pay an extra fee or I have to apologize or, you know, whatever it is. We should make the 'Big Book of Magnetizing Experiences'. [laughter] So, we *want* the magnetizing piece. But you can't get it without the kind of the power of it. Which in the negative part of it is almost always more powerful than the pleasant side of.

Student 4 [00:29:42] The way I made sense of this conversation was comparing it to driving my car or walking... where if I don't pay constant attention while I'm driving... if I daydream or change music... I, in an instant, can have a problem. If I'm walking, I still have to be present, but it's slower, but I still have to watch the traffic. I still have to watch what's happening. And I don't know if that's an example that makes sense to this conversation, but it is one that I can get a hold of... and know that it's true. That's it. You don't even have to answer. [laughter]

LMC [00:30:26] But there's a piece missing there.

Student 4 [00:30:28] Uh-oh. [laughter] That's what my mother always said to me.

LMC [00:30:34] Well, this is this is Mother's Day! So, there you are.

Student 4 [00:30:38] Luckily, she's gone. [laughter]

LMC [00:30:39] She's still here.

Student 4 [00:30:45] Thanks, Mom.

LMC [00:30:49] In the example that you use... the slightly troublesome piece of it is... yes, you have to pay attention when you're driving, when you're walking in dangerous areas and all... but there, you're paying attention to the driving. You're paying attention to the danger. All those things... we're pretty *good* at those things. But what we're trying to do in the context of our meditation practice is put... our awareness *on* that thing.

[00:31:22] So, for example, you feel... like it's a dark night and you're driving and there's not many lights and it's cloudy and all... one of those really dark nights where you're not actually sure whether the next block is the right place to turn or not. That's not presence in the context that we're talking about. Here, what we want to do is... we want to feel this sense of... I feel a little afraid here because... I don't know if I turn at the next block. But this is not the time to put your awareness on the fear. Because that won't save you from crashing into another car. You need to pay attention to the other car. [laughs] But if we want to, we want to do those things that actually provide a *basis* for placing our awareness on the experience. So, your experience is there. When you think it's so dark! I'm used to driving in this place, but now I'm not sure. I can't see that thing. I had this experience about a month ago and I had a flashlight. I actually got out and I got the flashlight and I had to go and look like, oh, yeah, it is that street. It was so dark. So, partly that's just age and then you can't see as well. So... it becomes an issue of... there's an anxiety that arises. Like I have to be *more* careful than normal. But it's not the same as the presence that we're talking about. Does it make sense?

Student 4 [00:33:10] I think I only get the part about the car. [laughter] Honestly, I don't think I get the other one, but that's okay.

LMC [00:33:19] Well, of course, you're having an experience. That's a given. I'm totally confident that when Kalu Rinpoche said the river of experience has no beginning and no end, whether you are dead or alive. I'm *totally* confident that that is the case. ... But it doesn't help me find my way home. If I'm totally confident of that and I park the car because I think, I can't see here! It's so dark. Then it's useful because I have a sense of angst. Like I don't want to drive here... at night. Even with my lights on, it's even worse because other cars coming... the contrast of the light is even more. So, I feel more blinded by the light. If we deal with it in a practical way, which we should... to start with, then maybe it's better... don't drive at night, like that. But what we want is... we want to capture the *experience* that we're having, which is like, oh my God, this is like... how am I going to find my way home? *That's* what we want to capture. Which is different from... the strategy to finally *find* our way home. So, we want the *experience* and we want our *awareness* to merge with the experience. So, the experience and the awareness become a single thing.

Student 4 [00:34:52] Thank you.

LMC [00:35:00] It is, by the way, just to clarify... that the practice of placing our awareness on an experience is... a foundational practice... for all of our practices. But it's not the end result. So, I think also knowing something about the end result, even just conceptually, can be helpful in that we start by putting our awareness on the experience. Like simple. First, I notice it conceptually. I'm having trouble seeing in the dark. That's a conceptual thing, right? But probably you're also having difficulty seeing! And so there's a... then you have an anxiety around... God, I wonder if somebody is in the crosswalk that I'm about to run over. And so, then... we need to put our awareness on that anxiety. *That's* the actual practice. So, once the anxiety is there and the awareness come together... now we've done something that's really important.

[00:36:08] The next step is... even more important. And that is to... place the awareness on the awareness itself. That's the difficult one, more difficult. But you *get* there by putting the awareness on the experience. Awareness on the experience, awareness on the experience. Awareness on the experience. And then... here again, which maybe you've read recently, or you just hear the instruction again... put the awareness on the awareness. And it's so hard. It's like trying to balance a marble on a marble. You can *put* it there, but you can't measure how short the time is that it's there and it's already rolling off by the time you let go of it. That's so important. So... you put your awareness there... on the awareness and you have a momentary *experience*... of awareness of awareness. That momentary experience is precious.

[00:37:13] And then, of course, the next thing is *stabilize* the experience of... awareness of awareness. All the practices that are about that, you can launch into them from just the place of... resting your awareness on any experience. And you've stepped into that... chain. Then, then what you need to do is just keep doing it. Find a way to do it all the time, as much as possible until you no longer have to remind yourself. I wish I could say I do that. But it's clear what the strategy is.

Student 5 [00:38:04] I feel like I think I might know what you mean, but it's like the marble on the marble. If I try to put it into words, it escapes. So, is it okay just to leave it alone? That sense of... I *think* I understand what to do. But if I try to conceptualize it, if I try to put the experience into words, everything, you know, slides away. So, what I would like to do... is just to rest with that sense... the unarticulated sense of... I *think* I might have an idea of what that might be like.

LMC [00:38:54] Safe to say... you have an idea. [laughter] Yes. Of course, we're going to do that because from the time we were in kindergarten, that's exactly what we learned to do these things. We learned to *express* our experiences in words... more and more. And people who can do it really well make lots of money doing it, right? So, we're very good at that. But what we really want to do is... once we can see the experience, we want to let go of the conceptual aspect completely. Is it pleasant or unpleasant? Who cares? I mean, unless somebody is sawing your leg off... who cares? The experience is unfolding. The river is flowing and you are in the river. Or more correctly, maybe you *are* the river.

[00:40:02] And... it's a wonderful... view, we say, to hold... that it has no beginning. It has no end. It did not begin when you were conceived or born. It was already flowing before that. And when you're gone, it will still be going. Even when there's no sense of *you*, there. So, if you can just hold that view, it's helpful... to notice that the experiences *never end*. There's no break... ever. If there's a break, it's because you lost your awareness. And you can notice that, too. As long as your awareness is sharp and clear, you will see there's no break in the experience. Even when the highest levels of realization occur, it is still the case that the river is still flowing. It doesn't come to an end.

Student 5 [00:41:09] I love that. Thank you.

LMC [00:41:11] Well, I'm glad you love it! Now what are you going to do?

Student 5 [00:41:13] What I like is... it's the image. The sense of that flow. And I don't want to put it into words. I just want to know...

LMC [00:41:28] And you don't have to.

Student 5 [00:41:30] Yeah. Thank you, that's what I was waiting for. [laughter]

LMC [00:41:32] We actually do this thing regularly without even knowing it. So, it's just that it's not very consistent. If you're going to step into a hot tub, for example, and it's a cold night and you're alone and there is a hot tub there. And you think, wow it's very cold, I'm going to get into that hot tub. So, what do you do? You don't just jump in. It's like you put your foot in and you step in and it's kind of a gradual experience occurring. And we are very clear about that experience. We are aware of that experience. Now, if we can be aware... of the *awareness* of the experience, which is not uncommon... we have stepped up a bit.

[00:42:31] The problem with that... there's really no problem with it... but the problem that is kind of hidden there is that you can't take the hot tub with you. And you also, after you've done it a couple of times, it doesn't have the power that it had before. But I see... if it's at night... and I'm feeling cold, then I have this experience. And if I put my awareness on it, the experience becomes even more intense. And... it's magnetizing. It's like easy for me to put my awareness on it. So, I think there's examples like that that we can find that are helpful so that we can have this sense of, ah I see... what this is.

[00:43:19] The challenge then becomes... when... you accidentally have a conflict with someone who is a close friend and suddenly... the experience is now 'hot'. So, *that's* the challenge then that you got to meet, is how do you work with that in a way of putting your awareness on the experience arising from... the things that most of us like the least. Which is interpersonal conflict. And we tend to ruin it, from the meditation perspective, by... all sorts of things... that are actually not functional, just in an ordinary way, and definitely not functional in terms of the meditative potential there. ... Is that enough? Okay. Happy Mother's Day. [laughs]

Student 6 [00:44:32] I'm not sure this is a question as much as a comment. When I heard the request for tips about being present... and you're mentioning the window and other things. This was occurring to me... maybe last month, [someone] asked the question to all of us sitting... why we meditate in a group? And just about everybody responded some variation of... because it's easier for my motivation, a variation on that. Like if I'm meditating by myself, I might have to, like, push myself, but, oh, here I am. And others are here. They're trying. I'll try harder. They're trying. I'll try more. I'll try this. So, putting that piece together with a short teaching I heard of Khandro Rinpoche when she said about how many reminders we need. And she said even a scrap of orange or yellow fabric can remind us of the Dharma. And how many reminders do we need? One for each time during the day we're distracted. So, in other words, a gazillion.

[00:46:06] So I'm thinking just like meditating... on a Sunday with a group. When I'm home or when I'm not meditating, but wanting to be 'present with the experience'. Like you mentioned, three people might be together. Are we actually all present? And then it's like, oh, there's an assumption... meditating in the sangha. We're trying this. And we're helping each other try this. We're reminding ourselves... to try to to be present and meditate. So, what if when we were outside and off the cushion, but wanting to be present, what if looking at each other at home, at the table... it's like reminding ourselves... are we both here? Are we both present? Are we walking by that window? And yes, it's time to be present. You know, I guess I'm asking myself and asking others in the Dharma family, in the bigger family.... can we remind ourselves? Are we present right now in this conversation? Are we present at this table? Are we present while we're walking down the street? I'm just kind of wondering. It seems of benefit. It seems useful.

LMC [00:47:44] Well, there's different kinds of benefit. Right? I mean, there's different variations on all of this. And of course... I think we all make efforts to understand what we're doing. And we try to gauge and ask the questions. Am I actually doing that? So, we'd like to... maybe be *authentic* in some way. Like, well, I hope the effort that I'm making is in the right direction so that, you know, all of those kinds of things are there. So, that's what we do as human beings. Not just because we're in this culture. I think human beings just do that. Is we try to see, like the road we took that was too dark... we try to go another route the next time we do it. That's always going on.

[00:48:40] But those things also are primarily in the context of... the social fabric. And there's a certain way in which... not exactly sure how to say this... what comes to mind is just a spontaneous... emotional burp. ... We need to be careful... to remind ourselves regularly... that the reason we're here... is for spiritual purposes. And that purpose is very fragile. Our *social* things are *not* fragile. They are not fragile. They *change* all the time, but they are not fragile. We just keep going with them. But when it comes to... actually... recognizing just the nature of our experience, let alone the nature of mind itself, that's *very* fragile. So, if we are not careful as a community, if we are not careful to recognize the difference, we will become a social gathering. And the rest of it will gradually dry up.

[00:50:41] And so, anyone who's been in... a Dharma community for more than... two or three years, I think would, could say, I know *exactly* what that means. We lost the spiritual aspect and we went wholeheartedly into the social aspect, almost like we were taking refuge in it. And the result is... not good. So, having seen that happen... numerous times, it's like, I think sometimes when I walk in here, I want to scream. Like, don't forget why you're here. It is not to make friends. It's not for this conversation that we're having. It's actually you're here because we are sharing a particular point, which is *awareness*.

[00:51:38] When I put my awareness on, let's say... the worst things, like, if I'm really angry, if I can put my awareness on my *anger*, the anger becomes fuel for the meditation. If I put my anger on the table as a *solution* to something else, the whole world burns up. It is so dry tinder. It only takes a spark and all the awareness and everything just dissolves. And so, it takes a lot of effort. A lot of kindness, a lot of patience with ourselves and with others in order to avoid the conflagration that undermines all of our effort, which is actually *useful*. It's *nice* to be together with friends, but it is not the Dharma.

[00:52:34] When we come together to sit, it's important that we come together and we understand... I know what I'm working on here. It's not to improve my friendships and my relationships, as good as they might be. What I want to do in *this* life is come to the place of knowing the nature of the mind that is the seat of all of my experience. And that's what I hold for everybody. There isn't anything else that is worth coming together for in the same way. So, we can eat lunch together and have parties together and do all sorts of things, but we don't move into a profoundly different place. So, those things that we have as tools to move us into a *profoundly* different place are the things that... I think it would be good if we could, when we come together, have a way of reminding ourselves... this is *really* why we're here. And that's meant to be the case when we recite the Refuge Prayer. Like, okay, I just took refuge in the last movie that I saw and I want to tell everybody what a great movie that was. ... So what.

[00:53:51] It's like, when we come together, we need to have this thing of... *why I'm here*. Otherwise, we become just like any other group. Chögyam Trungpa stated this thing better than anybody that I heard before. He talked about 'The End of Buddhism', which is predicted... for

those of you who don't know. It is predicted. It is even given a time when it will no longer exist. And... given who he was, he found that to be... not particularly startling. And not something to... shy away from. And not something to think that you could fix it and stop it. And so he talked about it once.

[00:54:40] "As you know, there's a great Buddhist Dharma Center down the street." He would say, kind of talking about it, perhaps talking about his own Dharma Center. [laughs] And would say, like, it's a great Dharma Center. It's really wonderful. And then he would mention the ways in which *today* it's not as good as it was. And then he started like, kind of removing the pieces little by little. And at some point, it comes to the place of...there's this club down the street. It's a Buddhist club. And they get together and they talk about the Buddha. And they talk about Buddhism. And they talk about all these things. And gradually it just becomes kind of a place. And then they start, you know, they also have drinking parties there and all these other things. And gradually it come to the place of... nobody even goes there. It's like... some kind of a club that people used to go to that place and do things but... nobody's there anymore. And the building then ultimately just gets torn down. There's not even any evidence of why it happened or anything. It's just gone. And he said this is the *norm*. So, if you are *in* a place where people *actually* practice and you *actually* have a sense of why you're doing it... it's really important that you not lose that sense, that presence with it. Because when it's lost, it's kind of on a downhill slide. And by the way, he said... we are on the downhill slide... historically.

[00:56:22] So, you kind of need to... get it while you can. Because it will not necessarily be there in the future. Kind of dreary. [laughter] But it's magnetizing! A little bit of urgency. Yeah. I think we're getting back to the place of putting your awareness on your experience is... you need to do something so that it connects. It's kind of like the refrigerator magnet. You know, you want to be able to have an experience which is strong enough that... like the strong refrigerator magnet, you can't get it off once it's stuck. So, then... if your awareness is there, you're in a place where you really will see something that you otherwise can't see.

Student 6 [00:57:18] So, Lama Michael. It was just the idea of... if being with people outside of the Dharma Center and I guess from your response, there's a fine line between... am I paying attention to the driving or am I paying attention to the anxiety of the driving? And so, my idea was... the idea of seeing others, like, am I aware of the experience while I'm here at this table? In other words, having other people or other situations be my window that I walked by 50 times a day. That was the sense. But I, but from your answer, I can hear that it would be easy to get into... making samsara nicer, or being a safer driver instead of experiencing what is. And I was trying to point to... it could be a tip to: experience now. Experience now. Just a reminder.

LMC [00:58:42] Yeah, that's... that's what we do. We're Americans. We go off the rail really easy. [laughs] And I don't mean that as a slam on this culture or any culture. This is what human beings do. And we would like to... do something different than all of that. And at the same time, we would like to do something that is good enough... such that we would like to share it. And the way that we share it is by bringing joy and happiness to other people. Almost... with total disregard to the cost... of our time, of anything. Because at some point, we have to know that... it is the wish for the benefit of others that is the foundation of our own benefit. And we can't trick ourselves out of that. It's just what it is. Okay? Shall we dedicate?

sangha [00:59:54] *dedicating the merit*