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Carrying Practice: *resting awareness on every experience, resting awareness on experience itself without manipulating and with curiosity*

LMC [00:01:26] So, for those of you who are not familiar with the schedule this evening, this is a time when you can raise... questions... and commentaries... objections. [laughter] And other things that we are happy to entertain ourselves and you with.

Student 1 [00:02:10] So, in Western psychology, there's a lot of references to ego defense mechanisms. So, I'm kind of interested in how the ego works and how it defends itself. But in the context of our practice, there are a few that come to mind. Disassociation. Or compartmentalization. Some of the more basic ones are kind of like denial... or these ways that we kind of protect ourselves from information we don't want to access. Our ego doesn't want to be exposed to. So, I'm wondering as we cultivate the *view*... how can we trust our own minds... to know whether or not we're doing these types of things. Such as like how do we know we're not disassociating? How do we know that we're not cultivating something as a means to escape... you know, a consensus reality of some kind that's uncomfortable. Does that make any sense?

LMC [00:03:34] Sure. And you're asking how you know? I mean, you said, 'how we know' but...

Student 1 [00:03:44] Yeah, yeah. I guess how / know. Yeah... let me see if I can clarify that. I guess it's more so the question of like, how do we see our ego tricks? You know, we could possibly be fooled by them and not see them in the first place. Like we have blind spots, I guess.

LMC [00:04:12] What do you call ego? How do you describe it?

Student 1 [00:04:19] Well, I would say one component of it that's easy to define or to point to is that, you know... socialization. The way that we're socialized... is one component of ego.

LMC [00:04:36] How is that ego?

Student 1 [00:04:39] I think that we take on other people's perspectives as material to design our own... identity. You know, so, to that extent, other people's perspectives are the material which we construct our ego out of. So, socialization would be one part of that. There could be the potential to not see how somebody else has written a narrative about ourselves that we have internalized and then come to call ourselves. Right? There's a potential, I think, that we may not see that.

LMC [00:05:29] What are you shooting for?

Student 1 [00:05:32] Awareness of that... of seeing those things. What am I shooting for? What's my goal? Yeah. My goal would be to see those and acknowledge them and not be controlled by them.

LMC [00:05:57] I think that where you are, the way you talk about it... is a little bit too much complicated. So, the study of psychology in the West is very complex, often. Which is why you

can spend a long time studying it... [laughs] and still have the questions that you're asking. [laughter] So, that's not a criticism of the study of psychology. But... it's not exactly the same... as our practice. And our practice really is about, you mentioned it, really *seeing* that thing. So, if you have kind of the fundamental ego thing of... identification. Like... you identify with your gender or your social status or your money or some kind of thing, then that's fundamentally an ego thing, like... we're trying to find who we are. And we do it often in ways which are not particularly functional, in the sense that we don't feel... happier and we don't feel more whole. From a Dharma perspective, that's more to the point.

[00:07:28] How do we *recognize* when we... think we recognize *ourselves*. And... from a Dharma perspective, we would say there really isn't a *self*. But it's natural for us to feel like there is one. And so, it's not so much the problem that we *feel* a sense of self or even that we name it. Like, I have a name. So, when we meet somebody and we say I'm Michael, or whatever the thing is that we call ourselves, that begins a process where... we have a certain... almost like a belief, that we *are* that thing. But the *first* thing isn't to get rid of that. The first thing is just developing the ability to see it. It's like if you're in total darkness and you can't see something, the first thing to do is to find the light switch. And often we can't do that. So, then we take refuge in the complexity of it. So, how many people do we know who have taken refuge in the complexity and they can speak quite eloquently about all of the different ways in which we fool ourselves. But they may... themselves, still be caught in that cycle.

[00:09:02] So, in the context of the Dharma, it doesn't appear to be so important to know all of the nuances and all of the names for different conditions and all. The more important thing is... to be able to recognize that experience as it unfolds. It doesn't need a name. It doesn't need a place in time. ... The place and time doesn't need to be pushed away. Just to have the experience clearly in the moment that it occurs... is very rare. And I think... you might agree, is very helpful. ... Whether you're sad or joyful... to be able to recognize those experiences, not by name necessarily... the name is not important, but to recognize the *actual* experience. And I don't mean recognize it like, uh-oh, here this is again! But rather just to recognize it. I have never had a pain in my leg before and I suddenly have pain in my leg... I don't have to know the name to recognize the experience. To recognize the experience is the beginning of the pieces that you were talking about of going deeper in it. It's a prerequisite, really. And in and of itself, it's pretty good... just to recognize the experience. Because mostly we don't. We blow through it. We blow through it and we have the experience that it happened... *to me*. Which is fundamentally a victim mentality. So, we want to get out of the victim mentality so that we can actually more clearly rest our awareness on the experience as it arises.

Student 1 [00:11:04] So, to that point, sometimes in meditation, I will recognize my ego doing things. Like trying to fix the experience... in a certain way. One example would be to, you know, identify with some sort of sense of progress in meditation and say, oh, look it. I'm getting better. You know? So, that would be one example of ego *fixing* that experience and turning it into kind of... material to aggrandize itself. Something like that. So, essentially, when you recognize those experiences, how do you build on that practice, I guess. Essentially, it's gaining insight and gaining awareness... into... when those things are unfolding?

LMC [00:12:15] It may not be an issue of building, but more like tearing down. [laughter] So, you... have a certain experience. You put your awareness on it. You find that... if you can put your awareness on it for long enough to witness anything... usually the result is the thing you put your awareness on, it's gone... by the time that you could identify it. Now, I mean, if someone's beating you over the head with a stick, it doesn't go away, so quick. But if you just are looking at

your experience as a kind of meditation, it's often the case that the recognition of the experience is very fleeting. It's just there. You recognize it in the moment and then it's gone.

[00:13:06] And yet... we could say... that... the exalted goal, and I know we're not supposed to use that word are we, that word goal, but it's okay as long as you fail. It's okay. [laughter] So, what we want is... we really need to put our awareness on experience, no matter what the experience is. And when we do that, the awareness... does not easily stay in one place. The example I like to use is you put a marble on a marble and let go of the second one. It doesn't stay very long. Like a split second. But in that split second, you can actually witness that you recognized something. You don't need a word or anything about it. And you can just put your awareness back on there again in the next moment... and see the experience. If you can do that enough times, you become familiar with the experience. And you become familiar with experience *itself*. So, the whole process kind of fills itself in without a lot of... explanation. Without a lot of... talk about what it is and what it isn't. As we talk about insight a lot, too. And I know a lot of people just recently have been talking about insight a lot. And insight is fundamentally just that! The ability to put your awareness on an experience and rest there with it. And we all know... it's an unstable experience for most of us most of the time. But that's just an issue of doing it over and over until we get familiar with it.

Student 1 [00:15:06] Thank you, that's helpful. I think... what I take from that is just spending more time in... awareness itself without a story. Without a narrative. Because I spend a lot of time in... like obviously, I think you can probably tell, based on my question... spend a lot of time like in this kind of... intellectual space. You know, weaving stories and weaving... yeah, just that... some sort of that material, I think, that's... very dualistic, you know. So, I think that awareness itself, non-dual awareness... in meditation is...

LMC [00:15:55] Awareness, awareness can be dual too.

Student 1 [00:15:58] Yeah.

LMC [00:16:01] It's, in the moment that you think... there's my awareness! There you are! [laughs] You can't walk away from it. It follows you. So, that's why I would suggest... don't pay so much attention to the instructional details until... you can actually rest, just rest your awareness on the experience itself, even if it's only for... five seconds. Ten seconds is pretty good. I mean, think if you did that with every experience that you had during the day... by the end of the day, you would have the sense that that day was an extraordinary day. And the details of... well, I kind of... name the awareness or I did this or that or I didn't get this... you probably wouldn't be asking those questions. You would just... know that... that was a very unusual day. To take every moment that you could... remember to do it, and put your awareness on *whatever* experience was occurring. Whether you were talking or listening or just hearing the sound or remembering something. They're all experiences.

Student 1 [00:17:22] Thank you.

LMC [00:17:26] So, your job now is report back. [laughter]

Student 1 [00:17:32] Okay. I can promise that.

Student 2 [00:20:04] So, at this point in my life, I'm spending a lot of time...making art in my studio... by myself. And... it's interesting, certain emotions come over me for no particular

reason. Like, you know, I'll suddenly feel really anxious or... maybe joyful or whatever, but... the ones that interest me, or that I get hooked on, are the ones like I'm suddenly bummed out for some reason. Suddenly feeling negative. It's like nothing just happened. And so, I go on this search, for like... what am I unhappy about? You know, so, that I can, like, put a name to it and sort of figure it out in some kind of logical way. And so, what you were just talking about made me think, you know, it'd be great if I could just... not do that. And not try to pin down why this emotion is suddenly arising. [... Or is it better to try to figure it out? No. Right?

LMC [00:21:09] I think you know the answer. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:21:18] It doesn't stop me from wanting to, you know, categorize it somehow and like, if I can understand why I feel this way, then I can... especially if it's negative, I can fix it, right. I really want to be able to fix it. So, just don't. Right?

LMC [00:21:42] Well... there's so many approaches here, so, it's really... not clear what you will find... useful. But there's plenty of opportunities to find the one that would... *sing* to you. Then generally... in speaking with many people, I think that the approach of not analyzing it, not trying to figure out what it is, not trying to figure out how to change it... the approach to that, where we *don't* try to engage in some way... is more helpful. In other words, you might say, "Surprise me." You know, just surprise me! And you will be surprised... in the sense that you cannot predict what your next experience is going to be. You might actually rest your awareness on some... feeling that felt kind of negative and then it was gone. And so, you feel like... that was interesting! And the next thing is, as we're kind of... tightening the screws and loosening the bolts and trying to get the thing to work in a different way. And it doesn't go like that. And I'm sure that if one were to look at it long enough, we would be able to... perhaps manipulate it in a way that we hadn't known before. But that manipulation is of, generally speaking, absolutely no benefit. It's far more beneficial to be able to just witness it. Just see it.

[00:23:48] And *when* we see it, it might be helpful to recall... for those who practice regularly... when we see... *any* experience, if we hold our awareness close to that, as close as we can without any manipulation on our own part, we are very close to recognizing the nature of mind itself. Which we *can* do on a kind of regular basis. So, it's not stable, at least not in the beginning, I mean, but still... to be just close to it, we can kind of have that feeling of... when I put my awareness on that... sense of dissatisfaction... the dissatisfaction didn't go away, but I got this other thing. Which was different than the dissatisfaction or... the dissatisfaction was *flavored* by it in some way. And so, we have this sense of... of the experience, not kind of like... *grabbiness*... somehow. It's more like... you open the door on a hot day and a cold breeze blows through. And we could stand there and talk about... how much we disliked it when it was a one hundred and ten. And how much more we like this one. And then when the winter comes, we can talk about how much more we like hot, you know. But we haven't done the *thing* of... putting our awareness *on* the experience. Even if it's like, I hate this! So put your awareness on the 'I hate this.' There's some experience there.

Student 2 [00:25:38] But then when I do that, then it's like, oh, I see! It's because... blah, blah, blah. Or I would hate this less if I did this other thing and I'd fix it, you know. So, it's really hard to stop that intellectualization of like... I've got to like, categorize this and put a name on it and figure out...

LMC [00:25:55] No, you don't. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:25:58] I'd like to stop. Yeah.

LMC [00:26:01] Well, you don't have to. You know that already. You know you don't *have* to do that. So, you might be curious and wonder why you do it anyway. But 'have to' is another kind of thing. Like...

Student 2 [00:26:13] I feel like I'm being an efficient person, like... okay, I have a problem. Figure out how to solve it, you know.

LMC [00:26:17] Yeah. Do you know how to be inefficient?

Student 2 [00:26:22] Well I do it all the time, but not intentionally. [laughs]

LMC [00:26:24] That's so... *perfect*. ... Do that! I mean... we get way too much... kind of identification and attachment with these things. And it's of no use at all. We don't get more efficient. We don't get less efficient. It's just... for the most part, it's just rigamarole. It's just flotsam and jetsam in the sea of mind. You know, it's going on. And so, there are so many opportunities to do this. You can put your awareness on... the experience that you're having of just... the flotsam and jetsam of... [blubbering sounds of lips] popcorn. It's fine. But it's also true that then you think, I don't think I'm doing this right. So, *that's* an experience! I don't think I'm doing this right. So, dump the label and the description and go with the experience that made you think... I don't like this experience. I mean, it's not like... stabbing you with swords and knives or something. It's not like that! It's just simply... a harmless experience, that we... reduce its power with, or we *increase* the power by virtue of, all of these other attachment and diversions that are going on.

[00:27:57] So, it's really more helpful... and I think many of us can say, from personal experience, *I* certainly can... that *the less I do*... to manipulate the experience, the easier it is for me to leave my mind, or my awareness, resting there. And if my mind rests there for a while, something *else* happens. The experiences that keep flowing during that time... become more subtle. And so... it's actually easier to place the awareness on it when the mind is still. And so then we can have the... kind of direct experience of... attachment and aversion to something. And it doesn't need a label, also. And it's not so hard once the label's put there, it's not so hard to let go of the label. It should be the most interesting thing that we could possibly do... is familiarize ourselves with our own minds.

Student 2 [00:29:06] Yeah, I'd like to cultivate that attitude.

LMC [00:29:09] Yeah, well, that's the start place, right? So, maybe there's a half a dozen start places. One of them is... I would like to cultivate a deep and abiding curiosity in all experiences that I have. I don't care whether they're painful or joyful or whatever. I want to see them. I want to feel them. I want to like... kind of weigh what they are. Without putting names and labels and who did this and... just to have the experience. And then... it's going to go away, just like the last wave that came in and washed up and over your feet and then it went out. There's another wave coming, but it is not the same one. It never comes twice. So, there's a way in which we can feel the diversity of all of the experiences we have... as they roll out and we put our awareness on them... with no intention other than just to be aware of them. You're so close when you do that. There's only a couple of moves left... to be right at the awareness of mind itself.

[00:30:24] So, it's really quite... wonderful to do that much. And then you're just kind of inching closer to the thing. And I think more often than not, you know, in the Zen tradition, there's this thing of going to see the Zen master to ask whether or not... I don't have the lingo for it, but it's fundamentally... did I recognize the nature of mind? And of course, no one can really know whether you did or not. But there's plenty of questions that you can ask... where you'd be able to say, looks like you did. No big deal! It's good. Go do it some more. [laughter] And so, in that way, I think the reason why they do that, they put an intermediary in there, where *you* don't have to answer it... so therefore, you have less to identify with... the kind of... I'm a big shot. I did this thing. You know, it's like someone else said I did it. Well, almost did, it looks like. Or maybe yes, you *did* do it. And... so, then you can continue from that place. It's kind of a nice tradition, I think.

Student 2 [00:31:39] Yeah, I like it. Thank you.

LMC [00:31:43] And you can do it by yourself also. And you can share that with whoever your teachers are and see whether or not what that it's what you thought it was. ... Is that okay?

Student 2 [00:32:01] More than okay. Thank you.

LMC [00:32:21] We just have only about three hours left. [laughter] Shall we recite the dedication?

sangha [00:33:06] *dedicating the merit*