

2019_05_26_am2_QA_LMC.mp4

*watching the hope fear and 'the want' experience, Milarepa, working with death with curiosity and **Carrying Practice**: (with view of interdependence) and also bodhicitta*

LMC [00:01:40] So, this is our period when we... have an open conversation, usually enjoyable. We haven't had a really serious... objection in a long time. So, let's try today.

Student 1 [00:03:17] Good morning. I have a question. I've been working with sound meditation, you know, meditating on sound, which was something Lama Eric suggested when he was here. And one of the things I notice is how... when I hear a sound... most of the time, there's what feels like an immediate labeling that goes on.

LMC [00:04:00] You mean like good sound, bad sound?

Student 1 [00:04:03] Like, oh, there's Dave getting out of bed and oh, that's the cat. That kind of thing. So immediate! Like there's no pause. And I guess you often encourage us to watch our experience, in which case, if my experience is a label... then it's just a label. Or should I have some magical technique which would allow me, over time, to just hear sound as sound rather than being accompanied by these?

LMC [00:04:46] I would definitely go... *always* with a magical technique. [room erupts in laughter]

Student 1 [00:04:53] And what *is* it?

LMC [00:04:56] I mean, really... why settle for less? Well, what you're describing, of course, is... the issue that we have, generally, which is to... take what is *always* non-conceptual... our experience. In the beginning, it's always *definitely* experiential. And we very quickly... concretize it in some way conceptually. It's square, it's round, it's dark, it's bright, it's like we... I like it, I don't. Usually, it comes down to I don't want it or I want it. So, that's where we get the attachment and aversion thing about... do your best to lay aside the attachments and the aversions. Sometimes it's stated as the hopes and fears.

[00:06:05] Those things are... valuable. Because... when we have a hope or a fear, an attachment or aversion, then... if we can learn to recognize those things as they arise, we are not... subject to them in the same way that we are when we don't recognize them. So, we can carry an aversion or a fear... I mean, pretty much for our whole life. There are many cases, like it happens, it is regular to have it carry for an hour or a day or a month. Simple. So the question often is, how do I get rid of the hope and the fear? One of the hallmarks of enlightenment, written in many texts, is... enlightenment fundamentally is the absence of hope and fear. Or you might say, if one is enlightened, hope and fear are not there.

[00:07:15] Well, many people will also say, what would life be like without hope and fear? [laughs] And so, there is that piece of it, too! But of course... it's strange because it embodies a certain sense of hope and fear around hope and fear. Like, I want to keep my hope, but I want to get rid of my fear. And so on. So... you can't actually manipulate this thing. It manipulates you. But you are the *IT*. So, we manipulate that ourselves. And the value is, in the meditation

session, to notice the experience of the fear. Like wanting to be rid of something or wanting to modify it somehow. And then just watching 'the want' as it arises is really the meditation... of the experience.

[00:08:17] The experience isn't really a problem. The experience becomes a problem when we... kind of twist it in the way of... I want to change it, I want to move it, I want less of it or more of it. When we're just there to see it... we have a totally different experience. So, there's a value just from that perspective... in virtually all of our experiences... to just note and experience and develop the *ability* to let go of the... 'I need to change this' aspect. It's just there. You're sick, for example. You have the flu. And we can lay around and moan and groan and do all sorts of stuff, which is totally okay... but we can *also* just pay attention to... the experience, which often, we can't change *anyway*. So, we end up like pushing and pulling, grasping and averting the thing. When the meditation, again, presents itself as an opportunity to just be present with the experience. So, the hope and the fear vanish. And we can have a sense of... profound understanding of what the experience is. ... We can go more on that, but maybe that's enough.

Student 4 [00:15:08] For the newcomers here, could you explain who Milarepa is?

off mic [00:15:21] [someone points to statue] It's him!

LMC [00:15:27] Yeah. That's it. [laughter] Well, not to say too much... but, for those who are not familiar with who Milarepa is, he was very... famous figure in the past. Kind of a magical figure in many ways. And so, of course, we always love magical figures. And Milarepa was, kind of maybe still is, for many people, mostly... like the star of that. Like, the one who did it more than anybody else. And so, the stories which are recorded in numerous places, in various ways, are usually what we reference when we're talking about studying Milarepa... is reading those texts and pondering them and getting teachings on them. Because his understanding of the Dharma was considered to be pretty much complete, absolute. So therefore, anything that he did or said... is taken to be something worth studying and looking at.

[00:17:08] And because his life was also, in many ways... *unlikely*, that is to say... we don't know how many people tried to live like he did and never made it. That is to say, go to living in caves and things in the mountains... where there are wild animals and not enough to eat and terrible weather conditions and so on. So, it's always kind of a joke. Like people will say, I think I'd like to do that. But... we're not sure of the bones found in caves belonged to Milarepa or somebody else like us. So, there's a lot, there's a lot of humor in Milarepa also, like serious humor. And... personally, that's my preference, the humorous aspect of it. Because the humor is always embedded in something which is kind of tragic in another way. So. it gives us an opportunity to laugh at that aspect as well as gain some understanding about the nature of mind itself.

Student 5 [00:19:28] I have... really felt very strongly... my *inexorable*... march towards death. I mean, really strongly. I had the wind knocked out of me pretty seriously a few days ago and... I thought I was going to die. I mean, I was starting to blackout. I couldn't get my breath. But also, just realizing, you know, I just turned 72. And I mean, how much longer? Anyway. My question is, sometimes I actually get scared... about it, you know? And... what is the best way... to work with that? I mean, acknowledging that this is inevitable. ... You know, I actually looked up the meaning of inexorable and it's from orare [sp?] in Latin, which is to pray. And... you can't get out of it by praying. Basically. You can't say, Oh please, God, I promise I won't ever do it again. Just let me live through this one thing. But what is the best way? Because I do, I... sometimes I feel very... oh you know, what is the best way to work with this realization... that this is going to

happen... *without* a doubt... and to really use it in my practice. Because I do contemplate it. It... you know, I think there's even a meditation where you see yourself, your body deteriorating. ... Do you have any more suggestions? Because I feel, I actually feel I am a lot closer than I thought. I feel I'm a lot closer than I thought.

LMC [00:21:43] Closer to dying?

Student 5 [00:21:44] Yeah. I feel a lot more fragile. Just physically. My body feels very fragile.

LMC [00:21:53] Well, there's a lot to be said about dying. [laughs] A lot to be said about dying. And... I think that one of the best things to do is exactly what you were talking about. So, you contemplate it. And not *everybody* is afraid of it. Some people can't shake the fear. I find myself... completely... embroiled in curiosity... about it. And somebody recently said, like, how can you be *curious* about it? And I said, I don't know how you *can't* be curious about it. You only get to do it *once* in this life. So, why wouldn't you be? And it's certain that you will do it. So... the only thing left is curiosity. But... people don't want that. So, there's something else that's not clear... .But... working with death... working with death from multiple perspectives, I think is really helpful. Helpful to avoid, or let's say... nurture a sense of wholesomeness around it rather than the 'woe is me' kind of thing. Which in my experience with people who hold *that* view, it doesn't look like there is much to go for there. When our sole sense is that... it's terrible, but it's inevitable. So, I guess I have to do it.

[00:23:45] And one of the teachings, that personally I find useful, is the teaching on unbounded interdependence. Like there is *nothing* which isn't connected to all other things. The meditation on that is something that some people, and I include myself in that group, find it... most helpful. Most *interesting* also. Because actually I'm not so interested in helpful. I'm more interested in interesting. Like, what is compelling? What would I *like* to look at somehow? And... so the unbounded interdependence covers an *enormous* swath of Buddhist teachings. Everywhere from karma, since karma is nothing more or less than unbounded interdependence... and death actually is an illusion in that context. Because it was *always the case*... that you were not going to be the same from day to day. So, it's funny, we don't notice *that!* That yesterday's life is today's death and today's death is tomorrow's life. We don't seem to notice that. We tend to focus on some small piece of that very big view. And that very *big* view, if we focus on that, feels grand. Feels... almost like, it's omniscience in itself. Just wonderful! But when we focus on... ourselves lying in a small, dirty bed with bad food, dying... [laughter] we have a totally different relationship with it.

[00:25:40] So, I think it's better to focus on the, on the *big* pieces. Like... the unbounded interdependence. Where we would say... that life itself had no beginning. It had no beginning, but it was inevitable. Because of... the unbounded interdependence. But nothing has a beginning, and there is no end by, in the context of unbounded interdependence. Things come to an end by virtue of things that we can't really witness. We witness what we want to witness out of it. And we *name* it, thereby making it more of an illusion... instead of just being present with it. So, we can *practice* unbounded interdependence by holding certain views and carrying them with us. Like, for example... *whatever* I do with my body, with my speech, with my mind... *today*... it will bear fruit in the future. And the future might be momentary after I say something or do something or I may not see the fruit of it until multiple lives away.

[00:26:58] So, that leads us to a place of... *that* being the case... then the question is, how can I improve the *odds* that in the future, if I have another life... well, we would say as Buddhists,

there's no question about it, because we don't say there's an end... to unbounded interdependence. You're just in that somewhere... continuously. So, if we hold the view that... this unbounded interdependence also has no beginning and no end. You can't find its birthplace. You can't find where it ended. Because it doesn't end. So then we have something to settle with. That gives us something to ponder. Gives us something to work with. We can work with *all* sorts of teachings in the Buddhist tradition, of course... but personally, I find just the unbounded interdependence... completely... satisfying... in itself. Because you never know what's coming... from it.

[00:28:08] Not just day to day, but moment to moment. You don't know will you have a headache? Will you suddenly have an itch? Will it go away? Will something show up that you weren't anticipating or something you never saw again? Will you be afraid of it? Will you be drawn to it? To... rest with those things as they occur... it's *difficult*, after you do that for years, it's difficult to be afraid of dying. Because in the context of the interdependence, you've already died so many times. And kind of reappeared again, and I'm not being philosophical and kind of magical in this sense, like you died and then you reappeared in some way that's not understandable. I mean, in the way that it's *understandable*... we come and go, all the time. And we don't notice the role that we play in it.

[00:29:04] But we do. When we look... we can see it immediately... what it is we're doing. Like I'm sitting here doing it and having a relationship with dying and interdependence... by just being asked the question and then talking about it. So, I *can* just turn it totally into a *conceptual* exercise. Which actually... at the end of the conversation... is like some ashes... on the floor. Not anything of value. But instead... I'm having a relationship with you. We're talking about this thing. Other people are listening and we're having a conversation and I'm remembering... people who lived and died that I knew. And... somebody mentioned Milarepa. And so, then I think that's a great conversation with Milarepa. Milarepa was the *king*... of living and dying. It's like... no fear whatsoever. And at the end of his life, he died on his own terms. Not suicide. But just recognizing that... the circumstances that were all there... were leading to his death in a fairly short time, like hours, not weeks. And so, that story also is interesting.

[00:30:25] And I think many people who read that story think... I would like to die *that* way. You know, *present*... with it. I only get to see it once in *this* life... and so... why should I avoid it since it's inevitable? And since it's one of the *most* important, right alongside birth... [laughs] one of the most important aspects of life. Therefore, I would like to witness it. And... that's a good move to make, even if we *can't* witness it in the end, somehow... it's a *grand* aspiration to hold. I would like to witness my own death. I would like to, from the perspective of bodhicitta, witness my own death. And other people could witness it and may it remove their suffering from *them*. And... because somebody wasn't afraid of it. And many stories about Milarepa involve that aspect. That dying was kind of, as a miserable, inevitable event in life, Milarepa put that to rest... in many ways... like, that's not what it is. ... Well, that was kind of a useless ramble.

Student 5 [00:31:51] Well, just to go on just this experience I had a few days ago... when I really thought... *I* could really be dying here. It was very painful. It was....

LMC [00:32:02] Physically painful?

Student 5 [00:32:04] Oh, yeah! Yeah. And... I mean, I think, you know, I guess I'm going to die... peacefully. Be saying my mantras, you know, kind of fantasy thing. But I... I was really... I don't want to die like that, you know. But who knows how you're going to. But I was really afraid!

You know, not being able to breathe and everything starting to go black... and pain. Oh, my God. I'm going to mess up the evening for my children now. [laughs and others join in]

LMC [00:32:41] That's where we go. We miss the show... completely.

Student 5 [00:32:50] So anyway, I'm trying to think, oh, maybe it's a... I mean, it's a good thing that... I, at least I had some practice in that because who knows how.... And I, you know, the whole boundless view thing. I tried to talk to someone about that yesterday. And the look on, the look his face was... [laughs] You know, just okay. That's enough! But I really do believe that very much. I mean, Milarepa certainly had a great...

LMC [00:33:21] What is it you believe?

Student 5 [00:33:22] The boundless view that if this happens over and over and over again, I mean, my relationship with Milarepa... is so profound. You know, I've told you that story, right?

LMC [00:33:34] That's the, you know, that view is...

Student 5 [00:33:39] It's priceless.

LMC [00:33:40] It's precious. Yeah.

Student 5 [00:33:42] Okay. Well, thank you.

LMC [00:33:50] [looking at his watch] How are we're doing? It's tomorrow. Tomorrow. Okay. Anything else?

sangha [00:34:28] *dedicating the merit*