

2019_06_02_am3_QA_LMC.mp4

the benefits and preciousness of placing awareness on our experiences as they unfold, appreciating our intense situations for they give us opportunity to glimpse nature of mind itself, another's accomplishment inspires us to practice so that we too can impact others in positive way

LMC [00:01:06] So, I hold the assumption that everyone knows what we're doing. But... that could be not true. So, I'll just say that this is a period that we have regularly where... we have an hour to raise questions in a kind of general way so, we all hear each other. And so, the conversation can be managed and more spontaneous. And... so, if there's things on your mind or things you'd like to discuss or hear about, then you just raise them and we'll do it.

Student 1 [00:01:58] Contemplating what you spoke of, boundless interdependence. If one is, or if I am... because you mentioned thinking, everything you *think* as well, if one is thinking thoughts that are not... conducive to the well-being of... if I'm not nice... [laughter] what is the best way to actually drop them? And not just superficially, but... to change those thoughts, so you're actually putting out... helpful energies into the world rather than condemning a negative?

LMC [00:02:47] Yeah. So, the question is how to interrupt that?

Student 1 [00:02:58] Maybe even more than interrupt. Is there a way to actually transform it so... that negativity... is no longer? You not just, because interrupted sounds like stopping. But... I keep thinking there's some way transforming it into... compassion and true forgiveness. Where you realize the thing you thought happened, that was bad didn't even... like a true seeing of what's really going on.

LMC [00:03:34] Oh, that's a good one. [laughs] To actually see what's going on is a big deal. It's very hard. Especially in the midst of an emotional state, which is where we almost always are... at some level... and that's difficult to just put aside. Because we... generally... when we try that, we end up just doing something else. Like changing it a little bit somehow, but not actually really thoroughly dealing with it.

[00:04:15] One of the... best ways, I think is... and it's classic, is to... place one's awareness on that thought. So, if we have a negative thought about somebody, for example, rather than... beating ourselves up, like oh, I really shouldn't be doing this. So, I really want to do this thing over here. But by the time we get that far, we're already tangled... in the web of it. So... it's actually useful, when we do that, rather than thinking that I did something bad, it's actually more useful to look at it as the opportunity.

[00:04:57] So, the opportunity here is that you're having an experience. That's indisputable. In fact, it's indisputable in this moment and the moment before. It's always there. But we don't notice it. So, when we really get tangled in the web, then we notice it. But we don't notice it in the way that's helpful. What's helpful is... to place our awareness on that experience as it unfolds. Without trying to stop it. Without trying to elaborate it. Without trying to change it. The transformation of the experience? Forget it. The likelihood that we're able to do that, in a positive way, intentionally, is not great. So, better to place our awareness *on* the experience itself. Which is actually a form of meditation.

[00:05:54] In other words, it's okay! I can have all sorts of thoughts, negative and positive. And the degree to which I can just place my awareness on each one as it arises... is a positive thing. For myself... and for others who I interact with. Even if the interaction is negative, if I can just put my awareness on the thought... everything... slows down and even stops. And in addition to that, we have done something which is precious. Which we almost never do. Which is to put our awareness... on our experience. And when the experience is emotional, when it's driven by emotion, or what we call the kleshas, then... it's even more profound... to just rest your awareness on it. And if it stays a while, that's okay. But almost always, by the time you rest your awareness on it, it's gone. You're looking for where you're supposed to put your awareness now. I can't find what that thing was.

[00:07:08] So, it's okay. Then we also know, don't worry, it'll be back. [laughs] And that's just another opportunity... to... rest in that same place again. Without any judgment. Without any hope. We often say, like to be rid of hope and fear... is impossible, really completely, short of enlightenment... but it's... in a certain sense, we could say it's, it's what we want to do. We don't want to *banish* our experiences. Because that always ends up being a form of repression. And most of us who are over 30... [laughs] have had the experience of repression... turning sour. So, we don't want to do that! But just putting our awareness on the experience is such a neutral event. And yet, we have the experience, which is kind of an *intimate* experience with ourself... that we normally don't do... or even worse, we avoid it. So, *whatever* the experience is, it's always an opportunity to just relax. Place our awareness on the experience. And if the experience continues... even better. Even better.

[00:08:36] The whole world has that... thing. But they don't have the 'even better' because they're normally trying to change it. Normally trying to get even with somebody. Or to get liked or whatever. All of the things of confusion in our relationships that happen. So, the stillness of awareness on the experience of it is really very precious. More? You need more?

Student 1 [00:09:07] That's great. Thank you. Beautiful.

Student 2 [00:09:21] Thank you, Lama Michael. I was hoping that you could shed some light on an experience that I had in the context of exchanging self for other? That idea of practicing Tonglen and... in general how to practice with this experience that I had. Which was that I was sort of just going along walking. I was on a walk and I had an experience of this just very surprising and random aggression come toward me... suddenly. And it was momentary and it passed. But I found that I had trouble practicing with it on the spot. I just went into fear and protection right away. And then, I've been able to practice with it in various ways, after. Like within a few hours I was able to start... practicing with it. But, just in terms of, like on the spot, practicing with it, if you could shed some light... on how I might have done that on the spot. That would be helpful.

LMC [00:10:50] So, are we dealing with a conflict? Is that what it is, or what?

Student 2 [00:10:54] No... what happened was a person, in their car, slowed way down and just turned to me and I've never had anyone look at me this way. It was just this intense look of aggression and malevolence. Just like, and... it was really surprising. And I looked away and, you know, that was it. So, it was pretty subtle. But the energy of it really... was strong for me.

LMC [00:11:18] Yeah. ... Those things happen a lot.

Student 2 [00:11:33] Yeah, and I mean, you know, one of the things I became aware of pretty quickly is that I don't... experience that very often. Because I'm privileged, you know, because of my economic and racial privilege, partly, you know, and just became aware of like, oh, that doesn't happen to me very often. And I'm lucky, you know, because I know that that's... it's there at the next corner... very often for people, so.

LMC [00:12:05] I still find a sort of *fondness* for... those kinds of things, because... you cannot generate those things easily... without having that experience. And there's something... you know, we look for magic too much. Really. But we are surrounded by the possibility of it. We just don't recognize it. And what I mean by that is that... if I am... hot in anger... I would like... something magic to rid myself of that. And... it's very difficult to generate that anger. Short of having it by the circumstances. But... the antidote to it, of bringing our awareness and attention to the experience itself... is once we've done it, just a few times, we're clear about *how* you do it. The only issue is... the *will*... to actually bring our awareness to it. But... that's *always* what we want. Is to bring our awareness to our experience.

[00:13:53] And of course, the extremely positive ones are easy to rest our awareness on. But they're sort of also polluted by attachment to the experience. So, we want the experience to continue all the time. But the aversion to the negative ones are also polluted by the aversion. So, there's a kind of a middle place there, where the experience arises. We recognize it. And, if we're lucky, we don't have all sorts of obligations and competing things for our attention in that moment. And we can... just stop. And literally, intentionally, place our awareness on that experience. Just because... *it's my experience!* Nobody else has it. And the other thing I think that's helpful to carry is, is that you'll never have that experience again.

[00:14:56] This is, I think one of the most extraordinary teachings is that any experience... occurs only once. It never comes again. And many people can't relate to that. Like I'm angry today. I was angry yesterday. Yeah, but it's not the same angry. And you're not the same person as you were yesterday. So, there's all of these... changes that have happened. And because we're so quick to label it as... that's the same music I was listening to yesterday. But it's not! Even if it's a recording, there is a difference. And so... to hold this *view* that we carry that... whatever experience I'm having has never occurred before and will never occur again. So, in the text it says... it's always fresh. Which is another way to think about it.

[00:15:53] But it's, by thinking about it in that way, we have a certain sense that there's something positive about *any* experience because it never happened before and will never occur again. So, there's an opportunity passing... that I will either take advantage of or not. And the more intense that opportunity is, the more *useful* it is from the perspective of the Dharma, I think. In most instances, the more intense it is, the greater the opportunity. Like, I can embrace... my own anger or disappointment or whatever the emotional state is. I embrace it by putting my awareness on it. And if it gets hotter by doing that, then great. Nothing to avoid there. But even if we avoid it, that's another experience.

[00:16:49] So, there isn't anything... that we can't put our awareness on. And when we do that, we make all sorts of discoveries. And the more we do it... and when we try to do it, when we make an effort to do it... we could say, it's *always* successful. It may not last very long, but if it lasts at all, it was successful. And the next time, maybe... the experience will continue and we'll stay with it for a longer period of time. The more we can do that, the more we really have two things... which I think are really important.

[00:17:49] One is, because it's a very personal and very personally intimate thing to be very clear about our emotional states. Not conceptually at all, but... experientially, we *feel* it... completely. And so, we can have this sense of... that was really good! It kind of settles down and we have this sense of... I really... I did that! And there's something really good about that because we feel ready to do it again. Ready to do it again. And the more you do it, the closer you get... I don't have a phrase for this and I know there is one, but I can't remember it... it is approaching... the experience of the nature of mind itself. The more we're able to rest our awareness with *whatever* experience there is, that experience is always coming... out of the nature of mind itself. Without this kind of training and working at it, we don't recognize the nature of mind there with it. But in time, it's not just the positive or emotional experience. We actually then begin to get glimpses of the nature of mind itself. And that's a really precious. ... So, it's easy to encourage anyone to do that.

[00:19:28] So the other side of it, the second piece was that... when we do that, we free ourselves of the anxiety and a lot of the negative things that are part of that. Those things we have been carrying around... and in all of our relationships, the relationships are affected by... our kind of not so clean relationship with our own experiences. So, when we actually see them clearly... for a period of time, other people recognize something they may not have a word for, but it's positive. And it gives a sense of... potential and goodness about it. Like this person is not looking for something from me. And yet, when I'm around them, it feels like... things are good. It's kind of a starting point of... it feels like it's good. And the more then, that you're around that person... we've had this experience with friends and people, often elderly people... sometimes we feel like they're just open to whatever I am is okay. But it's because of letting go of things, often. And we can do that at *any* age, actually. And other people experience that. And so, there's... just like we experience it, they experience it. And so, by virtue of that, we see the fruit of the work we do on our own side, then becomes something that manifests in a larger environment. ... Does it make sense?

Student 3 [00:22:10] What if you can't find... the stillness?

LMC [00:22:16] What stillness? [laughter]

Student 3 [00:22:17] Well, you mentioned in response to [her] questions, just kind of something about some stillness... with your experience. Or letting your awareness on your experience. What if the experiences are coming so fast... like a waterfall... of experiences that just so fast and there's such momentum in them that you can't... even find the stillness of awareness to place, there?

LMC [00:22:51] Yup. That's a good question. I'm wondering whether there's any such thing as a *discreet* experience. Or maybe even the waterfall of experiences is one experience. I mean, I actually remember a time, maybe more than one... sitting under a waterfall. So, you could say... this is like... rather, there's no simple one experience. There's a whole bunch of them happening, right. But on the other hand... probably from my own side, it feels like *an* experience. It doesn't feel like hundreds of experiences. So, I'm not sure that working with that is different. A waterfall, of course, if it's not washing you away, feels kind of good on a... sunny day. But negative emotional states and trauma and all sorts of attachment and aversion, all those things *don't* feel good... when we recognize them.

[00:24:21] But recognition is really helpful. Just the recognition of the experience. I know that... you have a lot of tools to work with those things. And I don't think that this is in contradiction to

that. It's really just... something that I imagine would work in any situation. The ability to rest your awareness on *any* experience is... helpful. Whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. Whatever tools one might have in their training to work with any experience... to put your awareness on the experience does not negate that potential. It doesn't, I don't think, interfere with it. We get closer to it. ... Probably, in my experience, it feels more intense... when you put your awareness on a strong experience, it often gets stronger, gets more intense.

Student 3 [00:25:28] I think that the experience that I had is connected to someone who's very close to me who's dying right now. And I thought, oh, my gosh, this is what happens. Because normally I can lay my awareness on experiences, you know. *okay*, you know. But this felt so much more intense... than I've experienced before. And it gave me an experience of... you know, gasping kind of fear... in relation to it.

LMC [00:26:02] Yeah.

Student 3 [00:26:05] So, I suppose putting my awareness on that experience... of all of these images kind of tumbling, tumbling, tumbling... I could work with.

LMC [00:26:18] If you can... if you can work with it, I think it's, it's useful. But I'd be interested in your feedback on that. So, I think that generally... we start with... kind of a very simple experience. Like you sit down to do meditation and you find that your legs hurt. So, the legs hurt. That's an experience. So, rather than try to figure out what's going on and move into a conceptual state... to just put our awareness on the *experience* is helpful. And then gradually moving into things like emotional states. Attachment and aversion, all those things. Of course, we want to deal with those. But, you can't start with... the *big stuff* in the beginning... without getting swamped. ... What do you think?

Student 3 [00:27:28] I wondered, Lama Michael, if ...and this is my last follow up here... I wondered if there was something about that experience that I *will* meet when I am dying. And it left me with this idea that, oh, my gosh. I'm not... in a place where I can do *anything*... when I'm dying. Except for feel... that fear and helplessness. And I wonder if the antidote for that is just more and more practice. Not only on the cushion, but with my experiences. Will that, could that, result in... just a little bit more ability to have stillness... at that time of transition? I'd like to be able to do that for, of course, the person who's very close to me, who's dying. And I find that I can't! And that's a little disappointing for me.

LMC [00:28:41] Yeah, it's easy to talk about this. And not so easy when... you're either dying yourself... or somebody else is dying who you would like to... be a positive influence for them. ... So, we were talking earlier about... the effect of... I think we could say, the effect on ourselves from meditation. Like placing awareness on experience. The effect on ourselves is naturally reflected and communicated to others. So, I think where we see this in the biggest way is when we... meet someone who *actually* has extraordinary presence... with them. And you don't have to have known anything beforehand. You just are in their presence and you realize something extraordinary. But... that doesn't necessarily translate into our ability to do that. But I can say, in my own experience, having seen that sort of thing happen from time to time, it is an inspiration to do more of that for oneself. So that the next time that I'm with someone who's dying or that they're having some kind of a traumatic experience, I can be... a still pool of water instead of a waterfall. And on occasion, that bears fruit. And I think that if we did it more, it would bear more fruit.

[00:30:38] It bears fruit for *us*... individually when we do it, we recognize it. But it's a little more tenuous when we expect that, because *I* feel very calm about something, therefore someone else will feel it too. But we may also not recognize what is *likely* there, and that is that... it communicates. It just may not communicate as much as we want. But I'll guess... that the few people that I've known who give me that kind of situation where I feel, I can *feel* something about myself that I wouldn't normally recognize... that feels like, it's by virtue of... the connection with somebody that I'm sitting with or speaking with somehow. Then I think, oh I understand here what is going on is a small amount of what *could* be if I could put the time and effort and duration into practicing this. Then... it would be more powerful. And we know people... I mean, many of us know people who *have* done it for long enough such that their mere presence with you does communicate something that feels on the edge of extraordinary.

[00:32:19] That's another piece, of course, is that we would like to... resolve something by getting a skill. ... And there is a skill. But we would like to resolve it in a way where we can... definitely have an impact on others. But this thing is so subtle that it's not going to happen... in a big way in a short time. ... But you never know. You never know... caring about somebody and communicating that caring, intentionally or not, often carries a really big experience. I'll guess that you've had that experience, I mean it... it's not so rare to have that experience. It's rare to have gone deep enough into it where it communicates regularly with other people that we connect with. ... It's so thoroughly *not* in our ordinary way of being. Because in order for... that effort to put the awareness on experience... to actually bear deep fruit, it has to be utterly non-conceptual. And we're so used to conceptualizing everything, even when... we've had a non-conceptual experience... and we're maybe inspired by it a little bit, the first thing we do is we want to wrap it up in a nice conceptual box. Put it away in the drawer somewhere. And that doesn't bear much fruit. But staying with the non-conceptual, I think, is... personally, I feel like it's where the gold is.

Student 3 [00:34:25] Thank you.

[00:34:33] *omitted responses that weren't LMC teachings*

LMC [00:44:10] We can close here if there's nothing else. So, we will recite the dedication.

sangha [00:44:43] *dedicating the merit*

LMC [00:45:36] Thank you all for coming. Nice.