

profoundly useful to train in seeing as fresh vs usual way we re-cognize, even being curious about our death

LMC [00:00:51] So this is our chance to raise objections and other commentaries. So there is a microphone going around, if you're not familiar with it, it's good to use the microphone, otherwise we can only see your lips moving. And sometimes that's better, [laughter] but usually not.

student 1 [00:01:35] Your instruction of sitting... and working with experience and the freshness and the nature of mind. So at a certain point, I wasn't meditating. I was contemplating. And what I was noodling on was I have some experience, not stable, but some experience of the nature of mind being... it's just display. And then I've heard it taught that the nature of mind and the nature of *all* phenomena is the same. And then I realized that was a stumbling block for me. Because I get a little sense of the nature of mind being display. But because of collective agreement... like this microphone amplifies sound. This floor holds us up. Conceptually I understand... it's display. But experientially... no, I don't. So that's the state, and if you have any comments, I'd love it.

LMC [00:03:23] Oh, the state of... yeah. Not everything that we've been talking about fits into a Buddhist thing, you know? It's my rebel mentality. [laughs] But I think that... we sometimes recognize things which are, really, for want of a better word, the truth. We kind of recognize them. And if we say that's the truth, we've basically lost what it was we were just working with. But it's almost inevitable. Because we're so trained... to name it. And we're so trained that when we hear the name, and somebody else says *that's* the name, we really think that we got it. But the name, it's kind of like our names. Also, we tend to think *I am* and we say our name. And...we know that's not true. But there is a truth that happens when you recognize your own name. Which is just the truth that that is *the* name. But the name is not you. And that when we confuse that, then we're really in trouble.

[00:05:16] But mostly we don't confuse that conceptual thing. But getting out of the *gross* level of the conceptual thing where we can see what the issue is, we then try to get into the subtle thing, which I tend to think of living with one's self. ... We have to live with ourselves in the largest context. And in that context, we can have all of the insights and all of the foolishness and everything that happens in that context. But... it's also the case that we need to recognize what it is that that we're seeing. And recognize it as the first time that we've seen it.

[00:06:14] So this, I think, is a really important thing. Is that we tend to *re-cognize*, right? Like, once again, I have this experience. And *that* is an enormous pitfall. Once again, I'm having the experience of I don't like you. Or I like you. Or I like that color. Once again. You know, the Dorje Chang Thung-ma Prayer. At the very end, the named meditator refers to himself... at a moment when he's putting into words the experience that he just had. Which was that every thought that comes to mind... the translation usually is, fresh. What it really means is... it's never been there before. No matter how many times you've said I'm hungry, it's not the same hunger. Ever. No matter how many times somebody refers to you in whatever way... your name or just anything, it is a profoundly useful practice to hold the view that I have never experienced that before.

[00:07:50] And that is, if we look at it very long at all, we see *that* is the truth. Now, what I really wish is that I could actually have that experience... *of* the experience. In other words, witness the experience unfolding. And have the clear understanding, not in a conceptual way, the clear

understanding that I have *never* had that experience before. And no matter how many times I've seen you, I have never seen *you* before. That is an extremely helpful... entry into our practice.

[00:08:32] I can't speak for other cultures. I suspect that the Tibetans have the same pitfall. I don't think that it's a cultural thing particularly. I think it's just... a human thing. Like we *want* to have the experience again. It *confirms* to us something. But it also leaves something out that we *would* have really appreciated. So it's like the person who hears the same tune. I wish I could get rid of this melody. It's been like... I used to like it and now I hate it. I wish I could get rid of it. And the next time you hear it, you think there it is again. Conceptually, we can understand that actually it's not the same. Even if it's a recording in a high-quality digital environment, it is, theoretically at least, not the same.

[00:09:43] And what we want to do really from a meditative standpoint, is watch the plethora of unbounded experiences and images and things coming right out of the nature of mind. That's the most precious thing that we have. And yet, we still pick and choose. [laughs] I wish I could not have that. Oh we have got to have that. Now I'm angry all day. I wish I could get rid of the anger. Why not just have it? Why not just enjoy the uniqueness of the experience that just arose? It's not going to occur again, ever. I think that's a piece also that we blow off. Like I want to get rid of this anger. I want to get rid of this... whatever it is. Oh, I'm feeling joyful. Why don't you get rid of that? So, why are we so compelled to name things? Like, oh, now I remember. You're the person I don't like. [laughter] You know, that kind of thing.

[00:10:53] We do that stuff. And yet the... opportunity to have an experience, even for, if I may speak so, even for having seen somebody that you just had a really horrific argument with and then you had this sense of.... there's that... lousy person. Which they may be... a lousy person. But you have never met them before. And that changes the whole formula. It is very difficult to hold that view and yet deeply embedded... in all of the levels of Buddhism, including the vajrayana... there is this thing of... *there is no such thing* of repeating something. It never occurs. And that is why we say in the Dorje Change Thung-ma... every experience I have is fresh. It is really pointing at that. Like no matter what you think, it never happened before. I think that as Americans, as this culture, we have a very difficult time with that.

[00:12:19] How can you tell me that? I just had that experience with so-and-so. So, in that context, we have just taken a communication and experience which is rich in a certain way, and we have relegated it to the trash can because it kind of had the shadow of appearance of something that just happened. And we're writing off the nature of mind itself as being ubiquitous in all experiences. So I think it's an issue of what we sometimes call the view. You hold the view that no experience that you have has ever occurred before and it will never occur again, whatever has just happened.

[00:13:09] I mean, I can say, boo! And you have an experience. But... you can say, well, that's the boo you just said a little while ago. It's harmless in one way, but we lose something out of it when it becomes a habitual pattern. And we don't even recognize that the pattern *itself* is not repeating itself. We're just kind of winding up the music box that the monkey turns. We are the monkey *and* the music. So we lose that thing. And I think it's a valuable thing to look at inside or outside of our meditation practice.

[00:13:55] But in the context of meditation, we really double-cross ourselves when we say I've had that experience again. We label it. Aha, that's it! We don't give it a second thought and we move on. So to hold the view that there's no such thing as a repeating experience is really

important. And it's in *accordance* with the highest understandings of the nature of mind itself. It never reproduces itself. We all understand that. You do retreats, long retreat, short retreats. You read the commentaries on it. You will never find anything that says the mind repeats itself. If you just wait long enough... it never comes back. And so because we don't understand that, we end up saying that's why I don't like that person. We end up doing stuff like that.

student 1 [00:15:03] Thank you.

LMC [00:15:05] You are very welcome... once again [laughter] Okay.

student 2 [00:15:16] Lama Michael. The only way I can wrap my head around that is to think, okay, so this is happening, but the causes and conditions behind this happening are totally different. My surroundings are totally different. There's different people around me. Everything's different. Everything has changed. So is that... logical? I mean, my thinking about that correctly?

LMC [00:15:38] The thinking about it is the correct view. The thinking about it, right? It's so easy to experiment with that also. The Dorje Chang Thung-ma, for those of you who haven't studied this, it's a brilliant little piece of poetry, actually. It's being spoken by a meditator who has not attained great realization but has attained... pretty good realization. And yet is also not apologizing or trying to undermine. Which is to say... oh, I don't really understand anything. He's trying to get *clear*. Like this is what it appears to me. And this one over here is not so clear to me. And so you kind of get this kind of confession kind of thing going on. It's really quite nice to ponder it.

[00:16:51] But my favorite, hands down, is... when he says everything is fresh. And when we look at it and when people who can speak Tibetan will say... what it really means is... you can call it fresh if you want, that is kind of a judgment in the fresh... implied maybe. But, just the truth is whatever experience you're having now, you've never had before. And one of the important things is, is that... in our daily work, in this culture, we have to remember tons of stuff. You get a job. You got to remember, like, what are you supposed to do and when do you have to show up in the morning and what do you have to eat for breakfast to feel good for the day? There's just endless things that we have to remember. And so, when you sit down to meditate, the single most important thing is... don't remember.

[00:17:50] Don't remember all that stuff. We want to be present 100 percent... with ourselves! Because that's where we learn... who we are and what we are and what this is, is when we live with ourselves. Not with someone else... thinking about it, fantasize. We're living with ourselves. There is no other place where you can get it. There is no other school that you can go to [laughs] you know. And it's really important to recognize that. And to recognize the importance of... when I have an experience, plain, dull or exciting, painful, joyous... it comes in the moment. And it's never been here before and never *will* appear again.

[00:18:44] It's like there's something mixed in there that is an antidote to real meditation and realization when we think... that same music goes over and over and over. When we think about it conceptually, we pretty quickly know, no, that's not true. You're saying you heard the same thing today that you heard yesterday? It's only kind of like... in name, it's the same. We can name the tune, kind of. But it is not the same as recognizing the experience as utterly unique. That's where we kind of have to train ourselves. In our practice, we have the opportunity every time an experience arises, we treat it as absolutely unique. It's very helpful. ... Let's argue about it. [laughs] [to another] You're going to take that up? That's good. [laughter]

student 3 [00:19:58] So unless that's my experience... that every experience is original, unique... unless that's my experience, I'm just telling myself a story, right? I'm saying, oh, here's this experience that feels like an experience I had before, but I'm going to tell myself that it's not. And I'm going to try to fit my experience into this concept that it's not the same? So then when I'm in the concept place, like this cough is a different cough, right? If I'm in the concept place, then I can go to okay, now I don't have to be responsible for the cough. Because it just disappears. It just dissolves. And maybe that is an experience to be had and to be realized. But unless I've got that experience, it just feels like more conceptual thinking about experience. I've never been able to grok with it. And I've never been able to... I mean, you've explained it to me and I've asked you about it before. And I really get that...

LMC [00:21:21] You've never asked that. I'm sure! [lots of laughter] And we've had many interviews. And you've never asked that! [said with huge smile]

student 3 [00:21:29] There was some help that said... you get to respond to every experience as though it's fresh and new. And I love that. And that seemed helpful, right. To be able to respond as though it's fresh and new and to be able to let go of a story that things are chronological. They're building, they're the same. There's this narrative. I think it's about letting go of that for me. More than it's about holding on to something else.

LMC [00:22:06] It's very difficult. I will confess. It's very difficult. We have kind of a need to organize and get things into the right slots and all. And so that's, that's a piece of the puzzle. ... There's nothing wrong with labeling and categorizing and, you know, kind of organizing so that we can remember what it was that we experienced. There's nothing wrong with that. ... But the remembering is something you learned... in the past. It is not in the present. And therein lies the real rub. We mostly... *do* live... in the past. As I get to walk out of here and walk home, I don't think to myself... whoa, the environment's totally brand new. I wonder where I'll go. [laughter] And so, I just start walking aimlessly. But aside from *that* kind of thing... one of the really big obstacles we have from the perspective of... I hate using the phrase, but I'll use it anyway, *spiritual development*, I think is that the *only* thing that is really valuable in that endeavor... is that it utterly *is* not something that is reoccurring. It is something that is by nature never seen before.

[00:24:22] When our mind... releases one of its little bombs, you know, and we don't recognize it for what it is... instead, we think, oh, that's... my troubled mind is having that thing there. So we reach into our bag, we pull out the label and we say, that's it! But it's a dead flower, it's not actually the thing. We are recalling something that happened in the past. And the majority of our effort to accomplish some kind of spiritual realization, generally speaking, it is seriously compromised for a very long time by virtue of how smart we are.

[00:25:16] And I don't mean that facetiously. I mean, we are smart. And we manipulate concepts easily. We're facile with it, all kinds. And the language is rich in things, in technology and so many things. And we reward ourselves for accomplishing those things and being able to talk about them well and write a book about it, and a commentary, all those things. But they do not get us one... inch... in the direction of genuine insight in development. Not about our general psychology of it, though, that could play into it too. But rather that I think we also compromised that... by virtue of taking what we learned in the past and applying it to something brand new in the present.

[00:26:19] I mean, when I'm looking, I can catch myself, do that many times a minute. What to speak of in a day? You know, it's like I can walk out the door and see somebody and we say hello. And we... you know, it's like we know each other. Oh, you're so-and-so. And with that comes a whole dossier on that person, you know. I know who you are. You know, it's like I don't want to see you or I want to see you or everything comes flooding in. And... in a social context, that has its ramifications, pleasant or not pleasant. In a *spiritual* context... it's just fatal. It just does not work. We are looking for the thing about ourselves that is perpetually brand new. In other words, that *thing* is not there.

[00:27:16] The nature of mind, Kalu Rinpoche's line, it produces experiences from before we're born and long after we're gone. It just keeps doing that continuously. And while that's a difficult thing for conceptual people to grasp at... it also, when we look at it for a while and we just hold that view, *what if...* I've never seen this microphone before? The first thing I'll do is look at and say that looks like the microphone I was using. That's not bad. That's a good start, you know. But... then, if [he] says, Ha, I got you! We replaced that microphone yesterday, you know. So, suddenly I hold the view! ... It pops up, it's not the same microphone. And I just believe that that's what it was and maybe it really was and maybe it wasn't.

[00:28:24] But imagine this... that you have really worked with this thing. Like you made it, in the vernacular that we use, we made it our main practice. To... hold the view... that I never have had and never will have the same experience twice. And you carry it with you all the time. Instead of carrying the thing of always finding what is similar to what I had before, make a path, just as an experiment, that everything like...this is not the same table that's been here for 20 years. Come on. Wood deteriorates. Things happen. It's a different color than it was. Somebody could have actually made the table separate. Could really be. The point is that... how does your life look different... when you walk around and you meet people and you do things and you're *not* comparing and digging into the label bag to say what it is. It's fresh.

[00:29:29] As soon as you say it's fresh, it's already almost old. It's definitely, when I say this, and I think this actually profound stuff... then when I say it here, and when we talk about it, I start realizing like it was profound. [laughs] Now... it's in the rearview mirror. And as soon as I look again, it's not even there. Then I wonder to myself, huh, what am I losing? What am I gaining? I know that what I'm really interested in is the stuff that I don't yet experience. That's what I really am interested in. And the tune, that bugs me... I would love to have the experience of hearing it again right now and have the experience of actually, that is not the tune. I see the differences in it. That's what I *like* to have, and sometimes I get it!

[00:30:35] It's difficult. It's difficult. And it's difficult, largely because, from the time that we were in kindergarten and elementary school, we are learning how to remember things. And there's nothing wrong with that. Nobody's going to say you shouldn't remember anything. But it would be nice if we also had the skill of putting the past aside so that we had the space to have the new. And the truth is, it's a curse... either way. Because we are not good at recognizing things as fresh. We're *far* better at recognizing what we haven't experienced before as new. Even when it was new all along. [laughs]

[00:31:26] So I think that's the meditation practice is. And it's in many texts, in many places. You want to sit down to practice as if you had never sat down to practice before. And I got to say, for decades, I could not see what that meant. What are they talking about? So I sit down, but I see is like, what I immediately get, is numerous experiences that I've had many times. Like... I can't

settle my mind. That's one of the big ones. I can't do this! So I'm going to go to a movie. Or I'm going to go out to lunch... or something.

[00:32:09] It's really helpful... to supplant that... with something... like the monk in the Dorje Change Thung-ma. He's not saying that nothing ever happened before. Or that I never had any experiences before. He's just saying that there's no such thing as having the same experience over and over. And every one of us could agree with that in a kind of objective understanding of things. Of course not. You know, I drink, I drink some milk out of a carton this morning and then later on somebody says, is there any more milk? No, I finished it. Finished what? The milk I was drinking. Then, if you can train yourself to start asking the question, what are you talking about? This is a bigger thing. We are so used to living in this little kind of beehive of five people or five minds or something, when in fact we need to open that thing up.

[00:33:20] And that's what our entire spiritual path is about, is to open that thing up. But we still get into the thing like I studied this thing and I know what this is. In that moment, it's helpful to recognize... clearly, that's what I thought. That's what I thought. And that's what I relied upon. But it actually is *not*... the profundity that I want. That I yearn for. I want to see the depth of it. You know, I can walk through a mud puddle any time and get my feet wet. But what I really like to do is fall out of the sky, into the ocean. ... But I keep putting barriers in front.

student 3 [00:34:13] Thank you, Lama Michael. It seems like what you're offering to us is a skillful means to hold the view. To work with the View.

LMC [00:34:27] Yes! Yeah, I think that, I think that view is a skillful means. I remember on long retreat... the Lama who was conducting it was giving us a three-day teaching on the Dorje Chang Thung-ma. And the one that he came to as the most profound was that fourth one of... I don't ever have an experience twice. And so he said, speaking personally from his own side, that he thought that it was a remarkable thing to do to just carry that view. Carry that view every time that you *think* you've had it before. Every time you think that you've eaten spaghetti before... you would never say I ate that spaghetti already and now I'm eating it again. And yet we *do* that with all of our experience and our mental stuff. We just totally mesh the stuff up. To sit down and meditate and have a radically different experience than what we usually have... should be a joyful occasion. But mostly what happens is we feel like, I don't know if I can do this.

student 4 [00:36:01] So I have a thought around that... that maybe has some value and maybe doesn't, and you may be able to help with that. But many, many, many years ago, when I was first trying to learn to meditate and was actively trying to do this, I was doing a very mundane but icky task. I was cleaning the cat box. And it was particularly icky that day. And all of a sudden, I realized that I was like *really* experiencing it *in* the moment and I wasn't doing anything else. And I never had seen the cat box like that before. And I just burst out laughing. Because it was like, of all the things to really feel like I'm present for, it was this! But I've kind of found that to be... maybe not cleaning the cat box, but similar, not the same, experiences when they're kind of the *icky* experience is sometimes when I felt like, even though I thought that I've had this experience before, it's like, well, not really! But it's just that you're so present with it, even though you don't like it. It's just that it was... funny and disgusting. Yeah.

LMC [00:37:26] So it's hard to remind yourself that you've never smelled that before, that sort of thing?

student 4 [00:37:32] In a way.

LMC [00:37:37] Yeah. So, Lama Tsang Tsing at the retreat, he said it's good to carry that view around of..... no experience that we have has been had. It's never and again... ever. It's always brand new. And he spent a number of days going over it. And with so many examples that it was just totally compelling at a certain point. And, I can remember, like wanting to have the experience of... every last experience that I had was fresh. Like I never had it before. And there was a part of me that thought, are you sure you want that? [laughter] Because... it was beginning to sound a little bit like... I'm just not sure that there's an insane asylum large enough to handle me. If that were to become true. But actually, of course, we tend to think about it in terms of our own experience. And for most of us, the fact that I *can* walk out of here and find my house... is comforting. [laughs] And so the idea that I would walk out and *not* be able to find the house. Or go somewhere and eat something that normally sits well with me, and instead I end up vomiting for three hours. And nothing ever works because... everything is fresh. So basically, you've become a complete lunatic.

[00:39:29] But I think that's just the way we *think* about it. We can't quite imagine... what it looks like when the experiences are fresh. *Actually* fresh! Because when I walk out and can't find the car, which we've all done from time to time, and there's a certain amount of anxiety around it if you don't get it pretty quick. And yet we're having the experience that is slightly exhilarating, like, oh my God, somebody stole my car. There's a certain kind of excitement in that. [laughter] And because of the way that we work with those things, it very quickly turns into a kind of tragic thing. But I think, also from the high perspective, when we think about things like death and dying... to have a kind of sense that these experiences, again Kalu Rinpoche phrase, continuously unfold before and after death. Like there is no barrier to it in either direction.

[00:40:44] That is, I think, one of the single largest thing in the entire Buddhist tradition, which makes it possible to be kind of intelligently *curious* about dying. Because it is neither a starting point nor an ending point. Which is, from our cultural standpoint, completely that's what it is. You know, here you were. You were conceived and born and everything, so that's your starting point. And when you die, that's your end point. And by the way, is mixed up with terrible sicknesses and all that stuff. So, difficult to handle. If that's really the end, then we got a problem. But if it's just moving on and you've worked with all of that stuff up to that point, I think then... you get the stories that we get from the Tibetans that it's not a tragic event. It's just another thing that happens.

[00:41:47] So I think, holding the view has, for most of my life since hearing about it, felt like *holding the view* in this particular incidence and in numerous other incidences, the view is the way in which we familiarize ourselves with the truth before we actually see it. It's kind of like training ourselves to catch it, you know? Oh, I see what's going on.

[00:42:19] Like, you get really sick, you know, you're in the hospital for a month. And you feel like, I could die from this. And so you start to get worried about that. And then it comes along that, yeah, you could die. And you start working with the view and the views around that. You can come to the place of, you know, now is as good as any time. And that probably saves your life. [laughs] Isn't it? I mean... I've always had the sense that we kill ourselves in the very end. We don't actually expire late, or on time. We actually get in there, and generally speaking, make it happen faster. And more miserable. Because of all the attachments and the aversions and all the stuff with it.

[00:43:17] So to have the sense of... I've never met you before. I've never done this before. I've never had this experience before. Yeah, I understand. I've had Campbell's tomato soup before, but it came out of a different can. It was five years older than the one that I had. And when I taste it and put them right together, I can say, yeah, they're a little bit different. But I just drop it right away and go with *yesterday*. And carry that forward. It's important, I think, to have the sense that... everything is absolutely fresh when it comes to experience.

[00:44:08] Well. Have we crossed the line? Oh yeah. Okay, let's, uh, dedicate the merit before we lose it.

sangha [00:44:31] *dedicating the merit*