

*working with the totality of experiences and the importance of view that each experience is fresh, more detail on this form of shamatha without discrimination*

LMC [00:01:29] If you sit down to practice the calm abiding meditation... in its usual form where we place our awareness on an imaginary object or an actual object in front of us, then you understand what that looks like. So the suggestion this morning is, instead of when you sit down placing your awareness on a specific object... the object in this case would be literally the totality of your experience in that moment as it is unfolding. Of course, if you pay attention, you feel things throughout your body. There are a myriad of things, of course, going on with our bodies and so experiences are arising continuously. And our *inclination* is to be kind of magnetized by certain experiences. And then we ignore the other ones. That is *not* helpful.

[00:03:23] What you need to do in this case is... as best as you can, and you can develop your ability to *do* it, and I think it can be helpful to start from the simple perspective that I have never done this meditation before. And, of course, it's *true* that you've never done it before. In fact, you've never been in this room before. Probably most of you don't know that. But you have never *been* in this room before, for at least two good reasons. One is, this room is not the same as the room that you were in before. You didn't *recognize* what was different because it was subtle. And so then we tell ourselves, I've been in that room before. Now I'm going in that room again. And, we leave out the single most important piece which is, that what were about to do we've never done before. And so we are already engaging in an investigation of the past.

[00:04:41] We are not moving into the future. We are trying to get back into the past. Whereas, from the meditation perspective, we're trying to get to another place. Not yesterday but today. Because today never occurred before and will never occur again. And that, kind of like as a little sleight of hand, whether it's made overt or subtle, is critical to mastering the meditation. That's of *any* meditation, not just what we're doing today. Like, to come to the meditation with a sense of *never having done this before*. And, at the end of it having a sense of 'never having done that before' is of great importance. And little by little, when you do that, you understand that even conceptually, this is not the same room. I am not the same person. Things have occurred since this thing and that thing have happened. And those things never have occurred exactly like that before. So we're just taking that and establishing what we call a view. And, the view is that, there is *no* experience that we have which is not fresh. The *only* issue is that, do you see it as fresh? Or, do you immediately name it something that happened last week or another time as if that were the same thing that we're doing now.

[00:06:23] So let's take a few moments and I'll say a few things and we'll try and move into this. ... So, after you have recited the refuge prayer and even before the refuge prayer, if you can start from the perspective of reminding yourself that there is no experience that you have which is not fresh. They are all fresh. So that when you sit down you kind of remind yourself that this is not something that I've done before. So, it's not about becoming an expert to something, but actually becoming a professional beginner every time that you sit down to meditate.

[00:07:47] While sitting in this way, do your best to allow your awareness to completely encompass all of the experiences that you're having; the ones that are coming and going, whatever they are. ... The example that I like to use is that, when I was young, I used to have aquariums in my bedroom, which was a garage. And I would sit in front of those aquariums which had 100's of fish in each one, and watch them. And it's interesting, I never paid attention

to *any* of those individual fish. I was just drawn to the movement of those animals. So I think this is kind of like that. Though we're not talking about many different things, but we're definitely talking about many different experiences which occur all the time. And so we want to remain aware of all of them. And become more sensitive to all of the experiences. Whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, is not relevant. So let's take 10 minutes.

[00:09:28] *short period of meditation*

[00:14:07] When you find yourself distracted in this meditation, then just take a moment, let go of all of the meditation and begin fresh. So, the beginning fresh is particularly important when you are placing your awareness on the totality of your experience. Of course, every time you begin anyway, it's fresh. But... in this case, it takes a little bit more of allowing your awareness to... kind of grow to a larger size, in a certain sense, where you can have a more complete sense of what your experiences are in that moment. So, it can be helpful to just... stop for a moment and allow your *awareness* to kind of gather in, immediately and instantly, all of the experiences that you are having. And then just hold that state for a few moments or a few minutes... and then let go of it. And, in *the letting go of it* you may also find that there are more experiences arising in *that* moment connected with the letting go of it. All of that is useful and helpful. And then you can stop for a moment, as you can anyway from regular meditation, and then, begin again fresh. Just... pressing your awareness into all corners of your experience. And then again, stay with that for a while and repeat.

[00:16:19] *period of meditation*

[00:22:28] Okay I think that's enough for that shamatha practice this morning. And if you want to just stretch a bit, we'll start our open conversation Q&A

[*break*]

Student 1 [00:24:32] Good morning. When you were describing taking a *break* from the meditation when you were distracted, you talked about gathering in your experiences. I just want to understand what that means. What is that exactly, or how does that work?

LMC [00:24:57] That's a sloppy way of saying, you know, [laughs] in other words, gather your awareness of the experiences that are there. So tha... instead of separating out specific experiences, you can bring your awareness to the entire thing. Which is so different from our normal way of approaching these things. And it *can* provide you with a sense of... greater ease in paying attention to *something*. Like in shamatha, it's often difficult to rest your awareness easily. But if you get in the habit of investigating *everything* at once, it actually works a little better. Because you don't need to be in control of what all is there, because that's not going to be stable anyway. So your experiences change continuously... because of who we are. It's like we pretty much have to, if we're really going to work with it, I think we pretty much have to be able to rest our awareness on all of that at once. So that it's not the machine that we're working on. Every time that we work on it, it's brand new. ... Okay?

Student 2 [00:26:52] In examining bringing some awareness to various types of kleshas that we might call aversion, attraction, ignorance... I've noticed over time that say, attraction is really just an aversion to not acting on desire. And, similarly ignorance is just... fundamentally all three, if you were to classify the motor behind it, is just not being present in the way that you said. It's just this impulse or this restlessness to not... just sit there and *allow* this stuff to pass through.

And fundamentally, essentially none of it feels really... when you step back from what we might call ignorance or attraction or aversion...I don't really see much of a difference.

LMC [00:28:06] Between?

Student 2 - Correct.

LMC - Between what?

Student 2 [00:28:12] Between what we would call like ignorance. Like, okay, I feel neutral toward this thing. So when I look at, well, if I'm sitting there with 'what is neutral' it's really just a way to not be present with that thing. It's a way to concretize something, disregard. Similarly, attraction, it's a way to get caught up in a strong emotion, an aversion to not acting on desire, or whatever it might be. And just sort of go with the thought and not sort of sit there and just allow this thing to arise or subside. And similarly, aggression, there's some big energy. It blows through and whether you call it aggression, attraction, or aversion, fundamentally, more and more, fundamentally it feels to me just the same thing. Something is there... in the present. And rather than just sit with it and abide, like calm abiding, there is this need to be entertained or to seize upon something. And then looking at that need, and I guess I'm just sort of saying, like where is the next thing to do then? To just say, let's just be here with that need to put it in a box as neutral, put it in a box as attractive... how to work with that?

LMC [00:29:49] Well, what you are saying is very important, I think. So, I don't want to write it off simply. ... The point actually, is not to make anything out of it, not to characterize it in any way. So, we're not looking to conceptually understand this thing. We're looking to understand something experientially. And ideally, completely experientially with no conceptual overlay at all. Which is not to say that conceptualization is an enemy. It's useful for so many things, as we were talking earlier. But what's also useful is to be able to put the tool down. And have the experience and not talk to yourself about it and not name it. Naming it is really a big deal. I don't think it's peculiar to our culture that we often name things and check it off the list. Like, "I know what that is", check. But actually, we don't know what it is. We just named it. But the name is not the thing. I can say, "oh I'm having a really clear meditation", but that is *not* the clear meditation, right? I just named it "the clear meditation", but not the meditation. It never is. It's like you say, somebody, you call them by their name. But in that case, we're often so accustomed to it, that we talk as if the name *is* the person. And maybe that's not so harmful in terms of ordinary person-to-person parlance, but when it comes to the meditation practice, naming the various experiences that occur is actually a defect in the practice. ... Does that make sense? It's not really supposed to, but [laughter] I'm glad you got it. ... Is that okay?

Student 3 [00:32:58] To follow-up on that, there was a teaching that I scribbled on a piece of paper. It was just one sentence, that I'm thinking this is what you mean but please clarify. "Attend to the very essence of experience before the mind makes the slightest discrimination." Is that accurate?

LMC [00:33:47] Yes... and was there something more?

Student 3 [00:33:50] No, I just wanted to make sure that I understood the teachings so far this morning.

LMC ~ [00:33:59] Yes that's fine. I mean even the confusion that arises during the practice is totally okay! So if I'm sitting carefully and making my best effort to rest my awareness on the totality of my experiences that are occurring, and if one of them is, I find myself saying *to* myself, "This is really confusing", there is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing that needs to be done with that. That is the experience that is occurring. But some of the experiences may be... the kind of things that trigger emotional response. Then we find ourselves *unable* to avoid engaging at another level. But that other level is just another experience also. So *ideally*, this is not really different from most of our shamatha practice. It's really just some effort to provide a more clear path to engaging in shamatha *without* discrimination. ... You're just staying with whatever arises, whatever occurs and not filtering. Like well, I'll rest my awareness on *this* experience. Inherently we're deciding to not do it with something else and that's a defect in the practice.

Student 3 [00:35:50] Thank you that's a little clearer.

*Sangha [00:36:00] dedicating the merit*