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**Carrying Practice:** train by resting awareness on all experiences before difficult ones arise, distinction of anxiety as living in future and depression as living in past and antidote of placing awareness on experience of now, included fish tank practice

Student 1 [00:01:39] I've been realizing lately that anxiety is the water that I swim in. Don't usually notice it because it's pervasive. And then I started contemplating that... I don't have chronic pain, but maybe like somebody who has chronic pain, they have to learn how to manage it, how to live with it. And so I'm wondering, okay, I need to learn how to live with chronic anxiety. And then it was, what's the cause of anxiety? It's probably a no brainer to many people, but what popped up was, oh, ego clinging. And anyway, just wondering if this is how you would imagine a source of anxiety, the causes of anxiety, the foundational cause of anxiety being ego clinging. And then it's like, well, could you give me some tips on working with that... ego clinging?

LMC [00:02:53] Oh, yeah. The big one. [laughs]

Student 1 [00:03:01] Yeah, the one who hides behind every curtain. Can you pull the mike closer to your face? Thank you.

LMC [00:03:14] How's that? Did that help your anxiety? [laughter]

Student 1 Helped on the easy question, what about the big one?

LMC [00:03:56] Well, I think that we could talk *around* that situation because it's universal. Well, it's universal for *us* anyway, because we have these things that we call ego-clinging and other things. And those formulas are meant to be helpful, but it's not necessarily my experience that they are. In other words, if you *have* anxiety... and you might be feeling like you're engaged in your meditation practice and you *should* be free of the anxiety. And of course, it *isn't* like that. And so it can become a problem in our meditation practice. Because it feels like after a decade or more of practice, we should be free of anxiety. We can have that sense that we should be free of it. And we can *actually* feel like there is *more* of it because it can feel like not only is it not less, now I have the anxiety of it feels like the meditation didn't work. And so it just is a problem. So do you see what I'm saying?

Student 1 [00:05:34] Well, actually, as you've been working with us more and more about meditating, shamatha with our experience, it's I get to see the water. I'm swimming in, the anxiety. And so I'm not anxious about that. Because it's like anger. It's like, oh, well, there it is. [laughs] But so now that I'm recognizing it and not adding the anxiety about having anxiety, it's... looking at the underlying cause and then working on that. And that's why I was getting to the ego-clinging.

LMC - What's the underlying cause?

Student 1 - I'm guessing that the cause of anxiety is that, well, I have hopes and fears to protect my ego, to protect *me*. ... And I've heard this thing about, well, if I didn't *worry* about protecting me, then there's no problem. But I'm not there.

LMC [00:06:58] Yeah, it's actually not helpful to *invoke* the ultimate stance, you know, [laughs] like that's a self-betrayal in a certain way. So it needs to be worked with in its own space. And its own space is almost, without exception, experience. We always get back to that. If we *don't* get back to that, we probably skipped off into the conceptual and just abandoned the actual work. ... I think there's a number of directions that we *could* take with it. One of them that is my own personal favorite *is...* that I work on the difficult things. And if I find myself disappointed or anxious, as you're saying, then I find it useful to just say, okay, I'll be anxious.

[00:08:22] Like many times in a day, I find myself saying I'm disappointed or I'm interested, I'm *excited* or whatever it is, and then whatever it is, it's okay. That's just what it is. We're just going to do *that*. If it's disappointment and disappointment. *Be* disappointed. I mean, I found it useful to actually *intentionally be* disappointed. Which is sometimes useful, because if I make it into a how disappointed can I get? I find that I can't actually *go* that far before I find myself laughing at it. Yeah. And then I feel like I betrayed myself, which of course is more laughter.

[00:09:18] Sometimes we're looking for the cure in the wrong place. Or we are looking for a cure when there's no cure that's necessary. And so by virtue of feeling like we've failed at it because the cure happened when we weren't looking. And then we feel like somehow, we didn't do it. Something didn't work. There's a confusion. We're brilliant at this! When there isn't any problem, we can make one.

And I'm not saying there *isn't* one. We're always having experiences. And the vast majority of them, for *most* of us, we don't pay any attention to it all. And *that's* a problem! As if I were asleep. It doesn't help us to be asleep. So I think, the value of paying attention to our experiences, is not that we should pay a *special* attention to experiences that are difficult so we can fix them. But rather, that just *paying attention* to our experiences is helpful when we need it. Rather than waiting until we need it and then thinking, well, I'll sit down and I'll put my awareness on this lousy experience. It's better if we're just doing it all the time. Day and night, in our sleep too. We really don't pay attention to it. Generally speaking, we're just asleep on *all* of the experiences. We're not paying attention to them. And some of the best ones are the ones that we normally don't pay attention to. But they're best, partly because they're neutral. So we can put our attention on it, put our awareness on it and not *focus* on it, just kind of have it gently. So when it comes around and we feel disappointed, it feels kind of loose and easy then.

And the problem really isn't the disappointment or the anxiety. Those are not really the problem. That's my personal opinion. Those are *not* the problem. The problem *is...* that we get caught in an 'aversion reaction. I shouldn't have that. I shouldn't have that. I should be beyond that at this point. So therefore, then we have like, I'm a bad person or I'm not smart or all these other things come into it. When if we were just watching, you know, my aversion to my leg going to sleep and just put my awareness on it. Not like I need to get rid of the sleep or anything, just put my awareness on it. Move the leg, put my awareness on it. Get up, feel the cramp, put my awareness on the cramp. It's gone. Put my awareness on the leg with no cramp. It doesn't really matter what it is. Pay attention, I guess, is what it would be like. Pay attention all the time. ... There's no outcome they're looking for. So when you feel angry, be angry. Just be angry. You don't have to, like, throw it at somebody. Just be angry. I mean, you're going to have that experience anyway. You're pissed off. So at least, if you pay attention to it a lot, there's a tendency to stop directing it towards yourself or towards others and all that. It's like this is my *normal* this week. I'm just angry. You know, it could be the president, you know. He's kind of an easy in a certain way a neutral target, you know? So it's like neutral in the way of feeling justified. [laughter] You don't have to build a case for everything.

Student 1 [00:13:52] Thank you.

Student 2 [00:13:57] Lama Michael, somebody and I can't remember who, but I know it wasn't a Dharma teacher, once wrote that anxiety is living in the future and depression is living in the past, mulling over the past. And I have noticed, when we do this meditation, the very few times that I can stay focused on my experience *now*, there is a freedom from that anxiety and depression. There is a happiness, there is a lightness there. There is a freedom. The question is how do we sustain that?

LMC [00:14:55] Well first of all stop trying to sustain it. [laughs] That is definitely not going to work.

Student 2 [00:15:04] But how do we increase the times when you can be free of these thoughts that cause suffering? How to work with it to free myself from those thoughts?

LMC [00:15:26] Well I think the distinction between the past and the future is helpful, often. So we often get stuck in the past with a certain kind of delusion that we're actually working on the future... when we're really not! And if you put your awareness again on the experience itself as it's unfolding, that is the future - right? Now if you're talking about, to yourself, like how this experience came about, now we are in the past. The past has a certain... it's appealing sometimes. Partly because we kind of *know* it. The problem is, is the thing that we know is what we are trying to get away from. [laughs] So it doesn't betray us. We just keep repeating it.

[00:16:33] So moving away from that is also *not* easy. But a *meditative* standpoint, I think the best thing is, put your awareness on the experience, whether it's positive or negative. Like whatever it is, as much as you can remain aware of your experience... there is a benefit to it. You feel a sense of freedom in it - like bring it on. It's like, once you can do that, there's no problem. If you feel anxious then, you step back a little bit and you just go with it. In other words, *be* anxious. Let it come, completely. Like just do it. Nobody is putting a knife in your heart. That is a different thing. But we put it into it *ourselves* by... sometimes getting anxious and *not* putting our awareness on it. But *fear* comes from it when we don't put our awareness on it. Then we feel afraid. Will it ever go away? Will it get worse? All those things come. The awareness itself, when it's *there*, is freeing. It opens something up. Okay, so I'm anxious. And in the midst of that we can feel like huh. That wasn't as bad *this* time as it was last time. Because we are *in* the future at the moment. I like the thing of the past and the future because we commonly go into the past. The conceptual is famous for that. The conceptual is almost always re-investigating what we did. So there is a value to that too in certain circumstances but when we're trying to... discover who and what we are... it's a loser. We need to be present with who we are now in order to see, who am I, what am I, and feeling comfortable with it.

[00:19:12] So to get good at this business of putting awareness *on* the experience is really helpful, cause the experience is there anyway. So we're not trying to get *rid* of the experience. We're just trying to be present with it. See it! See it! See it over and over again. Even if I don't like it, I can see it. I'm not trying to avoid it. And, I know some people feel like, if I don't try to avoid it, it gets worse. I'm not sure about that. I'm just not sure about that. My own experience is when I avoid it... it tends to get worse. And there's a fear. The fear thing definitely comes in. Maybe I won't be able to avoid it. And then we get into a place around that and it's all like manufactured. When really, if we develop the habit of bringing our awareness to all of our experiences. Not just this experience and that experience and the ones we want to be present

with. Just every one of them all together, all at once. It feels like too much, but it's okay. You don't need to succeed at. But the degree to which you *can* do it, feels like the mixture altogether comes closer to feeling like, *I am* getting closer to what I am at this time. But also, the next time it happens, it's not the same as the last time. It never is. It never is. So when it's not the same as the last time, and we put our awareness on it, we feel like we are moving into the future rather than regurgitating the past over and over. Which is debilitating at a certain point isn't it? That's my experience.

[00:21:31] I'd rather have a new pain than the same old pain. If I have to have pain, give me a new one. [laughs] Something that I can do something *different* with at least. And my experience is, is that it's usually less than it was before. I'm more likely to have a sense of humor around it and feel like, I see what I am doing. I see what's happening. I see myself doing this and that happening. ... I think it's healthier, just in an ordinary way. But also healthier in the sense that when we bring our awareness to our experience, we are *indeed* discovering who we are. What it is. In a certain way, there is a problem with this because of course, one of our teachings is... don't put a label on who you are. Because it is never the case that the name is the thing. Right? I mean I have a name. But we all have a name. But at some point in our lives we have to know that that name does not say who I really am. Other people may think that the label does something but actually it doesn't. So it's important to be aware of as much of that as we can. But if we try to be aware of each one of those things, it's overwhelming.

[00:23:10] So I like the approach of... bring your awareness to the totality of your experience. Even if only for five seconds. Can you just kind of hold the whole thing then you drop it? You can pick it up again you know, try it again. You get a better sense of... what's going on, physically, emotionally, in your mind, in your body, the whole thing. Cause you can't track the individual pieces of it. The example that I think I've used a few times was when I was about twelve years old I had fish. And I used to watch the fish, sometimes for hours, just watching them swim. Hundreds of fish in one place. And there was something very settling about it, that... I mean in retrospect I would think, I would sit and not think for a long time. I mean you couldn't really have a conversation with them. [laughs] It was just something to look at and the fact that they were *alive* as opposed to something that was digitally generated, there was something satisfying to just sit and look at them. And after an hour of doing that, what I discovered, but didn't really say to myself was, I just felt good. I felt like somehow, it is just like if it had been a bad day at school or something... it would just feel like that was then. But its back there now. It's gone. I think doing that with ourselves is also very helpful.

Student 2 [00:25:13] Is being aware that I'm *thinking* about something in the past or in the future part of my awareness of my experience now?

LMC [00:25:24] Yeah, but I wouldn't label it. I think the labeling is the problem. Like, now I'm thinking its better just to put your awareness on that experience. So if your thinking, just put your awareness on that experience. It's not going to stay. Our experiences do not generally last, you know unless we really hurt our leg or something. You know, physically if we are really hurt ourselves, the pain may last awhile. But generally, speaking when we're just talking about ordinary day to day experiences, putting your awareness on it changes your relationship with it and it gives you an opportunity to have the experience without the label. ...You know, I appreciate you raising that.

Student 3 [00:27:02] I'd like to take this a little further if I may, what you're speaking about, because I'm in a situation right now with somebody in my family whose quite physically and

mentally ill. And I am trying to work with this and they can be quite difficult. And I find myself overwhelmed, overwhelmed by *strong* emotions, and it affects me physically. I can feel it in my body. So this is a strong situation, I feel physically and mentally helpless. And so, what you're saying, I'm assuming this goes for heavy afflictive anger or... *fear*. Fear, worry, all these things. It's a basket of things. So I wondered if you had anything more to say, or should I just take what you're saying... this is what it is. Have your experience. And especially physically, I don't want what's happening physically because its damaging to me.

LMC [00:28:58] Well, I think the *main* thing is... maybe a willingness to put our awareness on the experience that we are having. And that's not easy, as I'm sure you know.

Student 3 [00:29:20] No, not with this.

LMC [00:29:25] And yet this business of going into the future, or going into the past... also that's a helpful thing to look at. Because, what's interesting is, it appears to be a contradiction. In my own experience, it appears to be a contradiction. That if I go into the past, I imagine that, that's a safe place because I know it. But that's not my experience *in* that place, going into the past, because... you can't *fix* it. Then you get fear. And the fear is debilitating. And it's usually accompanied with some significant dysfunction. [laughs] So because it feels *conceptually* like, what I ate yesterday, which made me feel good, today will make me feel good. In other words, it feels like somehow the past is safe because I know it. But when I look close at it it's the exact opposite. Because it's the place where I tried to get away from anyway. And so I'm just going back to that place and I'm no better at getting out from it than I was before. Whereas going into the future, offers... a change. Not only does it offer a change, also we go into the future by putting our awareness on the *current* experience. Not the one we *expect* to have in the future. That's the wrong future, that's already past. The *expectation* of the future is the past already! So putting our awareness on the *current* experience moves into the future and that provides us with at least something fresh. It's not where we were.

[00:31:46] And if we feel uncomfortable there, then there is also *another* future element which is... there are so many ways to say this, but I'll just say, if you feel uncomfortable going into the future... then bring your awareness to that in the sense of, okay than I will be uncomfortable. It sounds kind of heroic in a certain way, but there's something about, rather than trying to avoid it, so of course if someone's threatening you physically or some other way, then that's a different situation. But were dealing here with things that we actually have some... I don't know if I want to use the word control, but we have some say in what it is were doing. So one thing I can say is, which we all do a lot of the time is, if I don't like something, I change it. I *try* to change it. If I don't like being with somebody, I try to go somewhere else. And if I don't like something about myself then I try to avoid it or go somewhere else. But all of those things are *not* putting our awareness on that thing. The awareness, by definition almost, that's a bad phrase to use because that's a conceptual thing when we're trying to get *out* of that spot. What we really are trying to do is, I'm trying to be present with what is. So I'm feeling crappy today. There's all sorts of things that I might do that might be functional or dysfunctional. But one thing that is *definitely* functional is, I put my awareness on the experience of feeling bad. Okay, I'm feeling bad. I'm just going to feel bad! And it doesn't *fix* it, but you keep renewing your awareness there. And by definition, again not a good phrase, by virtue of putting you awareness there that *is* the future. That is not the past. You are not regurgitating when your awareness is on your current experience. That *is* the future. We might say, well isn't it the present? Well, the present is what is moving into the future. That's what is. The more you can *be* there, the more you feel sane. Whatever else is going on it feels like this, this is sanity.

Student 3 That's what I'm looking for. It is...

LMC [00:34:52] You know what it is by direct experience. Not by some formula. Not even by some meditation method. Like that *is* the method. Your awareness is the meditation. The awareness *on* the experience *is* the meditation. And you don't have to know that that carries you into the future. You don't really have to know anything else. You just go there. By the time you see it in the rear-view mirror, you have the sense of, that was good! Whatever else is going on, that was good. And after you've done it a few times it becomes a little bit more automatic. I'm in a space that I like. I put my awareness on it. I'm in a place that feels pleasant. I put me awareness on it. That suddenly changes into something that feels not so good. Put your awareness on it. You are constantly moving into the future. And by virtue of that you are discovering, who and what you are. Which is *deeply* satisfying when you see it. That's *really* what our entire practice is about. So we say, it's better not to *be* somebody or something. In other words, you label yourself something, that's a problem. So when we say you are discovering who and what you are, we don't really mean there's going to be a tag there and you say, ah ha, this is what it is! The ah ha comes at the moment when your awareness rests on that place. It's really, I think, a profound meditation.

Student 3 [00:36:54] Thank you.

LMC [00:37:04] Was that okay for now?

Student 3 [00:37:07] Yes, the whole discussion was very helpful. [had some inaudible words]

LMC [00:37:13] Well it lends itself to that too. That whole process lends itself to a conversation. So that's not the meditation. That's not the putting your awareness on that. But it can easily transition to that place where it feels like, somethings not quite right here. And then you notice, actually, I'm in a reactive place and I'm not putting my awareness on the experience. ... It's so simple. ... What else? Lunch [laughter]

*Sangha - dedicating the merit*

LMC - Thank you, thank you, very nice morning.