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*resting awareness on totality has potential for non-conceptual experiential insight, identifying with the watcher, fish tank method, discussion of awareness including resting awareness on itself or on our experiences, clarifying what's meant by totality of experiences, **Carrying Practice:** recognizing our experience without labeling as way to know ourself*

[00:02:36] So, are we on schedule? Are we doing okay? ... Well, we definitely have time for an open conversation if you have questions, curiosities...let's entertain them.

Student 1 [00:04:20] When I was practicing just then... it felt almost rapid, trying to focus just on now and the entire experience of everything. Even though there is really nothing going on in here. But, it's like inside as well as outside. It's a very interesting thing. So, I guess my question is, is it just sort of part of the process that you'll just be rapidly going from every bird you know, from bird, to bird, to bird, to bird while you're doing that and eventually, you'll see just the flock, using your metaphor? Being able to just see the flock as opposed to just focusing on individual birds. Do you know what I'm saying?

LMC [00:05:29] Yes, that's the intention of that practice. To see the whole thing. It's kind of a global thing. It's not meant to count the birds or determine their colors, what they're doing or whatever. But rather, that at any given moment we are... an experience generator. In fact, the nature of mind is sometimes referred to as... a kind of non-stop endless generator of experiences. It never stops. Which has a little piece of humor in it. Because we sit down with the idea [that] we'll place our awareness on something like, you know a leaf. And the idea is that I'll rest my awareness on the leaf and I'll gradually settle my mind. But, anyone whose done that for some period of time will raise the objection that, I've been doing this for a very long period of time and my mind is still not settled. So, if the mind *is* settled, it's almost always settled on something. Almost always settled on something. So you may not have *practiced* putting your awareness on an experience. You may just have gotten to the place where your awareness naturally tends to settle. But, the point really isn't even the settling on anything in particular but rather to settle with the totality of our experience. Which, is in a certain way, is not different than having a leaf to settle your mind on. The leaf is actually not... much more easy or difficult than putting your awareness on the totality of you experience. But the totality of your experience has the potential of bringing insight.

Student 1 [00:07:53] That was actually my next question. Is that a step toward insight meditation? Or just like insight in general. The insight of our true nature? That this meditation of focusing on our experience as it's happening, is that a step toward insight meditation? Like it goes toward that vipashyana like way... am I correct?

LMC [00:08:32] It is a form of vipashyana for sure. You may know there are many different forms of vipashyana. Some of them are more complex. Some of them are more highly conceptual. This one is highly non-conceptual. So the idea is to actually have your experience, whatever it is, without trying to control or modify it. Just have the experience. Which, is actually, what we would say, that's what you're going to have anyway. Whatever you want... you'll get what you get. [laughs] Because most of us have actually discovered, we actually don't get to decide what it's going to be.

[00:09:22] Sometimes you sit down to meditate and you feel... irritated. And one of the interesting antidotes to that is... *intentionally* be irritated... in the middle of the meditation. So, that doesn't mean you're blaming other people for things or yourself, but just that there's the irritation... just go ahead and have it! So, we have a sense then of... well, so there was 10 minutes or an hour of irritation. It came and it went. In the process of resting the awareness there, we make discoveries. One of the disappointments that you can have is that the discovery... because it's so thoroughly focused on experience... the discovery does not feel like anything. It feels...not even barely conceptual. And it's not meant to be conceptual at all. Which, you could say translates into...therefore there isn't much *there* for you to look at. But insight practice at it's... highest point is completely non-conceptual. Even though we sometimes deliver conceptual explanations of it. That is really just kind of like a painting on the wall. It actually isn't the insight. The insight is *a/ways* completely non-conceptual.

[00:11:12] So we go for that and sometimes we get insights that are completely conceptual, but they are inspiring maybe. So we feel inspired. And, then sometimes people say, I felt really inspired. I had a couple of really nice sessions and insight occurred. I got this and that, and then it never happened again. That problem is the problem of the *labeler*. [laughs] Because it *may* happen and you're looking for something that you expect to happen. That can happen. And, of course there we are again. That expectation almost never bears fruit. When we get that insight, the experientially one, we feel cheated. Like it just wasn't very big or important. And in a way, that's what you should expect! Because, we go about our day's business and exchanges with friends and all the things that we do and we don't expect any big thing from it at all. And yet, to be able to walk through a day and place our awareness on those experiences as they unfold is a *really* big thing. It is very difficult to do. But when you do it and your awareness rests on the experience as it unfolds, what appeared to be something that was *clearly* boring to the core, it's actually very interesting to watch us watch ourselves look at our experiences which are *not* still. They are continuously boiling and simmering. So, I think that what you're saying is completely in accordance with what we're trying to do.

Student 1 [00:13:11] Great. ... I've been practicing something like that for a while. I've been practicing this shamatha for some while, but without any instruction. So it was nice to hear a more full instruction about this experiential meditation. I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

Student 2 [00:13:50] The English language has a really good way of saying, '*I*' am watching this or whatever. So then in that shamatha experience... having the sense of like ah... you know, watching the birds and whatever is happening. But then a rut can happen with identification with the watcher or the perceiver. That *I* am the perceiver or the watcher... and re-thinking about reality that way. So, I just wanted to see what you had to say about that rut. The identification with the watcher, the perceiver.

LMC [00:14:46] Usually we identify with both of those things whether we're watching for that or not. It's almost impossible to not identify with it. Even if we feel like, I'm not able to do it, we're identifying with not being able to do it. We just can't escape it, I shouldn't say, we *can't* escape it. We *can* escape it. In fact, escaping that very thing is a piece of what we hope to accomplish on the path. But it's not easy to do. On the other hand, I think since we've started working on shamatha as a practice to bring awareness to the experiences as they unfold, many people have said that was an enhancement for them over the shamatha that we used to do. Which was to have an individual put this [object] somewhere and put your awareness on it. Gradually your mind will still a little bit. But when it's all done, [laughs] you feel like, I don't know what I was supposed to do. It just didn't come around somehow.

[00:16:07] And I think, generally speaking, it *doesn't* come around when we put our awareness on it. But if you can think of, for example... when I was a kid, I had aquariums filled with tropical fish and things. And I used to sit in front of those aquariums and just look at all those fish just swimming around in there. I could sit there for an hour, easy and watch them. And of course there's no speech going on. There is no obvious communication of any kind, but you're watching. Two things are happening that are important. One is, you're watching a whole bunch of sentient beings who actually have a life and they are exchanging things., Just swimming around each other and going over and above and all around. So they're having a certain life. And I remember thinking it's so weird to be able to sit here, like they can't see *me* in all likelihood. And I can see everything they are doing. But of course, I have no idea what they are doing from the *inside*. You can just see bodies... swimming. And the rest of it is *your* experience, not theirs. [laughs] So, I think we are back to that place again.

[00:17:34] Our experience is the whole reason that we come to sit down to meditate. If *nobody* was here, including ourselves, we would not come to sit down to meditate. So we come to sit down and meditate because *functionally*, for the great majority of human beings and probably all of *us*, the single most important thing is me. Me! [off mic Me?] And me! [laughs] And even though that's a little bit of a problem, as *Buddhists* we're trying to like deal with that thing. But still, honestly... it's pretty clear that our experience is preeminent in importance to us. If were in deep pain that's a big deal. And if we're enjoying ourselves that's a big deal. And if we have had pleasure in our lives, that often is a big deal in the direction *of*... disappointment. It's kind of like disappointment arises to the challenge in proportion to the pleasure. So this is the thing that now were going to lose the pleasure maybe, almost certainly at some point, and so we have fear born from the very thing that we would say was pleasurable The more pleasurable it was, likely, the more we have fear of losing it. So those things become important to us also. And the meditation is meant to bring us face to face with our own experiences. And *ideally*... do nothing with it. You bring your awareness to the experience. You rest your awareness there, on the experience, and that's it! Watch it. You would think there couldn't be anything more interesting than watching your own mind. And, if you've sat and watched your mind for a long time, you realize that... the implied *effort* to bring the mind to stillness... is highly unlikely to be successful.

[00:20:21] So, I quote Kalu Rinpoche, one of the great meditation masters of the century, who once said, when somebody said they were having trouble settling the mind, he said, the mind does not settle. It's not its job. Your job is to rest *your* awareness on *that* mind. In the meantime, it never settles. It runs day and night, awake or asleep, dead or alive was his comment. [laughs] It's kind of like it has no beginning and it has no end. So that's a rather large chunk when you think, I'd like to put my awareness on that. That is the most elusive character of all. And, that's what each one of us is, fundamentally. From a Buddhist perspective, if you were to say who we are? You would probably... in the best case, say, I *am* the nature of my mind. Which doesn't really say anything about who you are and what you do or what you think or whether you're afraid or not. Whether you are a pleasant person or an unpleasant one. You don't get anything from it. And yet, from a Buddhist perspective, to acknowledge and recognize from the inside out, that... the nature of mind is something that has no beginning and no end. And it is something that encompasses *all* of our experiences. So from that place we come back to where we have been this evening. The best thing that we can do is place our awareness on the totality of our experience. Which is *far* more than a leaf. The leaf is fine to practice and kind of get a sense of, I see. If I do certain things mind slows down a little bit. Doesn't quite pump out the experiences quite so fast. ... But, even if it doesn't, it still doesn't stop creating experiences.

Student 3 [00:23:07] I spent a good portion of today very focused... painting and just in that world without any distraction. And that's a pretty strong form of meditating, in my opinion. But of course it's got kind of a single lens in the sense that you're dealing with manipulating the tools of the trade. And you're watching color unfold. And the kind of painting I was doing was abstraction so it didn't have any agenda or form. I mean you can go into that, of course, an artist and contrive all kinds of things on what's in front of you. But if you're really just doing abstraction, you've let go of everything and you're just seeing where the painting takes. And then, analogous to mind, awareness...we don't have an awareness to focus on something. We *are* the awareness. And that's my experience of it. When I'm setting my mind to the place of meditating, I don't focus on anything, I just be aware. I am aware. That's what the experience is. And many things arise, like little tidbits, thumbles [?] of strands of various things and basically let them go and go back to the experience of awareness. Just awareness. Not self. Not focusing on something. But just being aware. And, it doesn't have subject or object or anything. And it kind of a wonderful space to just... go ahead. Because pretty soon we're going to dissolve anyhow. Since we're illusory, ' going to be part of a big universal *sweep* of something. We don't know where this little supposed form thing goes. We might be or something burned up or something, buried in a ground or ground up or something, I'm not quite sure. They might figure out how to make dog food out of us. [laughs] But anyhow, through all of that... just awareness is it. It's nothing else. It's just being aware. You are awareness. And you don't bring your focus to anything. You just be aware. And if you focus, you know the difference between focusing very strongly on something and have that really *focused* awareness and that is... an experience we all have. I mean that kind of focusing. But this other thing of just... aware. Drop every preconceived notion of what it might look like or feel like and it's... just wonderful.

LMC [00:26:45] Generally... are you done?

Student 3 [00:26:45] *Hit me with the real thing Mac.*

LMC [00:26:51] I don't have a real thing. But generally speaking, when we talk about... awareness *of* something, when we talk about awareness of awareness, that's enlightenment. So we're back a little bit from *that*. And awareness itself often feels like it is an object of some kind.

Student 3 [00:27:24] How about if it's not? It's just awareness.

LMC [00:27:30] Well then, we have to be careful of another thing. And that is to *focus* on what it is we are doing. That is to say,

Student 3 [00:27:36] Oh yeah, you mean you come back to awareness. If you lose it, you have to come back to awareness.

LMC [00:27:41] Well of course. But when you come back, you exclude. So that's the *nature* of that whole thing. Is that when you leave the awareness and you, again, the focusing almost inevitably betrays us. Because...

Student 3 [00:28:03] What about just dropping? Not focusing, but just dropping all the input that pulls you away from bigger seeing?

LMC [00:28:17] Well I don't know what to say. ... If I was another *famous* character I would say, good luck. [Laughter] But I'm not that person, so I won't say, *good luck*. But I think that there is an issue there in the distinction between... resting the awareness on awareness itself or resting

awareness on... our experiences. That when we move between those, we end up focusing on another place. Putting our awareness in another place. And almost inevitably it has to be, at least for a moment, a focus. That focus... is inevitably... what do I want to say, I want to say *exclusive*. But what I want to say is it's...

Student 3 [00:29:25] Isn't it kind of a distraction?

LMC [00:29:27] No. No don't mix them together like that. There's a way in which what we're doing is... by *focusing*, it's kind of like I look around the room and I focus. And I see a cushion, a chair, people and those things. But it's an excluding process. it's not an including...

Student 3 [00:29:50] The world, your internal world grows smaller.

LMC [00:29:53] That's right.

Student 3 [00:29:55] But when you just do aware, it's enormous!

LMC [00:30:01] Yes. But if you *just* do aware, it's not possible to talk about it.

Student 3 [00:30:06] That's right. So I'm going blah, blah, blah [laughs] and it's not much use to anybody else, but it's fun. ... I mean we gotta get some benefit from hanging out and sitting still for hours and hours and hours and looking at our aching this and that and then the inevitability of then we're all going to ... *fluff* in the not too distant future. – I love it, I'm,

LMC [00:30:41] Did you just raise your hand?

Student 3 [00:30:45] I'm just going blah, blah, blah. You did a lot of blah, blah, blah. So I figured I'd go blah blah blah. I'm eighty and I *love* the idea that I'm pretty soon cashing in the chips. I love it. I'm so *curious* about it. I didn't used to be. I used to be afraid of dying. But in recent days it's become less and less fearful and more and more okay. We can't get rid of our being-ness anyhow. There is no way to get rid of your being-ness...is there? You have to let it go at some point. And then you have pure awareness, right? Isn't that pure awareness when you let go of all sense of being-ness? ... Anyhow I'm done. Any body else want to go blah, blah, blah?

Student 4 [00:32:06] To back up just a little bit, I guess the language that helps to clarify it a little bit is... it seems like we are talking about –trying to let go of the notion of subject and object, like objects that we create in ourselves, like objects that we attach to ourselves. So, this idea of awareness itself, I think... you can watch the totality of your experience and be okay with it changing and the plethora of its different forms and that be the object. I understand that. But this idea that there's still the subtle notion of the perceiver... or a watcher that you mentioned, that's still what I'm interested in. This notion of how do we let go of subject and object... and get into non-duality? Do we just keep watching? Is that the answer, we just keep watching?

LMC [00:33:15] I think that's the antidote. The antidote is to place your awareness on *that* experience. So that you have the experience of a perceiver, an object of perception, however many levels you want to cut it into. You *have* that experience and when you place your awareness on that experience the experience is modified by just placing your awareness on it. And gradually it changes. And the idea is, you keep the awareness *on* that... as it changes. And gradually, the experience *morphs* as you put your awareness on it. It just changes naturally into

another thing. So you keep your awareness on that and your attachment to those changing states gradually... gets less and your awareness gets sharper.

Student 3 [00:34:20] Is it a mistake to say “*your*” awareness?

LMC [00:34:26] No I don't think it's a mistake to say *your* awareness. Somebody has to own it. [laughs] Language is always a problem when you're dealing with something that fundamentally is non-conceptual. Because the language part of it is *always* conceptual. And the actual experience is often also imbued with conceptual elements. But at its best place, that conceptual side drops away completely.

Student 5 [00:35:11] I am getting confused. [laughs, and LMC says, “that's good”] I just want to make sure if I understand correctly about putting our awareness on the totality of experiences. So, here today... meditation started. Here is what happened, some thoughts appeared and at the same time, I didn't grasp it. But then at the same time I noticed the sound from the heater is coming. I noticed that. But I was able to drop it. And then I also noticed that somewhere around here some people moved. I noticed but I was not chasing any of those phenomena. I was able to be still. But I noticed all these things happening. You know, sound, movement, my thought. So...that's what you mean by the totality of experiences? Is that what you meant or am I getting confused?

LMC [00:37:09] You don't sound confused at all. So I can't say that you aren't confused [they both laugh] but you don't sound confused.

Student 5 [00:37:21] Okay, so how about my understanding of my *totality of experiences*, is that what you meant? Being aware of everything happening around you including sound, movement, your thought, maybe your body started aching a little bit but then next moment, another sort comes up, but then next moment, the sound from the heater coming?

LMC [00:37:57] Yes. Yeah, that's it. And, while that's happening, are you noting that the sound of the heater is the sound of the heater? Or are you just having the experience, whatever the experience is? ... You sounded like those two things were mixed a little bit... which is normal.

Student 5 [00:38:35] I think I was noting the sound of the heater when sound came.

LMC [00:38:42] Let's take a conceptual look at it first... cause often times that's helpful. So the conceptual thing is that... *you hear the noise*. So, you hear the noise that's non-conceptual. Then you say it's that damn heater. [laughs] That's conceptual. And, there is nothing *wrong* with that conceptual, but recognizing the distinction between the two... will, at various times, be really helpful. Because in the non-conceptual meditation, what we want to do is arrive at the place where, *we are just having the experience*. Even if I keep hearing that heater and just feel totally irritated, I'm just noticing the irritation. I'm not trying to fix it, improve it, eliminate it, increase, nothing. Just having the experience. So *that's* what the sense of the totality of the experience is. That we rest in *all* of our experiences as they are occurring. Which is a lot! And if we can have 3 or 4 experiences and just be aware of them is a nice start. It's a nice start. And it's quite different from when we place a leaf in front of us and put our awareness on it. There is not much experience in *having* the leaf. So that's the problem really. We start analyzing the leaf. I wonder if this was from a tree in Bodhgaya? Or how old it is, or if it's this or that, where it came from? We naturally start doing that. We want to be able to *completely* step outside of the

conceptual and step into the non-conceptual. And it's not easy. So yeah, probably anything that you do to make it different than it is... is likely to have a commentary.

Student 5 [00:41:08] So noticing the sound from the heater that's considered as... [LMC clarified is to be] non-conceptual. [off-mic unintelligible] This is kind of difficult to distinguish sometimes. You notice the sound. And when I was meditating, I was not bothered by the sound. I was just noticing. But I know that the noise was coming from the heater. So, that's conceptual or non-conceptual?

LMC [00:42:22] Which part of it was what? ...The part... where you weren't irritated?

Student 5 [00:42:29] I was not irritated, And I noticed the sound *is* coming from the heater.

LMC [00:42:36] Irritation, by the way, is no problem. [both laugh] Let's just be clear.

Student 5 ~ [00:42:47] I think I'm making the situation even worse. [laughter]

Student 4 [00:43:15] When you merge the experience of the sound... with the fact that it supposedly comes from the heater...you're conflating two things kind of like, right? So, we naturally do that. We always think, oh that's the sound of the heater. But in that experience itself is actually, a merging of the concepts or two things. It's a merging of the sound itself and the concept of where it's emerging from. It's emerging from a heater. Does that make any sense?

LMC [00:43:45] Yes, that's good. The truth is, if you grow up in this culture... you are bound and hog tied in conceptuality. [laughs] And, I don't mean that in a derogatory way, were *good* at it. We're *really* good at it. And by virtue of being really good at it, *and*... by virtue of being able to make a living at it and do things that we otherwise wouldn't be able to do... it's not easy for us to step *out* of that place and into the non-conceptual. Sometimes I'll meet somebody here [and] we'll have an interview and... they will talk about non-conceptual things for a long time. But, talking about non-conceptual things is not non-conceptual. [laughs] And many people don't recognize the distinction. They will say, that was a very nice non-conceptual meeting. [laughter] It leaves m kind of slack jawed. I'm not sure what to do with it. [off-mic comment] That depends on the person. I have to be careful with people. Sometimes people have a definite idea of the experiences that they had and they describe them. And when they describe them it's clear that they may have had an experience, but the description is totally conceptual and doesn't actually communicate *anything* except a fantasy that comes off of someone else's conceptuality and proceeds... and so were not actually *getting* at the meditation thing at all.

Student 6 [00:46:12] Wondering about if something that happened during the tea break might illustrate. When I'm sitting up and my eyes are open or even if I'm not looking at people or I know it's this person talking, that person answering, this person talking. And so there's an experience but there's a lot of labeling. But when I was lying down briefly during break... some time, my eyes were closed, sometimes open, I was continuing your instruction on meditating on the totality. And so there was the physical sensations and all kinds of things. And there was this *wonderful* mix of sound. A variety of sound. And what was *cool* was... for a brief period of time, I didn't get into labeling. Oh, that *this* word or that word or it's a human sound or it's the other sounds. It was just this delightful mix of sound. [off mic comment] Yes, exactly. Exactly. No, but I heard myself say that and I realized that was my commentary, after. Yeah. But it's like we do that all the time.

LMC [00:48:06] Well, you can't beat that. You can't have it both ways at the same moment. Though, you *will* have an experience. But as soon as you begin to label it and talk about it, you're now in a different realm in terms of how you're *relating* to that experience. And there's nothing *wrong* with that. In a certain way, I think if somebody is *really* irritated, let's say, and they're trying to engage in their meditation somehow and they're *not* trying to get into the non-conceptual. They're just conceptually trying to understand how you *would* work with it. My inclination is to say, if you're irritated, probably the *best* thing that you *could* do is just be *really* irritated. Just go ahead and *be* irritated. You're already irritated anyway! So what you could do is just decide, well, what I'm *not* going to do is hurt other people with my irritation. So I'm just going to sit by myself and be really irritated. And I've known, I won't name any of them, but well-known teachers who will say, the best thing to do if you're really irritated is just *sit* in the irritation. Just do it. Be irritated. [laughs] And I think that is actually a great instruction. It's not saying how to get out of the conceptual thing. So that's a different story.

[00:49:49] The non-conceptual is really hard. It really eludes us most of the time. But when you *get* it, when you place your awareness on a thing, you know, when we're talking about global, it doesn't mean that you're meditation on this is no good if you don't manage to encompass the entirety of your experience. It's really meant to be... that look, you have so many experiences *continuously* happening. That those experiences, all together, are really a lot about who you are... and what you do. All *those* things. And so to make an *effort* in that direction could be really helpful just to understand who you are. It's kind of like auto-therapy in a certain way. You at least know what your *experiences* are. So many people go to a therapist for years to find out what they *were* experiencing. Because it's not always easy to just get in touch with what the experience *itself* is, let alone dealing with that experience. So I think it's helpful just to recognize *one* experience. Like, my hip hurts. I got a little arthritis, so my hip hurts. So I can look at my hip and say it's there. Not any big deal. Maybe it will be at some point. But generally speaking, people like to turn their experiences into conceptual things. Which from the standpoint of understanding who you *are*, it's of no use. It basically just continues the process and the confused way that we normally are.

Student 3 [00:51:48] It seems like that conceptualization is some sort of form of avoidance... of not wanting to inhabit the experience itself fully. Like we want to change the experience. We don't want to be with it or inhabit it fully and why is that?

LMC [00:52:07] Why you want to change the experience?

Student 3 [00:52:08] Yeah. We don't want to sit with frustration. I guess that goes to maybe there are certain things we like and there are certain things we don't want to sit with certain feelings... inhabit them fully.

LMC [00:52:23] Why?

Student 3 [00:52:24] Because we have aversion to some feelings and then we like other feelings. And then there's somethings that we're indifferent about.

LMC [00:52:33] Why is that? That's a good question, or else it's a lousy question, I'm not sure which one. [laughter] I should have just said, that's a lousy question, we're not going there! Well... this shamatha that demands us to put our awareness on the totality of all our experience is an easy formula to conceptually understand. It is not an easy formula to implement. Because, generally speaking, we go about our lives. Conceptualizing the majority of our experience in a



running dialogue with ourselves all the time. Isn't it? Like I walk outside and I say, where's my shoes? Right there! I'm out of it. Where's my shoes? Oh, I found my shoes! But I'm still not resting with the awareness of the shoes and all those pieces. So, almost every experience *derails* the process. Which is why we come together and sit together. So that there aren't as many ways in which we can get derailed. And, we maybe get the experience of, I'm beginning to see... what it looks like when I put my awareness on the *actual* experience and just rest on that experience. It's a pretty remarkable thing. And, you're getting pretty close to possibly having an insight into the nature of mind itself.

[00:54:16] You're not getting *deeply* into it. Because to get deeply into it you need to actually recognize it and *stay* with it for awhile. But just to even see it for a moment, and see... I see. I just had an experience of rage. And now just suddenly I see, whoa, that was actually the experience that would have been helpful to put my awareness on. But before I did that, I *conceptualized* it and basically allocated the *blame* for it to somebody else and a few other things before I wound down. So, the slowing down makes it possible. I think one of the most important things is just slow down and put your awareness on *whatever* the experience is. Don't try to fix it by "*I'm* going to have *this* experience and put my awareness on it". It just never works. You'll be derailed before you get on the horse.

[00:55:26] [various off mic comments including these:] Rats! No horse! [laughter]

LMC [00:55:45] Okay, let's dedicate the merit.

[00:55:48] *dedicating the merit*