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repeatedly placing our awareness with a sense of curiosity on the impermanence and freshness of our experiences, our mind is an experience machine and hope and fear are always there

LMC [00:02:02] Well, we've started the conversation. So, sometimes it's nice to go and have a teaching on the Dharma. But also, it's helpful, from time to time, to just have a conversation. Whether you sit down with a friend and talk about it or you come here and sit and we just talk about it. And you have the opportunity to raise questions that you didn't think of before, maybe. And that can be helpful also. So that's where we are....in this moment. So any of the issues or questions you might have, that would be interesting to discuss... now's your chance, could be your last chance. [laughter]

Student 1[00:03:50] This is the first time I have been here, so I'm visiting. And I found the meditation very, very interesting and was trying to follow that. Um, what concerned me, trying to do the meditation, was that this morning when I got up, I turned the news on and it was quite dark. An ISIS person had been murdered by our military. What really disturbed me was not just the killing, but the randomness of it. Because he was a father and two of his son's children were with him. And that struck me as really dark. And then as I drove here, I had my radio on and it was the anniversary of a black man who had been lynched in 1934. I don't remember the name, but he had also been tortured severely. And they were describing the kind of torture. So I wound up here with really dark news. And so, when the meditation talked about lightness, I found that difficult to go to that place. And could you just comment on ways that might be helpful? I find it difficult to turn the darkness off.

LMC [00:05:51] Are you're talking about a kind of dark place in your own mind, right? Am I correct?

Student 1 [00:05:58] The dark place would be activated.

LMC [00:06:02] What activates it?

Student 1 [00:06:05] The destruction of the human life.

LMC [00:06:10] Is it memories? What activates what activates that place?

Student 1[00:06:19] Well, I'm just saying that the darkness of the random murders and....

LMC Oh, I see.

Student 1[00:06:26] That stayed with me.

LMC It stays with you?

Student 1 Yeah. Mm hmm.

LMC [00:06:38] So what would you say if I said, no, it doesn't? Just for a moment, just think about it. Tell me, what would you say to that? That I'm wrong and it really does stay with you? Or is it possible that actually something new and fresh is happening in between the dark places?

Student 1 [00:07:11] I don't know that I have an answer for that.

LMC That's a good start.

Student 1 It's just what I know is, that it's difficult to switch.

LMC [00:07:26] Yes. It's also difficult to stay. Is it not?

Student 1 [00:07:38] Would you explain that a little more to stay where?

LMC [00:07:41] When you say it's difficult to switch, I assume that you mean you want to move from one kind of mental state into another state, right? [Student responded, Yes] So, first of all, it's helpful, I think, to *experience* and understand that actually you can't stay where you are. We're continually changing our level of happiness or our anger or our sadness. The dark, as you say, comes, but it also doesn't stay. In another moment it could be gone. So we often refer to this as the *nature* of our experience is that it is... there's a number of ways we can talk about it. One, we just say, it's impermanent. Whatever the experience is. The experience you had yesterday isn't here today. And we never can be quite sure where we're going to be tomorrow or even in the next moment.

[00:09:01] So another way to approach that, can be a lot more helpful also, to just think of it from the perspective of... any experience that I have at any time is fresh. It's never happened before. So some people say, no, I had a backache yesterday. But actually, it's not the same today. There are differences that have happened. And, of course, physical things can be a little bit more *feeling* like they're permanent. [And] the *mental*, when we think I don't feel so good today or I feel like gloomy today. But when we think to ourselves, I've been feeling gloomy every day... now, we've made a mistake. Because actually feeling gloomy every day... is not possible.

[00:10:08] If you look carefully at it, you can see that actually there are other things going on. No experience stays. The nature of experience is definitely impermanence. And that's not just what Buddhists say, [laughs] you know, it's impermanent. We all know that because when you have an experience that you really want, you'd love to have it for the rest of your life... it's already gone. And our problem sometimes is, is that we think that it *shouldn't* go. But when it's gloomy, we're glad that it goes. So it's the nature of experience that... it's changing all the time. So that can be very helpful when you feel gloomy. that what you're feeling is just about to disappear. And sometimes we hold on to it as if it was permanent.

[00:11:19] So there's some work to do there to kind of figure out experientially. If you put your awareness on the experience as often as possible, you'll start to get a sense of I felt dark 10 minutes ago and now it's now it's not there. So once you have that experience and you recognize it, you also have the sense of... there's dark and there's light and there's gray and there's colors and there's no color. This is the nature of mind.

[00:11:57] It actually...the mind, and we don't mean the brain. We mean the mind. The mind uses the brain. And the experience arise. But it has no agenda. It doesn't produce things that we like or dislike. These things just flow all the time. It's like a river flowing. The experiences keep coming and then they disappear and they go. So the things that are not particularly... enjoyable... we can at least develop a sense of curiosity, once we know that whatever the experience is, whether it's enjoyable or not, it's just about to change. It's just about to change so

we can have a sense of curiosity. A sense of enjoyment around it, even. Like that's difficult but it's not *permanently* difficult. ... Does it make sense?

Student 1 Yeah, it gives me a lot to think about. [laughter]

LMC [00:13:18] Oh, I was hoping you would say... That's really nice. It's something I don't have to think about. [even *more* laughter]

Student 1 [00:13:29] Well, it's only my first time here. Thank you very much.

LMC You're getting it. It's good. Thank you.

Student 2 [00:13:44] So I'm paralleling on with your comment because I think the challenge right now is the darkness that's in the news that we hear. All the time, every hour or whatever, you know. And so, there's concrete things that I find to be helpful, like not listening to the news, especially if I'm on my way to KCC. No, no, no. And switching to my little chanting CD or something like that. But it is kind of this heaviness that... so I appreciate that question because I think I'm not alone in experiencing that of sort of being *in* the world we live in, but not... this sounds sort of like philosophical, and that's what I'm trying to figure out, the more concrete way... in this world that we're living in. So not to be in denial of some of the realities that I think we need to be... making choices of how we are participating or not participating, but how to maintain the equanimity during this time.

LMC [00:15:15] Which equanimity?

Student 2 [00:15:16] Well, just sort of that recognition of... this is not permanent, just as you say. And this is... even though it feels like it's going on, there's so much going on... to keep a sense of peacefulness within somehow. Just that equanimity or peaceful place within despite the chaos in the news and all that. So it is a the switch flipping. The switch is hard. And I get that. So it helps to recognize that everything is impermanent. But at this time it feels like it's an endless stream of negativity. So it's not as easy to have the impermanence piece, *this too shall pass*. Well, it's not passing. There's something else that's just as bad or worse in the news. So more tips, I guess, you know. [laughter]

LMC [00:16:42] The only thing that's constant is change. Things come and go and we definitely play a role in the changing feast of experiences. But one thing is clear, the experiences don't stop. So many times we fool ourselves in the practice of shamatha, where we sit and place our awareness on the mind or on some object, and we expect that we will. find some peace in that. But the peace doesn't occur because one of the ways that... one of the early Buddhist teachers, Kalu Rinpoche, once early on in 1973 said... I have to paraphrase because I can't remember the exact thing he said at this point laughs] so long ago. But part of what he said was the mind is an experience machine. So when you engage in the practice of calm g, the expectation that you *will* calmly abide... is almost certainly going to be disappointing. [laughter]

[00:18:13] On the other hand, the experiences come out sometimes as like... you feel blissful and happy and everything looks good and we just naturally grasp onto it. My life has changed. What we really want to say is it's changed into this great place and now I *have* it. And the next thing is you don't. And that's... our trouble is not only the issue of I hate the experience I'm having and I just wish it would end. Or I love what I have and I hope it doesn't end. It's the hope and fear thing is always there. It's always there. And the mind just doesn't stop! Kalu Rinpoche

said... the thing that really made me laugh was the intonation of it when he said the mind is not still ever! Whether you are awake or asleep, it doesn't matter. And then he paused for a moment and he said, dead or alive. ... Now, one could ask, is that good news or bad news? [laughter]

[00:19:34] But you see, you got it! It's like the truth is, if you come to that place and you think about that for just a moment, you will laugh. Because just look at our experience... take any period of time, but a long period of time is really good, and you will say, yeah, that's it. It comes and goes. The tide comes in, and sometimes I'm happy to go for a swim and other times I drown in it. You don't get to say what your experiences are going to be. Which is why all of the teachings in this tradition come to work with what you've got, because you actually don't get to choose what you get. That always that sticks with me, I laughed for days when he said dead or alive. It sounded almost like, you know, a John Wayne movie of some kind. [laughter] I don't think he had that background, but... maybe.

[00:20:56] But it's very helpful to understand when we place our awareness on something that we will have the full range of experiences. It's just an issue of how big of a block of time do you measure it with. Because they will all occur. Everything from life to death. And one of the things that I think *can* be helpful, though, some people find it difficult, I find it very helpful... the *idea* that the mind continually delivers experiences, dead or alive, is part of the kind of the the teachings in the tradition is that, yes, we have life and we have death. And neither one of them is permanent. It's like every day all of our experiences are fresh. The experiences we had yesterday are not the experiences we're having today. Even if we say there's that damn song that I can't get out of my mind. It's actually not the same experience you were having before, nor will that experience ever occur again. And to hold that view changes our entire perspective of everything. ... If you just pay attention to what you're doing in any moment, you'll just have that experience like, no, I've never done this before. I mean, I've sat here before and said things and if I just bring my awareness to it, I realize that this experience has some kind of similarity to other times, but actually the majority of the experience I've never had before.

Student 3 [00:23:02] omitted comments, they weren't a question

Student 4 [00:26:09] omitted comments, they weren't a question

Student 5 [00:28:35] I apologize because I will be thinking out loud here. So I'm not sure if there's a question here or not. What I'm hearing and perhaps I'm misperceiving what it is that I'm hearing. What I think I'm hearing is a question of how to be an engaged Buddhist in this time, when, at least in the United States, we are on a precipice and certainly in the world we're at a precipice when it comes to global warming at the same time as being a Buddhist or someone who's trying to practice, trying to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha. Big shoes to fill, even though they were bare feet. For myself, if I don't practice the path, if I don't practice meditation and notice the complete impermanence of things, then my engagement in the world is almost inevitably confused. Until I become a Buddha, I don't think I won't.

I mean, apparently the Buddha continued to practice meditation, so I guess I'm going to have to do that even after if I should somehow be lucky enough to become a Buddha. But I guess what I would like to do is perhaps present to you the question of how does one do both? How does one be successfully engaged person... not hiding one's head in the sand, so to speak, at the same time as being a practicing Buddhist, not getting engaged when we're just going to add confusion. Being engaged but not adding confusion. How do we do that, if you can answer?

LMC [00:31:05] I'm not sure that's how we're built. I mean, we add confusion and we remove confusion. I don't think there's a way that you can avoid confusion completely. That maybe

already is confused. You will encounter whatever your experience is and you will respond to it, which is usually a reaction of some kind. And I think if we're talking about training in our spiritual path, then we gradually develop the abilities to face the things that come and work with them in a hopefully progressively better way. But in the meantime, we may actually have struggles that challenge us in a way that is too much for us to do. So that's partly where we come together with each other and work together with these things in a way which hopefully is helpful. It's hard sometimes... no doubt.

Zopa [00:32:25] omitted

Student 6 [00:36:45] This whole conversation speaks to something that I have struggled with long before I came to the Buddhist teachings and something that I still struggle with a lot, which is how daunting this all is. The more I practice and the more I engage with these teachings, the vastness of samsara confronts me more. Confronting it head on is even more uncomfortable than just ignoring it, like a lot. You know, it's really difficult to really meet that moment-to-moment view of what often feels kind of like an abyss of suffering. This sort of like endless cosmic scale. It kind of gets to a point where I don't really feel like I have any agency. Where I'm so out of control that there's nothing to do. There's no action to take. There's nowhere to start anymore. Because there's no sense of agency to change anything. It's like how do I cope with that? How do I continue to practice? I want to feel determination and I want to feel steadfast and I want to feel confident in the teachings and in my capability and everyone's capability. And yet every day I'm confronted with this endless expanse of suffering. And how do I reconcile those things? Because I clearly do have agency, you know. I can choose to stay in bed all day. I can choose to never eat if I did. Yet... I also feel completely powerless.

LMC [00:39:03] Well, you're not completely powerless. I mean, how did you get here today? [Student responded, Exactly] So we do things and we don't always *consciously* do things. We just do them. But we can change that and be more conscious of the things that we do. And even as practicing Buddhists, we often miss the ripest opportunities. Like, for example... in a situation where we feel darkness. And we can't really imagine how it is that we would experience the light again. But we can, in that moment, have an experience of, by virtue of a little bit of effort, to generate compassion for the people of the world who feel like they're trapped in something. And just that wish generates something different. It changes a little bit. And maybe along the way, you meet somebody who actually, has more equanimity than you thought was possible. And so you feel inspired by *that* sort of thing.

[00:40:29] So you're mentioning the ability to make differences and change. I think we can. The first thing is maybe to recognize that we can do those things. And the second thing is... do them. [laughs] Just do them and see what happens. So I had an instruction from a teacher a long time ago. And the bottom line was he suggested that every day I go into a store, a commercial place somewhere, every day and find somebody and have a short conversation with them. And that felt to me like at first, like it was a sentence into darkness. [laughter] But really. Like the idea that I would approach people that I didn't know and actually deliver something that would make them laugh or smile or have some kind of a short one-minute relationship was not even close to anything that I felt that I was. But I did it. And it opened up an enormous amount of things. And so it was just one of those things where we often miss the opportunity by virtue of not stepping in to a different place. Sometimes we stay where we are because it feels comfortable. But the reason we stay where we are is because we are *not* comfortable with something. So all those things come up little by little, and we discover them just by the movement of the mind, the body moving around. I don't see a conflict with what you're saying.

Student 6 [00:42:37] Thank you.

sangha [00:42:46] dedicating the merit

LMC [00:43:23] Thank you all for coming. So somebody just left a note here... which depending on which side of the fence you're on... is darkness or lightness. It's the approach of Daylight Savings Time. [laughter]