

*taking refuge - a reminder of why and how, **Carrying Practice**: short times many times with awareness on experience*

[00:04:51] Can you hear? It's loud enough? Nope? Loud enough? Too loud? Too bad. [chuckling] So there are many ways to begin a meditation session. ... And there are *definite* things that should be done when intending to begin a meditation session. So it's helpful... like in all endeavors, that we remind ourselves of why we're doing what we're doing. And that helps us get a clean start even if it's a rusty ending. And the tradition, before the practice of shamatha, we engage... in first recognizing all of the things that are on our minds. Our hopes and fears. Especially fears, since we generally take joy in our hopes... but almost never our fears.

[00:07:10] So we start by thinking about, pondering and *looking for* certain experiences. And fear... if you're really looking as opposed to just avoiding... fear is always there. Little fears and big fears, but they really dominate so many parts of our life. Some people have said, *all* of them, every day, all the time. ... So just as we are about to recite the refuge prayer, the refuge in the Buddha in particular, just take half a minute or less... and rest your awareness on one of the many things that you might be hopeful for or afraid of... without trying to correct it or cure it, just see it. So take a minute or two, see if you can do that. [short period of meditation] Then of course, following that, we will preface the longer meditation with the refuge prayer itself which we will recite together now three times.

Sangha [00:10:29] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:16:53] Can you see...that in the short period... of just making the effort to settle the mind... still the mind... that it is so difficult. ... It's easier to do it in the really tiny increments. Isn't it? I can put my awareness on almost anything... if the incremental period that I'm watching that thing... is short enough.

[00:18:01] So in this way, it's like so many things that we learn to do and accomplish... we take small segments. It's how we learn to read and think about things. Meditation is really no different. Just bring your... awareness to any experience that arises, for example. ... But bring your awareness to that... and keep an eye without any internal conversation whatsoever. Just to watch. ... And if your mind drifts continuously, then you just need to... cut the session down to size. If you can only do it for... five minutes, undistracted. That's actually pretty good.

[00:19:28] If you can only do it for... one second, then... bring your awareness to the experience you're having and settle it there without any commentary at all for just one second. When the second passes... just let the whole thing go. In this way... you can have the experience of settling the mind completely. In short pieces. Like drops of water... falling on the ground. Each one is insignificant, but when you add them up... you have a puddle. And ultimately, you have a lake.

[00:20:40] So in the same way. Perhaps you have a fear... of not accomplishing the meditation. Because, you know it's important... and so you tend to... tense up, perhaps. And try your best to hold your awareness... on something. Whatever it is. But that strategy is self-defeating. No matter how hard you try, you end up paying attention to a smaller and smaller subset of your experiences. And still... not getting your awareness to rest on the experience. So as that experience unfolds, then bring your mind back to the starting point where you sit down, take a

few breaths, relax. And notice... experiences arising and fading away. And just at any moment... you step into that stream... and rest your awareness on the experiences as they flow by.

[00:22:38] If you feel up to it, you can also... rest your awareness on other experiences. The one thing to shy away from... is to avoid thinking about the experiences. Like oohhh, that experience, I really want to put my awareness on that one. But that one is already gone. And it will never return. ... So as experiences arise while you're sitting and resting your awareness on the experiences as they come and go... when they come... just rest your awareness there. And when they go... just let them go and rest in what's left.

[00:24:18] So for a few minutes... bring your awareness to your experiences. Without any conceptual pondering and just rest your awareness there.

[00:24:36] short period of meditation

[00:26:02] When you are distracted... just bring your awareness back to your experience. ... Note that there is never a moment when an experience is not occurring. [pause] ... The issue is not whether we have experiences... the issue is whether we even notice them. ... Having noticed them... then we want to... just... gaze at that experience... as it unfolds. Not the memory of the experience. That is of no use. We want our awareness to rest on the living experience in the moment. ... Even if you have to bring your awareness there a thousand times. Any one of those thousand times, is far more valuable, in the moment that it occurs, than an uncountable series of experiences.

[00:28:04] short period of meditation

[00:30:21] If you feel profoundly distracted... then it's best to think of that as having found gold. ... You're alive! ... And you bring your awareness to that... distracted state... and in the moment of placing your awareness on that distracted state, or what you experience as the cause of that distraction... in the moment that you place your awareness there... you are utterly not distracted.

[00:31:20] In the state of not being distracted... you can see. If you look carefully, you can see... the distraction, or at least... you can feel it. ... Then once you felt it, once you've seen it... we need to let go of the judgment. That was good. That was bad. Why can't I do it better? Why isn't it more interesting? ... All the things that we can dream up. Most of which, in some way or another, fall... into the category of distraction. Because as soon as we recognized... the experience we're having... we sometimes... become afraid that we'll lose that experience. And then... the judgment. I'm not really very good at meditation.

[00:33:34] Every experience that we have... is a profound opportunity... to see... the essence of mind itself. ... It might be rather rare to knowingly experience... mind itself. But every time that you witness an experience... and see it with the mind's eye... you are moving in the direction of witnessing the most important thing that we have. The nature of mind itself. ... So important. ... That even just being able to walk past it and know what you're walking past... is so precious.

[00:35:07] And then... we need to let go of it. Each person in their own... at the point where it feels done. We relax, and let go of the entire@ process. Process is kind of like a bus ride. Once you get there, you don't stay on the bus! You get off. And in the same way, when we have made the effort, placed the awareness on the experience. When we've let go of the effort... and just

resting... with no object whatsoever... that's the best moment... to let go of the entire process and just relax again... in the entirety of your body and mind. Nothing more to do.

[00:36:22] period of meditation

[00:43:29] dedicating the merit

[00:44:19] [We'll] take a little break. And during that time, if we could... honor ourselves and each other by being silent as possible. So not formal silence. When you feel like you must, but... make an effort to continue in this supportive environment. To notice your experiences as they arise. And even just for a moment, just putting your awareness there on the experience and then it seems to just dissolve, that also is okay. And the fear of failure is also okay. And we'll talk a little bit more about that fear after the break. Okay?