

2019_12_01_am3_QA_LMC.mp4

Carrying Practice: seeing as fresh and looking at experiences as they unfold including hope and fear, some on deity practice and the importance to try whatever works without a sense of failure if change practices, Dorje Chang Thung-ma and view of fresh which is also ethic's foundation, the Mother Teresa story of everyday going out and meeting Jesus

LMC [00:01:08] So, if you have something on your mind that you would like to raise then we can chew on it. If not, then I'll force my opinions on you. [laughter]

Student 1 [00:01:53] Lama Michael, I feel like there's something really important here and I totally missed it.

LMC [00:02:00] I'm with you.

Student 1 [00:02:03] Things arise and dissolve. No beginning and no end. Now, to me, there's just a contradiction. I mean, yeah, they rise, they dissolve. Beginning. End. Like instant, like little quanta. And it's like there's nothing *but* beginning and ending. No duration. But begin, end, over and over and over. So I don't get this, no beginning, no end, which is so fundamental to Buddhism. So maybe I'm in the wrong place. I don't know.

LMC [00:02:32] Yeah. What are you doing here? [laughter] I think it's a troubling proposition. That 'no beginning and no end'. If you look at it long enough to kind of ponder it and literally kind of conceptually *talk* to yourself about it and maybe talk to others about it, you can come to a place where it's a very *useful* view to hold. I really mean useful. It's not like a dogmatic thing, like you don't have to *believe* in that. In fact, I would recommend definitely *not* believing in it, but it's useful. For example.

[00:03:25] Kind of a *stupid* example would be that the person says, I can't get this song out of my head. It's been going for three days. I feel like jumping off the bridge. It's so terrible. And they're saying, I'm hearing the same thing over and over again. But I think most of us, if not all of us, could say, no, no. It's not the *same* thing. The name of the tune is the same. The label that's on it is the same. But the music itself is *never* the same. Like a violinist can play a piece of music ten times. And I think they would say *for sure* no two of them were the same. How could it be? It's just not possible. Conceptually maybe it's possible to think you played the same music over and over, but... experientially, if you paid *attention*, there were differences. So that's kind of the simple piece of what I think. We tend to want to concretize and set things in place so that we don't actually have to deal with it anymore. Or if it's bad, at least we can put it in the backyard and put a hood over it so that we don't have to deal with it.

[00:04:57] But the problem is... like the whole issue of fear. We want to eradicate fear. But how? It's not our *job*, as Buddhists, where we are trying to actually discover the nature of mind itself. And we're never going to *find* it, we're never going to see it by trying to homogenize the process to the point where... we keep getting the same answer. Like every time I add five and three, I get eight. So it's the same result. That is kind of the essence of the conceptual approach. We *always* get the same result. after some period and we feel like that's what it's supposed to *be*. But it's not supposed to be that because it *isn't* that. We sing the song and it's never the same song. You can say, yeah, it's the same song, but actually we know it's not the same. There's differences.

[00:06:08] And that's really what it is. So then if we *magnify* that... and spread it out a little bit, we can see. I see that... the very basis of Buddhist philosophical thought really comes out of, or *spawns* the proposition that... every experience that we have, like in the Dorje Chang Thung-ma, that one prayer, the end of the prayer is like absolutely *everything* is fresh. So just slightly more nuanced, we could say, everything is fresh and it never occurs twice. So if we look at *that*, if you can come to that place and say, actually, every experience I have has never occurred before. Well, you can say, well, no, I've been depressed before. I've been angry before. But it's not the *same* anger. It's not the same day of the week. You have to look to find the thing to connect all the pieces together to make it look like it's the same thing again. But you never actually can nail that down. And if you *do* nail it down. You took a wrong turn... somewhere in there, because it isn't what it is.

[00:07:49] I mean, we make this mistake in our lives normally, not as Buddhists or any other thing, we tend to think every time I go to that restaurant, I get sick. That could be absolutely true, but it's not the same sickness. It's not the same experience. It's not the same food, exactly. So what we're trying to do here is... get clear with the experience that we're having. Without trying, if it's fear... we don't want to get rid of the fear. We want to experience it. Because that fear, and the reason why fear is so important is hope and fear are the two fundamental obstacles to recognizing the nature of mind. Hope and fear. Those two things are the primary issues. And then, of course, we can elaborate on them into all sorts of obstacles and practices to deal with it and all but hope and fear is really it.

[00:09:04] And of course, I don't think I'm unusual in... entering a retreat and hearing that there is a book that I can look in and see, like what is the nature of the highest realization? So you know, thumb through the book to see if you can find the nature of the highest realization... and it's there! It's there... fundamentally in two things. Like enlightenment itself is... fundamentally recognizable as... a complete absence of hope and fear. So you look at that and you think, oh... I know what that is. I know what *hope* is. I know what *fear* is. I know what disappointment is. I can make a long list. But I actually don't know how to *experience*... the *absence* of the hope and fear.

Well, [00:10:14] The method to get to the absence of hope and fear is to go *into* the hope and fear. Not to try and avoid it. Because it has the same nature as joy, anger, generosity, kindness. It has exact same nature. But *fear*... is really much more interesting than kindness and all the things. Fear, when it's big... is really interesting. So if we can *have* the experience of fear without feeling like we're about to be executed or something, we just have fear that I'm gonna be bankrupt and I'll be poor and I'll lose my house. And my wife is sick and I think she's gonna die. And so we have these concerns and fears. And fundamentally, we could play all sorts of games to undo them. But the idea is, is that why would you *do* that? You have that thing in your hand. It's no more dangerous than it ever was before. And so there's an opportunity to do something with it.

[00:11:31] And there are many things we can do with it. And I just *picked*, not exactly out of a hat, but I picked like we will talk about it from the perspective *of*... the *value* of placing your *awareness* on that fear. So that's not going to make it *more* fearful. And it's not going to remove the fear. But one big thing happens is that the anger, the fear, all those things arise from the nature of mind. They don't come from other people, no matter what the relationships are. They come out of the mind. Mind generates them. So, in order to *recognize* the nature of mind, at some point we have to... explore it directly.

[00:12:31] It's kind of like a river, right? You get in your raft or something and you go out on the river. You can't have that experience without going out on the river. And you can't completely guarantee that it won't tip over. And you can't completely guarantee that the people, your friends that you took with you, won't drown. So there's always going to be a certain kind of *tension*. Like we're going on the river, like we want to go out and we want to take the trip, and we want to come back again. So there's always that thing in the background. I remember once a guy who raced motorcycles. And I don't know how he convinced me to get on the back of his motorcycle, but he did. And I was absolutely terrified. That is not the best way to explore the nature of mind. [laughs] And I don't know why it was, but I ended up getting a more a little motorcycle and then I almost got killed. And so that was sort of the end.

[00:13:46] That's too much fear. But the little fears that we have, the recollection of fear is of virtually no use. We want the *actual* experience of fear. Not the recollection, I remember being really afraid on that thing. That is in the so-what-bucket. What we want... we look around at our experiences as they unfold. And along the way we will say, whoa! That's... that's, right now I have that fear. That's the *perfect* time. Now, instead of trying to avoid it, to paper it over with something, to literally sit down and bring your awareness to that fear. Just rest with it. Don't talk about it to yourself. Don't encourage yourself. Just look at it. That's it. And it won't last very long. Five seconds, five minutes. And then it's gone. But... we could say the good news is, there'll be another fear coming right along. And we counted ourselves as *successful* when we can avoid all that fear. We're basically throwing away the fruit, kept the seeds.

[00:15:13] So I think that when we say, there's no beginning and no end. What we mean is the beginning is always fresh. ... It's *always* fresh. So, in a way, from that simple thing we can say, there is no beginning, really. The beginning *is* the result of an ending. Which also wasn't exactly an ending, but it was a place that came along through rich circumstances of all kinds. And at some point, I stopped and looked at it and realized that... the music that I am listening to that I'm so *tired* of, that I so loved before... the circumstances were changed. And I no longer like that music. But the problem really isn't the music. The problem is... that there were other things there that I had not been able to put my awareness on and to understand that whole process.

[00:16:23] Putting our awareness on our experience is... one of the most classic... Buddhist injunctions. Like put your awareness on the experience. But that doesn't mean *think* about it and try and figure it out. That's another process entirely. We want to just *have* the experience. And fear is a great one because we all have fear. At some level... it's a little bold to say it, but I think at some level it seems to me like... we always carry a certain amount of fear. Sometimes, some people carry *a lot*. So much that they just die young from it. It's so painful and so much angst in it. And other people don't. And who knows how that all works together?

[00:17:21] But I will say, I think, from personal experience, the most interesting and *useful* experiences are the experiences that I have that I don't try to fix. I just try to see it. And when we see it, we are actually getting close to seeing the nature of mind. In a certain way, we see the nature of mind often, but we don't recognize it. Early on Kalu Rinpoche said, we sit in order to still the mind. But, I don't remember the exact words he said, but fundamentally he said, it's a hoax. The mind is not still. In case you didn't notice. [laughs] Well, we've *all* noticed it and felt like we were failures at times. Like, why can't I be still? He basically said, like, that's not what we're really doing... to be still. We are trying to see the *nature* of that movement.

[00:18:32] And that was a big opening, I thought. Working with that a little bit, I thought... I can do this a lot easier. then somehow try to concretize my mind into a solid state somehow, where it

doesn't move anymore. And so that was helpful. I didn't really kind of *get* that for about five years. And the other one was the... no beginning and no end.

[00:19:07] I think all of us engaging in the rich philosophical aspects of Buddhist thought and the rich practices also, we're trying to find something. And one of the issues is that we don't always know what we're even trying to find. And we meet people like the Karmapa and the Dalai Lama and others, and we feel like *that's* what I want. [laughs] Unfortunately, they can't just dish it out. ... And sometimes it just looks like, I mean, we lose people because they work so hard to get it and then give up. There's that issue. But it's not always that difficult. Personally, I like to divide things up into bite sized thing. Like sit down and... look at your experiences as they unfold. Just look at them. Don't try to criticize them. Don't try to run away from them. Don't really try to hang on to them. ... That's the best. It's really a twofold process. You put your awareness on the experience and if the awareness rests for, you know, like normally put your awareness on the experience and it's like balancing a marble on another marble. It just instantly rolls off. Like we kind of put it there and then it's gone. Put it there and then it's gone. And that's not helpful. That's sort of frustrating. But it's frustrating because we don't know *why* we're doing it at some point. And what are we supposed to get from it.

[00:21:03] If the awareness if you can put the awareness on the experience... I'll say a little more about this. If you can have an experience that... is strong, but not so strong that it completely derails you all the time and not so weak that it's not interesting, but one of those kind of in-between ones. If you can put your awareness on one of those experiences and the awareness just kind of rests there. Then the next thing you do is... put your awareness on the *awareness* of the experience. And *that*, through many machinations of meditation practices is fundamentally meant to take us to the place where we have insight into the nature of mind, which is the fundamental goal of the entire tradition. ... I have a certificate here for you if you'd like. [laughs]

Student 1 [00:22:14] You mentioned rivers. Heraclitus said, you can't step twice in the same river. And then he said even more than that, you actually can't even step once into the same river. And, let's take as an example Oliver's alarm, [LMC asks, was that you, Oliver?] when Oliver's alarm went off.

LMC [00:22:38] No, but that was another Oliver. [laughter]

Student 1 [00:22:42] Yeah. It wasn't the same, in fact it wasn't any Oliver at all. But, when that went off... there was kind of a pure reaction in my mind like just panic. Which wasn't conceptual. But then, oh shit an alarm. And then I thought, oh my god, it's still going on. And then, oh! thank god it's over. There's this whole series of experiences there which, got kind of conceptually compressed into, *the alarm went off*. And each one of those little, minute reactions kind of had a beginning and an end. But it was all my mind going out to this and having sort of mental experiences focused on that sound and the end of that sound. ... Not really a question, was it?

LMC [00:23:44] This is not a question period... this is a free-for-all. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:24:00] So Michael, way back in the 1990's you used to talk, in your instructions for shamatha, you used to say a lot about using the breath as a support. And I don't hear you saying that any more. And there's also...

LMC [00:24:20] I've never said the same thing twice. [laughter]

Student 2 [00:24:28] Actually, I remember you did... every week! And it was really helpful. And then there's also cultivating devotion to the root Lama. Which, is something we all have to find on our own I think. But I find that this focus only on momentary experience without a support, gets a little... amorphous, a little hard to stay with. So perhaps you could, for old time sake, talk a little bit about using the breath as support, or meditation on the deity or the Lama as a support, and then returning to just bare naked awareness.

LMC [00:25:26] Wow. ... What are you looking for?

Student 2 [00:25:37] Well it's always right here. [LMC laughs]

LMC [00:25:45] Well you know, that was then. For sure. We had... I think in important ways, it was a very different time. And we were all very excited about... our tradition, about our community, about so many things. And then we weren't excited. Then we beat ourselves up. Then we found that again. That's been going on ever since. ... Well... I don't really want to get into the deities. I think that deity yoga is a profound practice. ... In a certain way, I can say that in my own experience of deity yoga, at its best, it was never better nor worse than anything else. In fact, it always seemed to me, pretty close to the beginning, that it was the *same* as all the other practices. And so, the challenge was, kind of like what makes it the same? It's like, here is a glass of water and here's chocolate milk and they're the same. And you taste them and you say, it doesn't *taste* the same! But maybe, in fact after you drink it, you *feel* the same. Like maybe it has nutrition in it or something that you didn't know about. And I think the deity yoga in some ways is like that too. Like, you have to go *into* it and practice it... and not to try to conceptualize it. I will say the conceptualization of deity practice is fatal. Not to the practitioner, though it possibly could be. [laughs] But more like I think it's fatal to the practice itself.

[00:28:44] The experiential aspect is what brings it to life. The deity could just be a concrete or metal statue. And that really... it's questionable, like what do you get from that? So there's something else has to happen in there to make it work. And, I've often thought it's a *thawing* process. We have an idea, like we can get into deity yoga for example and have the sense that this is going to be really hot! And then it's actually frozen. And you can't figure out why you're doing it. And it's hard work, *way* hard work. And so, then you dump it and then go do something else. And then maybe come back later and do it, which is also quite common. And, some people say that's really not good to do. But I think, in the matter of spiritual growth and in the manner of human beings coming to recognize the nature of mind, it's like whatever *gets* you there is the right thing. And if you have to do it over and over and throw it out and go back to it a couple of years later, that's what you do. There is no failure. You just have to abandon the idea that there's failure because... *everyone* can do this! And I think I agree with Kalu Rinpoche when he said, no beginning, no end, dead or alive. I think anyone can do this and I will add into it... dead or alive.

[00:30:38] If you practice enough while you're alive you will practice enough when you are dead. It is my *weak* experience but nonetheless a certain strong sense that... conception and birth is not a beginning, it's a continuation of something. And death is a continuation of something. Things changing. And because of our fear... to a significant degree, we call death an end. But I think that there is a lot of *experiential* evidence that, that is just not the case. And I wouldn't have said that 20 years ago, but now I do. As a result, the fear is totally not there at all. I think, some of these things are hard to nail down. And as good Americans we *insist* on nailing things down. And we're great at conceptualizing. I mean the extraordinary scientific things that have been done, inventions and all, we're like masters of it. But we're not masters of our own minds. We *use* them really well for doing these other things but when it comes to *insight* into the real nature of things,

were not any better than anybody else is. ... So I encourage people to continue with it. And if you feel like you are just not getting it, then you need something new. You need some other approach. I think all the pieces are available... and some of them outside Buddhism too. Wherever you can find it, dig there. [laughs] You know.

Student 2 [00:32:54] Thank you.

LMC [00:33:05] How we doing? ...We have about 15 minutes or so.

Student 3 [00:33:22] So, you started talking about that one section in the Dorje Chang Thung-ma, about the essence of all thought that arises is fresh. It's the one I am always captivated by it, I mean it's...

LMC [00:33:43] Does that mean you get stuck?

Student 3 [00:33:46] No it's just the one for me. And so when [student 1] was talking about no beginning no end, I kept coming back to, is it this idea that we *bracket* things? Like, something arises and I bracket it. Then I make it a *thing*, like it's an object. And so, when you were talking today, I thought, well, if I kind of held it in that flow of, no beginning no end, then maybe I loosen that perception of 'thingness', or object. I don't know where my question is in here but I love talking about this. [laughter] And then I started reading the English translation again and it said, the *essence* of all thought that arises is new. And I thought, is that different than me just saying the... *words* that I put on it are new? Does that make any sense to you? Like thinking about it as the *essence* is new as opposed to the phrase... or the word?

LMC [00:35:36] I think we need to look at it slightly different. I think it's easy to grasp, from a strictly personal perspective, that we live on a continuum of sorts. So... what I eat for lunch will determine how I feel after lunch and might even determine whether I live or not, [laughs] and so on. But, let's just say, in a kind of normal way, I get up in the morning and I go for a run. And going for a run *affects* my mental state... and my body. And then I get to the destination and maybe I have some lunch. And *that* affects my body. So I feel a little different from it. So change is kind of taking place and I can *witness* it. And then I run into somebody that I know and we walk together and we have a conversation. That conversation is affected by what I had for breakfast and the run that I had. So you see? There's a continuum here that starts and continues. ... And that has no beginning and no end. So each thing that I do affects my experience in the next moment. And some of it is a bigger wave and lasts for days or weeks, continues to go. But finally it deteriorates into a conceptual understanding and gradually just dissolves. But that doesn't mean that there is an end. That just means that *I* wasn't sensitive enough to see it.

[00:37:59] So the idea is, the fundamental underlying teaching is... that everything you do affects the next thing that you experience. And that affects what you do in that place, which affects... the best thing is, we have a continuous chain of, you could say, causal conditions. In fact Buddhists say that. [laughter] Causal conditions continually bring something else, bring something else, bring something else. And it's through *that* that we get things like... reincarnation, which I find to be kind of a hokey idea. But when you look at it, kind of close, from the causal condition place and you think... instead of just having like this well, you're going to be born in a bad place because you did these things. Which is really not the causal condition. There are really just a string of judgments that we actually can't really analyze and calculate anyway.

[00:39:12] But if we just think in our own lives, how did we land here? What do I actually *know* is kind of close to the beginning... I would have to think that I had a mother... and a father, maybe. And that I was born from some small little seed. And life kind of started there and began to go. And from that point to the end of this life... we would say, we can kind of see, things went along and you were good at this and you weren't so good at that. And these things happened. And then you came to the end of your life. And all that we really do is we say, well that's kind of the simple story. But what if, in fact, that is just not the end? Just because *you* don't see what the end is or that there is an end, or you *think* there is an end, that doesn't mean that there actually *is* an end. What if instead of that, all of those causal conditions that you went along with, that was a whole series of seeds that came from previous generations, individuals and all the relationships with them were *all* more causes and conditions rolling forward all the time and then you die. And those causal conditions continue. They don't come to an end. And from *that*, you also, your experience continues without interruption. So you may, in fact, from that, you may be born a human being. You may be born something else. And your experiences, having been born or not being born will determine the kinds of things that *you* do, again... in the future over and over again. So if you look at all of that, and you hold that view, no beginning, in other words, you can't really say this is where it started because you can't really tell where the last thing ended.

[00:41:30] So therefore we say, there's no real end and there's no real beginning. Because, you actually can't put a *peg* there and say *that's* where it ended. And so out of that kind of comes the, I would say... first, the philosophical position that beings die but they actually come again into other forms, which we, in my sense of it being kind of hokey, as reincarnation. And for decades I thought, don't give me that. It's like I don't know what to do with that. So what? But gradually, and it was actually out of that one line of a prayer that we call the Dorje Chang Thung-ma, where in a very short one or two lines a case is made that every thought we have, every experience we have, is *absolutely* fresh. It doesn't mean that it's *independently* fresh. It's fresh because along this like, unending chain of causes and conditions, every time anything is done in there you could say, the whole thing's fresh! Maybe it's not grossly different, but... if you add on to that all the things that happen between... birth and death and death and birth, we get a continuous thing going. And so the philosophy that what you do in this life will bear fruit in the next life. It will also bear fruit tomorrow, right after you did it. [laughs] It's just that... somebody *picked* that it was going to be between life and death. But actually, the more robust form is just a chain of causal conditions that has no beginning and no end. You can't find the beginning. Where you going to go to find it? And where are you going to find the end? Well, as good Americans, we define the end as the point where we buried them. But... that's kind of arbitrary decision. That's the end? Maybe. Why? Because, I can't speak anymore and my body is decomposing? Why is that the end? How about the things that I did just before that and the things I just before than in previous lives and all? Does that have any effect now? Or is there some stop point? The Tibetans basically say, no, there isn't a stop point. It just keeps going. And I take that and... chew on it for a while. And I think I see. For me, if I hold the largest view, *that's* the foundation for ethics. Ethics are really important if you take that view. Because what *you* do and say in all ways is going to influence you in *this* life and the next life and the next life and so on. And it actually is the reason why you're here... now. From previous causes and conditions, it just keeps going.

[00:45:19] It's cyclic existence. Just keeps rolling forward. And we don't get to witness it in the way that we witness it when we're alive and flesh and all. But... we tend to acknowledge what we can see and feel and taste. And the rest of it, as our conceptual understanding in our current culture tends to make it easy for people to just write off anything beyond that. Which, I confess, I did for at least a decade, first decade. But after that I started thinking, no actually... I have no reason to think that it comes to an end there. In a certain way I thought, I also have no reason to

think that it doesn't or it does. I can't see it, but it's a *very* interestingly *functional* view to hold. Not a belief. I'm totally against belief, I've got to say. I think it's totally functional to softly hold the view that... the likelihood appears to be that, I am totally *not* convinced that there is an end at death or any other kind of end. And, as a result, I tend to treat people differently.

[00:47:06] There's another tradition which is not Buddhist. Which I want to just mention this because I found it to be the most interesting statements that I'd ever heard. And it's a statement of a conversation between a politician in India and Mother Teresa. And the politician asked Mother Teresa at one point, why do you go out every morning in horrible conditions and work with dying people every day? Like many people dying and sick and dying and all the work that she did with all of that and worked with those people. And she didn't hire somebody else to do it, she actually *did* that work herself. Moved those people around and took care of them. And so this guy who was saying, like I don't understand. What do you get from that? She said, what I get is, I go out every morning and work with all of those dying people. That's what *you* see. What I see is I go out every morning and I meet and work with Jesus Christ. ... [laughs] That was her thing! And I thought, whoa! wait a minute, I would be a Christian tomorrow if I thought *that*. That would *totally* bring me to a place that I feel like, I've never been before. I mean I didn't become a Christian, but... I was amazed at her ability to *do* that. And I thought, if you *really* thought that you were connecting with Jesus Christ every time you went out in the morning, who wouldn't go? Wouldn't everybody want to go? [laughs] It just was so simple.

[00:49:21] That's... I think, what you get when you *really* put yourself totally into the place of working with these materials. The *fear* is eradicated. Like in two meetings with Mother Teresa, it was totally clear. She had no fear of *anything*. And that's also very interesting, because everybody's got fear. But she had *no* fear. And many people said that about her, like no fear. Just isn't there. So I think that holding the view, so I attribute that to the view that she holds, that she meets Jesus Christ every day. I don't mean that she really doesn't. But just... the *is* view there. Like I pick somebody up who's dying and covered with filth and all that stuff, and she thinks to herself, the filth and all that stuff maybe there, but this is Jesus Christ. So, she holds the view and lives through the view. And the result is... what anyone can know, no matter, And I think that we also have that power, to hold the view. And that's what the view is about. To bring us to a place where we can live in that spot and work with it. So to hold the view... that there is no beginning and no end. When you start pondering that, you start seeing all sorts of things. Oh, like I see this could be, that could be, and so on. And I think that's how we gradually can enrich our understanding of those things.

[00:51:55] Nobody's left yet but you might like to. [laughter] So perhaps we can dedicate the merits of our efforts, which is, for those of you who don't know, dedicating the merit is to say whatever good, whatever blessings come, by virtue of our effort working together, that we make the wish that it would be shared by all beings, without exception.

Sangha [00:51:55] dedicating the merit