

## 2019\_12\_29\_am1\_Shamatha\_LMC.mp4

*because mind is experience factory learning to slow mind down by placing awareness on totality of our experiences as they're occurring using short time many times*

[00:05:03] To begin with this morning, we will recite the short liturgy of refuge. Then we'll continue.

**sangha** [00:05:19] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:09:13] So as we have said before... the practice of calm abiding is... in many ways, the foundation... of all of our practices. Of some necessity, when we sit down to meditate... it behooves us to... settle the mind as well as we can. Settle the body as a support... for the settled mind. Though we have to say, in all honesty, the *settled* mind... is almost never settled. ... We don't care. The settled mind... is no better than the moving mind. And vice versa. ... In the context of calm abiding, without which... it's extremely difficult, if possible, at all... to practice calm abiding. ... So instead of this morning looking for... something that we could settle our mind upon... which almost always means we are looking for something outside of ourselves, which is already still... so that we could hook our wagon up to that! But the mind and the hook up and the wagon and all the rest... all except for the mind... might well *be* still. ... But the mind... it's almost never still. Actually, in 1973, the then renowned... meditation master Kalu Rinpoche... actually said the mind *is* never still. Period. Its nature... is... appearances... experiences... visions... and all the rest. And after he listed them... and said that the mind was like an experience factory... that runs day and night. All the time. And then somehow, my favorite quote from him was, he capped it by saying, dead or alive. In other words... referencing the teaching that we know... which is that... the mind never dies, nor was it ever born.

[00:13:52] So given all of that, if you think about it carefully, you could easily come to... a place where you felt like there was no entry for you. Or no exit. One or the other, or maybe both! ... One of our issues, so common... for all of us as beginners... and also, as those who have practiced a lot... coming to terms with the stillness and the lack of stillness... is something of a puzzle. ... One of the common obstacles to resting our awareness... on the mind... which is a very advanced state of meditation, resting our awareness on the mind. We might think, so easy to do. It's with me all the time. But everyone who has worked with it knows... it's like trying to balance a marble on another marble. You can place your awareness there... but not likely that you will tame it.

[00:15:47] So this morning, I thought it might be useful to take a different tact. ... How do we *get* our minds to slow down? Because on the surface, it looks like if we *can't* slow down, we're sort of doomed. But we know that's not the instruction. And no renowned great meditator has ever said that it's hopeless. ... So I think one of the issues is that... we insist... on the *object* of our meditation, like the lid to this cup, when I put it there, voilà! It is still. The problem is that it's not the mind. [laughter] So we're back to where we started.

[00:17:32] One of the... issues is that we commonly use an *object* of meditation. Like, for example, this stick for making the bell ring. I could put it on a little stand here and it would stick and it would be very still. And then I could put my awareness on that stick. And to some degree, that might help me to relax and maintain an awareness of the stick. But after some time... a minute, an hour, a year... if you didn't get bored, you must have died. [laughter] ... The problem is, is that all the things that we want to rest our awareness on... even things that are still...

seems like it should be easy. Because it's still when I put it down, it doesn't run around. But we all know it doesn't matter. We will... seemingly, endlessly, chase that thing around. And we know that's *not* the process, nor is it the end state. ... But there is a solution to the conundrum... of finding something worthwhile. Placing our awareness on, like, for example, an emotional state like frustration or anger or desire of some kind. How do we *use* those things? Because if we can only use dead sticks, the entire tradition will never sing.

[00:20:19] There's an alternative approach. Most of you... know me as someone who *always* looks for an alternative. For many years, always the... alternative which finally would *work*. But that never happened. And so the issue really is... that the more important thing to place our awareness on is our own experience. And the more... animated the experience is... the better. ... That's true, you know. The more we can see the mind move, the more we have a sense of what's happening and how it works. So we can't *just* place our awareness on a stick or a leaf or some other thing and think that somehow that's going to work. We place our mind on the leaf... not to take refuge in the *leaf*, but to kind of help and aid the mind's ability to slow down, even if it doesn't stop. But it still is so unsatisfying, that leaf. Even though it came off a bodhi tree. It's possible the Buddha himself sat under that tree. And we ooh and ahh for a little while and then it's like... we're not really sure why we're doing it.

[00:22:27] Another option of using the bodhi leaf, or anything else, as the object upon which to place the awareness... has to be our own experience. There's nothing else that will work as well. And all of our practices... even the tantric practices and everything, it finally comes to the place of... you must recognize your own experience. Definitely must recognize it. Not just in the sense of, oh, damn, I'm angry. That's not good enough. We have to actually *see*... the anger. See it, kind of a living presence of some kind, if you will. Failing to do that... it's kind of like we walked to the river to get some water. But on the way home, while we were thinking about how heavy the water was, we ended up little by little, not suddenly, little by little, spilling the water. And when we got home, the bucket was empty. And it seemed no matter what we did, it was always empty at the other end.

[00:24:05] Shamatha can be done... by placing our awareness on a single... still thing. And it's good. It's not like it's no good. It's good! But far better is to place our awareness upon... and literally merge with, by witnessing the characteristic of the experience. ... The nice thing about emotions is... they're always kind of magnetizing. Even in a negative way, we're drawn to it. Kind of like a magnet. You get close and you're drawn to it. So our issue really is... how do you get close? How do you allow yourself to be drawn into... the hellstrom [sp?]. ... of our emotional states. Since the Dharma's all about... quelling our desires, our anger, our greed, our jealousy, all these things... somewhere in there, there's no magic, there's something like... you must rest your awareness on the experience of the emotion. And here is where an interesting thing comes, because the general teaching is, if you can still the fires of emotion, you'll be free of them. ... But we've all stilled those fires. I'll bet there's nobody here who hasn't. ... We just don't continue. We just do it and then we walk away from it. And that's the difficulty.

[00:26:32] So how do I, how do I look at something? This thing [holding up bodhi leaf] isn't going to work, so I think instead... I'm angry, I'm hungry or whatever it is. So I try to put my awareness on that. Because I need to *feel* directly my experience. Because *that's* really what the path is. You have to make peace with *yourself* first. And the best thing to put your awareness on is the most unruly, not peaceful, thing you can find.

[00:27:16] And the way to do that... is simple. If I'm having an experience... let's just say the experience of that bell. I can put my awareness on the experience of the sound. And it just rings a little bit and then it's gone. And what I want to do, I'm not shutting this down, please... [laughs, as if ringing bell meant start of meditation session] ... the antidote to all the little problems that we have *can* be... approached... by placing your awareness... on *all* of the experiences you're having, not just one, but all of them. Because by the time you're 15 years old, you know that they do not line up in orderly fashion. And yet putting our awareness on it and *feeling* the emotions, whatever they are, is critical. Whether we want to or not, that is definitely the path. One way or the other, by whatever method... you have to make friends... with your worst side, as well as the best side. And trying to do it object by object... is, for most of us, a dead end. I can only put my awareness on my jealousy for a short time unless I really get it beefed up really good, but then I might kill someone. [laughter] So it's a little bit of a trap. You need to put your awareness on it, but you don't have the ability to hold it there.

[00:29:41] So the alternative to putting our awareness *on* that thing is to put awareness on *all* those things. Every emotional state that we have. Every thought that arises. Just kind of... not in a kind of wild way of going there and going there and going there and there and all over the place, but rather *notice* the movement and put your awareness on that movement. So if you have ten emotional states, two people you're going to kill, one person you're going to marry [laughs] and so on, then you, you take all of those things. The things that you like. The things you don't like. You put it *all* together and you put your awareness on the *whole* thing. Embrace it... wholeheartedly.

[00:30:40] And then with the body... settle... still... with the *body*. Because all of our emotional states affect the body. So it is a very convenient thing to have... a body. As opposed to just *disembodied* emotion... might be very difficult to work with. But it's never disembodied for most of us. We have relationship *through* the body. So putting our awareness on the emotional state. And just watching it. And then putting your awareness on *all* the emotional states all at once. Kind of like... you had some honey and 35 bees came to the honey. You could easily, in a certain way more easily, place your awareness on the 35 bees than you could on a single one. So the trick, if I could call it that, which is really not fair, but just for the moment, the trick is... place your awareness on the totality of your experiences as they're occurring. And don't try to hold it there more than a few seconds. So it comes. They're all there. You just rest your awareness there. You know what's going to happen. But you don't have to talk to yourself about it. You just rest the awareness. Gradually... it becomes a little bit confused, like it always does. You just... pull back. Just rest free of it. And in another moment, without taking very much time at all, look again. Just keep looking at all of the experiences. Keep bringing your awareness to it. And when it feels like, it's become disoriented and too busy... then rest... on the totality of the experiences. Not the ones like that one and that one and that one and that one. Oh, that one, I can't stand that one! I got to go to this one. Not that! But just the totality of all of them... at once. And they all move. They're all connected. You have a different experience... every time your awareness lands on one person or another person, it changes everything.

[00:33:27] So now... we've done that. Now we have to do something real. That wasn't real. In case you didn't notice. The shamatha of this is to sit in the ways that we all know. Sit, relax. Relax, just short of falling asleep. Add... into the mix, something that is delightful. Something that really sings to you. Like something beautiful that you saw. Or you met an old friend on the way here this morning and you had a sense, an emotional feeling. So we rest our awareness on that. But the more of those things that you can bring, the better.

[00:34:34] So I'm going to say one more thing and then we're going to sit with as best as you can. ... It's not important to make progress. If they'd only said that when I was 15, it would have been so good. It's not important to make progress. It's important to keep noticing... who you are. Like what experiences you are generating and having them? To keep looking at them. Like flash on them. And then... you'll slide off and go to another one, which is okay. Just put your awareness *there*. And keep moving like that with it. And the mind will move, too. But the mind can always go faster than you can. So you learn to relax then with... a subset. But it can feel like the whole range of things at any given time. We don't want to reduce this to something clever. Or something that isn't important. There is nothing more important than knowing who you are.

[00:36:05] We don't get to know ourselves by reading a book about ourselves. Because whoever wrote the book, that was yesterday. We're not even that person. Even today, we sit down and practice a little bit... and we look at the myriad of experiences we're having. If you try to find *yourself* in that place, you will be confused. And even if you think you found yourself, it's yesterday's experience. It's not today's. In other words, when we say we think we found ourselves, what we really mean is... I have a memory of something that happened yesterday. It's not today's experience. Today's experience is your memory of that. And that is as thin as you could possibly get. In order for us to wake up... we need to use all the power... of our confusion, our happiness, our sadness, all the emotional states, as many as we can bring to bear.

[00:37:21] So let's take... five or six hours? Just kidding. I could feel the groans even though I couldn't hear them. My gawd, would he really do that to me? [laughs] And see if you can... bring your awareness... sit for a little moment... just with yourself quietly. Doesn't matter like how well you're sitting or not. And bring your awareness to the experiences as they arise. And first, just one or two and then just kind of open it up and in a certain sense... slightly corny, but I'll say... invite all of them in. You know, there's a there's a story about this, connected with Milarepa, about inviting in all of the demons, all of the thoughts, all of the experiences and all. But we're not doing that today. You have to do the six hours with yourself first.

[00:38:34] So if you will do that and try to look at the experiences that arise... and use them as a place to just rest your awareness... and then bring your awareness back to the experiences that you're having. And just go back and forth with that for a while... as if you were... discovering yourself. Which is in fact, if you do it correctly, that is exactly what's happening. You're discovering yourself. I mean, we have to say that as Buddhists, we don't actually believe there is a self. So that's a little bit of a problem. But what we have is... we have endless experiences. So it's easy to find an experience. It's easy to find a dozen experiences and put all your awareness on it. And keep... kind of flashing on the experiences. Because what you're looking at is actually as close as you can get to who you are.

[00:39:40] So if you're trying to make it better than you thought it was, the trying to make it better is also who you are. It's not the practice particularly, but practicing putting our awareness back on the very thing that troubles us is extremely helpful. In fact, it's a prerequisite. We cannot really *know* who we are and what we are and what we're doing without watching ourselves do it. Okay? We won't do this for three hours, maybe just 20 minutes.

[00:40:16] *short period of meditation*

[00:45:04] When you feel an experience and you're putting your awareness on that experience... do not substitute *thinking* about the experience for the *actual* experience. It's important to stay

with the ephemeral nature of experience. And not fall into the trap of equating conceptual understanding with those experiences.

*[00:45:38] short period of meditation*

**sangha** *[00:49:41] dedicating the merit*