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*learning to work with intense emotions by quickly and repeatedly flashing on the turmoil and also in this way recognizing nature of our mind*

**LMC** [00:00:06] We're doing multiple things... and some of them are being done simultaneously and in a disjunct order. So we're about to do our normal Q&A and all, but some of us have also put together in conjunction with conversations with Lama Eric, that we would also answer questions about what the situation is here. What it will be. What it was. And what kind of changes are obvious and kind of lined up for something. Any of those things that might be there, are also open for inquiring. And we can work with those. Okay?

**student 1** [00:01:44] We're doing Q&A first, right?

**LMC** [00:01:46] Yeah, I'm waiting for [you].

**student 1** [00:01:49] There's a play about that. My morning meditation is organized around that little mahamudra booklet by Bokar Rinpoche. A little thing with Bokar's photograph on it. And it sets forth a very detailed agenda for meditation each day of the week. On Tuesday, you know that you're going to contemplate death and impermanence. And your support is going to be small, sacred or non-sacred object. Every day there's a different regimen that set out, and I love that because that's the way I am. I like to take orders. [laughter]

**LMC** [00:02:47] I'll make a note on that here. [laughter]

**student 1** [00:02:53] So anyway, that's set up for seven days a week, and I like that. And, you know, essentially I... problem is, I only meditate in the morning, and so that *is* my routine. And so my question is, how does this fit with what *you're* talking about? Which is... be open to your experiences, watch your experiences, see what comes up there. To heck with the meditation support. Forget the small sacred object. Forget the seven times twenty-one breaths.

**LMC** [00:03:30] Why would you do that?

**student 1** [00:03:31] Just look at your experiences? So, and I think during break, I kind of figure out, well, I just need to do more meditating so that I can do things differently at different times. And not, you know, just be a mahamudra slave. [laughter]

**LMC** [00:03:49] Wow!

**student 1** [00:03:49] But... so I think I just realized I'm limiting myself too much to just do that morning sit and just follow that recommendation. And it's sort of... forecloses me from other approaches. Well, yeah.... like what you're describing and also yidam practice. I mean, there's no yidam practice in there either. So, I guess this is more a soliloquy than a question, but it seems like I just need to do more meditation and do it different ways. Comments?

**LMC** [00:04:30] Yeah, I think if we had the time and... enough people to work with it... that the best situation would be that everyone who wanted it could have like a personal trainer. Somebody who would sit down with you and work with those things periodically.

**student 1** [00:04:59] It would be a great revenue source. [laughter]

**LMC** [00:05:04] I'm going to mark that down too. [He] said, it would be a great... Yes, I understand. I think that's about, you know, at least 'three commas' in there. So it's always interesting to ask the question, what would be more helpful? I think it's a good idea. I think some people don't like that. Or they don't like to hear it and they don't want to be asked about it. But I think that actually, *especially* in our culture, which is still struggling with like, what is this stuff? It's not integrated in our culture to the degree that it's integrated in Tibet or in India or any of the other places where these things happen.

[00:05:57] And so I think it's... this is my own personal thing about it. I feel like I encourage people all the time. Like ask questions. Complain. Like, it's too much. I can't do it. Is there anything I could do to help get into that place? I mean, I think we all deserve to have... all the supports that we need. It's not easy to get all those things in place to do it. But I don't think that means we should change the truth of the thing, which is we *deserve* to have it if we can get it. Because ideally, we would have that support. And some people *do* have it because they happen to know somebody. Or they're working with somebody. They have a teacher that's readily available. And others have a good teacher or a profoundly good teacher, but they live 10,000 miles away.

[00:07:09] So those things, I personally take them seriously. The issue of... how do I how do I clarify some of the things that I'm drawn to, perhaps, but I can't quite seem to get the juice out of the practice. And it isn't always the best thing to do to just, like, tough it out. Just keep going. Sometimes that really works well. But I can say from a lot of experience that it also dumps people out in the street. And they don't come back!

[00:07:50] So those kinds of things also need to be addressed. Just because we happen to *have* a profound practice like the yidam practice and mahamudra and other things, it doesn't mean that it's going to benefit the people who pick it up. That's my own personal feeling. I'm not blaming anybody for it, but I think that we don't have the same long term cultural relationship with the practices that any Tibetan, 25 years or older, let's say, would have that relationship. And we don't necessarily have it. And we don't necessarily find ourselves able to find support for those things.

**student 1** [00:08:39] I wonder, excuse me for continuing, but just to follow up, would it be feasible, you think, to have some kind of a mentor program at KCC? Where in addition to the resident lama, there could be sort of... senior students on call, you know who, if you like, I mean, if I have a medical problem, I don't necessarily need to talk to the doctor, you know. I'll make do with the physician's assistant or nurse. They know a lot more than I do. And maybe that's counter traditional, but it just seems like it would be good to know that so-and-so is on call today. And, uh, I mean, I use Bill that way. I go see Bill. I mean, he takes house calls and very useful to me.

**LMC** [00:09:34] Well, it can also be just, uh, to be able to call somebody. And not just anybody. But like somebody that you have a connection with and you're working with it. And that's important. I mean, most of us who have been practicing and are in this community, we do that regularly. But there's no sign-up sheet somewhere. And maybe that's because maybe there was a sign-up sheet and it was so overbearing that you couldn't get through it. But I don't think so. I think if you do those kinds of things, that it happens and it's helpful. And having had the direct experience of people who really wanted to do some of the practices, and that often take years to complete, and sometimes they just found it too much. Too much. So I need to find something

else. And finding something else often results in later on... I would see they just left. They just abandoned the whole thing. And that's worth crying over. Because we don't *need* to do that. We have the ability to provide support. So I think that anyway.

[00:11:02] omitted section with Zopa and another response

**student 3** [00:14:44] So, Lama Michael, I remember you saying what you said today about the sort of blessing of strong emotional reactions and that it is really quite magnetizing. And since you said that to me in an interview, I want to say a couple of years ago, I've really taken that on as my practice. And luckily, as a highly sensitive person who's easily overwhelmed by interactions with other people, scents, everything, there's a lot to notice in the experience. One challenge that I find is, let's say in a work place setting that might be chaotic, there's a lot of stimulus, I'm able to see a lot going on inside of me. And then maybe some big kind of, I don't want to say conflict, but just energy. Some big energy comes at me. There's a big reaction and it becomes very hard *in* the moment to both see it and stay present with it and... interact. And I've also heard you say something about mindfulness is like a bell that you can't un-ring. It's just, even if you didn't want to do it anymore, it's just kind of there.

[00:16:01] So I'm always sort of aware of the experience I'm having and trying to interact. And I don't know what to say about that other than it's really challenging to... sometimes it doesn't feel very integrated, I would say. Sort of the experience, this sort of bodily somatic experience and this emotional experience, it's almost like I don't feel that I have the freedom in that moment to sort of look at the other party and say, you know, I need just a minute to allow this to kind of come and go. [laughs] And I'm feeling really angry or I'm having... and so I don't know what advice you might have for... holding the totality of the experience. The experience of interacting with someone, the internal and the somatic experience. When it *is* very intense and you're sort of in the world doing your thing, just drop it and be like, all right, come back to it later? What's the... is there a practice that can be applied?

**LMC** [00:17:18] The analogy that comes to mind is when you're learning to swim, you don't go into the deep-water during hurricanes. [laughter] So, you know, and yet... very experienced people can swim in very difficult situations for other people. And you take that into account naturally, right? You know what you can do and you do what you can in it. There's a benefit, just being able to... some time ago, one person said it's kind of like *flashing* on the experience. Like you just bring your awareness to it in a moment and just like really rest with it. Like just literally, for two or three seconds and then just let it go. And to do that over and over in a situation where there's kind of ongoing turmoil. The context for it was ongoing turmoil for this person. And yet they had the ability... to stop for a few seconds, or maybe even ten seconds, and just look at their own experience... and then just let it go.

[00:18:43] And as I recall, it's been, this has been quite some time ago, but as I recall, they would say that... it was kind of like a cool breeze on a hot day. It wasn't like the weather was going to cool down. It was just that you got a cool breeze. And it felt good going by. And it also was empowering. Like, if I can get a cool breeze for five or 10 seconds, I could probably get one for five or 10 minutes if I work on it. And it wasn't trying to fix anything. It was really about, I think, coming to try and see... what am I? Who am I? What drives me?

[00:19:36] And I think in a certain way, we all have that. We all want to know who we are. I think! I mean, on bad days, maybe not. Or the person that you just took out back and beat up, maybe not that day. [laughs] But generally speaking, we want to have a sense of who we are, what

we're about. And mostly when we look at that in a kind of conceptual way... we're just talking about the past. We're not actually looking at the present. We need to bridge *that* place. Go from the past into the present. And because the conceptual understanding of the emotional situation is very... not so helpful. ... Does that make sense? Is it enough?

**student 3** [00:20:39] Time will tell. [laughter]

**LMC** [00:21:00] I want to say a really quick one thing here is that as we talk about these things, I want to remind us that we're also in waiting. And Eric will be coming in. And so, one of the things that we do, in talking about these things in advance is, we might inadvertently put an obstacle in front of him. That he wouldn't have said it that way or suggested the same thing. And while that shouldn't be a really big deal, it *can* be... in some situations, depending upon what the context is. So I'm trying to modulate it myself. Sometimes I dredge up the most radical things I can think of. When I'm alone, I always do. [laughter] And I'm just concerned then, you know, Lama Eric will come and say, you said what? [laughter] And so... I withdraw everything I've said for 25 years. Yeah. Gone. [great laughter]

**student 4** [00:22:24] Lama Michael, thank you for saying that. Because in a few days I'll be getting to sit at the feet of my root lama, Khenpo Kunga in Madison, Wisconsin. And in my early days of Buddhism, maybe six or seven years ago, it was... I couldn't imagine having more than one teacher. But now it's like, oh, what's the big deal? There's Khenpo-la. There's you. There's Lama Lekshe. There's Lama Tsang Tsing. And then there's all the other 'teachers' that don't go by that name.

**LMC** [00:23:03] Yeah. So there are a lot of qualified people in this sangha and in general in the West... a lot of qualified people. And it would be interesting to have some kind of a means to cross reference those things with maybe a short statement for brand new people. And a way to contact them easily for personal advice or an interview or a meeting of some kind. I think that would be a nice thing to have. And I don't think that's a conflict with Lama Eric. I think that's just... my guess is he's going to be doing that so... so I think that it would be helpful. Oftentimes, people that I meet with, they'll say, oh, it took me three months or even six months in some cases, to get a conversation. That really shouldn't have to happen.

**student 4** [00:24:40] Okay. Lama Michael, so I realized I have a few teachers. Similar and very different. And then I read some books, not too many. And it's... okay, I read that, this seems to contradict this. It's not really a contradiction. How does it land in *my* heart? What do I make of it? How does it pertain? What use do I put it to? So I don't mind at all when it seems like teachers might contradict themselves. But my question, why I asked for the mic, has to do with your guidance for this morning's session. And get to watch what I'm experiencing now. The strong emotions and I don't mind strong emotions. I really wish I could stop labeling them while they're happening. But labels did pop up because that's my tendency. And so there was great joy in hearing you teach... and then I started fabricating and I was feeling the grief for maybe I don't get to hear you much in the future. So part of... so that's like, okay, [that's] what I got to see. And now the question about... because you opened the Q&A by saying, well, we could ask questions about what's coming. Might we hear you teach on occasion?

**LMC** [00:26:24] Yeah, you might. [laughter] We have, uh... a tentative... sort of transitional schedule. So, I think even in our conversation with Eric that I would at least teach on the first Sunday in the month. Right? The last Sunday. What's the difference?

[00:27:03] omitted Zopa response on logistics

**student 5** [00:28:59] I have a question regarding... I'm over here. That voice in the crowd. You referenced 'mind' this morning in your teaching. And... so a lot of times when I hear that word... mind, that I think sits in my body. But I also have had experiences where I see that's not quite what *mind* is referencing. Or that's not the way I should think of mind. So I'm asking you to maybe say a little bit about how you were... speaking of mind this morning in your teaching.

**LMC** [00:30:22] Well, I'm not sure that what I said this morning is exactly apropos at this point. But generally, when we talk about mind, and I can say from my own side, it's pretty much universal... whenever I talk about 'mind', we're talking about the very foundation... of original mind. Which basically means it is the seed of enlightenment that each of us carries. And so, all of our practices, all of the things that we do, ideally... are focused in the direction of recognizing that mind. Because that's actually all that's necessary, is to recognize it and stabilize that recognition. But it's clear from all of the written things and from many of the great teachers and in our own experience... it's very difficult. It's very difficult to recognize it in the first place and then to stabilize it is a whole other category of things. But that's... that's it! Nothing more. ... Simple. [laughter] ... It's fun being glib.

[00:31:58] omitted student adding to the discussion of benefit of sangha

**student 7** [00:34:28] Lama Michael. What did you mean earlier when you said... or could you talk about what you said, when you said, that some people can swim in the deep water for other people?

**LMC** [00:34:51] Oh no, I didn't mean that some people could swim in the deep water *for* other people. Just that some people could swim in deep water and rough water and others couldn't. So that I can't remember the *exact* context that was in. But maybe a little bit of a warning. Like... we all have abilities that we're good at and other things that we can kind of do and not do and so on. So I can't remember the exact context. If you could remind me, I could...

**student 7** [00:35:34] We were talking about strong emotion. And the reason that I wondered about that is... I get really bored with my strong emotion. And, you know, for example, this time of year, it always is difficult for me. I get kind of thrown back into some kind of state, some kind of foundational anxiety, some kind of feeling like a three-year old. And I know it's not the same, but it seems like every year this comes up and is connected to some things in my life. And I'm really bored with all of that. [laughter] It doesn't feel very important to me. But it is like being in a wave and just kind of head over heels, you know. And if I felt like there was some meaning in that or if I could meet that in a way that I felt was useful, that it might not be so tedious to me.

**LMC** [00:36:43] Yeah. Yes. ... I think one thing that, uh, we could look at that through the lens of, I'm going to be just a moment... to look at it, first of all... if we can if we can personally identify... the way in which we approach these things... then we can see something about ourselves, right. Like of whatever kind of emotional state we normally call the kleshas. But if we can look at those things in a certain way, then we have a different sense of them than when we're just experiencing them. But... the truth is, is that we really actually need to *experience* the emotion. Even though some people say, well, Buddhism is all about not having emotions, which is actually not true. It's about not being enslaved to them. Which is very different from not having them.

[00:38:17] So I don't know, I've never met anyone who was actually alive, who didn't have emotions. You know, it's like that just doesn't happen. So we *are* often deeply enslaved by our emotional states. And the point is.. that that emotional state is not something to avoid. Avoiding it is just adding another emotional state on top of the previous one. When, even if it's an emotion that we appreciate, since, I mean, maybe 50 percent of our emotions we like and the other half we'd like to get rid of. But getting rid of them creates its shadow form. [laughs] So it doesn't really work. What we really would like is to have the emotion, recognize it and be able to be present with it... so that we actually discover its nature. ... That's the ideal.

[00:39:23] So we won't talk about what that... is supposed to look like. But we all know when we're really angry or we're jealous or we have these negative emotions, we all know... that we'd rather not have that. And at the same time, we want to know who we are and what we're doing. So there's a contradiction there. You want to know who you are and what you're doing. You need to be able to... work *with* the emotional state that you're trying to avoid and you're trying to call that... 'this is health'. Because I've avoided it when actually I've stuffed it and it's down there growling in the back, getting ready to leap up and grab me by the throat. Which we've all experienced. But, if you can... just *momentarily* bring your awareness to it, I mean, literally like three or four seconds... and then just kind of let it go and then it comes back. Another three or four seconds. And at some point in there, for most people, unless it's really, really deep, we can have an experience that I see what it is... in a way that I did not see it before.

[00:40:42] The way it was before my relationship with it hurt me! Which makes me want to hurt somebody else. And we already know, before we even go through that whole thing, this is not what I wanted to do. But here I am. So... putting our awareness on *most* of the things, like an emotion, I would say... the way that we process it, even in the context of our meditation, *usually* looks like... we tried to do something that didn't work. ... The emotion itself, of course, is very powerful. So we're all aware of that. And in order to be free of the suffering of those emotions, we need to be able to have a different relationship with the emotions themselves. And generally, in that context, through *many* meditation systems, whether it's in Tibet or India or some other place, those systems often are used to... *look at* the actual experience of the emotion. And over and over, I mean, you can buy the books on it and read it also, that over and over, the person who actually gets good at that no longer *feels* the emotional downside. Or if they *do* feel it, they're happy to feel. Good enough. If that's what I feel, if I feel sad, if I feel grief or if I feel anger, I'm just kind of witnessing it. Which is very different from I need to be rid of it. When actually, the alternative is to be dead. Because, like I said, like, only dead people don't have emotions and actually... Kalu Rinpoche himself said, they have them, too. [laughter] So I mean...

**Zopa** [00:43:05] Because no one's dead.

**LMC** [00:43:06] Yeah, that's right. The body might die. But in the philosophical perspective of this thing, there's no birth and no death. It's just a continuum that never began and never ends. So in that context, we are really... from a *sane* perspective, we are really mandated to... know what those emotions are and how they work so that we can... see it clearly. Not seeing it clearly, we have no hope for the recognition of the nature of mind. Which is that recognition *is* enlightenment itself. We have no hope of that! If we're just trying to *fix* all the little things in our bodies and our emotional states and all, it has to be embraced. So I think, the thing that I found to be most useful was... look at all of it. Kind of like a flash. Like, look at all of it. No matter how bad it looks, if you just look at it for one second, it seems really small or trivial. Just kind of nothing there. Three seconds? You can start to see something. Five seconds? You're in it. And

then you just let it all go for a few seconds. And when it comes back again, put your awareness on it again.

00:44:44] [dull clink of bell] That is our lead bell. Remember 'Engineer somebody, I can't remember what his name was, probably engineer Bill. He was the guy who used to have the... some kind of a show for kids. And there was a lead bell. That's what I remember. So that's what that sounded like. Somebody got that lead bell and now we have to put up with that. And I'm feeling really irritated by that, [laughter] just in case you wondered.

**sangha** [00:45:28] *dedicating the merit*

**LMC** [00:45:59] Thank you all. It's a delight to see you, and I know people have asked and I'm slightly embarrassed by the... I'm embarrassed by the request to even stay and do anything. But I will say that I also appreciate it and I have no intention of abandoning this community or anybody else who's in it. So I can't control that completely. I mean, people abandon themselves and I can't do too much with that. But it's not my intention *ever* to abandon someone. So I'm glad that we're here and we're meeting today and it's a joyful occasion, not because it's an end, but because it's a furthering and I think, we'll do that. [all clapping]