

Concentration: Week 1

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Welcome to our five-week introductory course in concentration. It's a new thing for me to do. I've done the intro mindfulness class for many years now and have enjoyed that a lot. Now I felt it was time to offer something on concentration, partly because my overall sense—my generalization, which doesn't apply to everyone—is that students in the West, some of them get very good at mindfulness, but often what they're lagging in is concentration. Concentration and mindfulness need to be partners for the purposes of mindfulness. In order to really let the mindfulness practice go deep, it needs to be coupled together with a strong concentration.

Whenever they're partners, especially equal partners, you can't have too much concentration, and you can have too little. By focusing on concentration, it hopefully will begin encouraging the cultivation of this very important factor. The idea in this intro class is hopefully not that ambitious; I'm thinking of it kind of in parallel to the intro mindfulness class that I teach, at that level—a kind of real basic level of information and instructions. I am not expecting any of you to have attained the fourth *jhāna* by the second class or the third or by the end. Even that's for concentration, one or two, concentration one or one today. My hope is that by giving some of the basic ideas, the basic elements of concentration, the teachings, instructions around them, it can help a lot in you appreciating both the value and the beauty and the joy of concentration, and also in that, letting that factor become stronger in your life for all the benefit you can get from it, including the benefit of supporting your mindfulness practice.

That's the very general idea of what I have in mind. As I said, I have never done this before. I've never taken a five-week undergraduate course in concentration before. So it's kind of an experiment to see how anyone would do something like this. I just sat down with myself and tried to review all the different things that I might want to teach, and came together with a

number of different things that I thought were important. So bear with me as I experiment as you do this, and I hope it's an experiment which is very useful for all of you. Otherwise, I wouldn't do it. Also, something that is useful enough that I will want to keep doing it maybe yearly, just like we do the regular intro mindfulness.

When I was practising in Burma, I was practising in the Vipassanā Centre, and every morning I would go to breakfast. The monastery with the meditation center looked like a sprawling junior college campus built in the nineteen fifties. That's what I thought of when I was there, except there were no cars on it, just the large walkways. Every morning I'd walk to the dining room for the monks and the Western men, and I had to walk by—often we went by in a single file, the monks first, and then the Westerners would follow—the women's meditation hall. The women's meditation hall would have five hundred women in there. They'd be meditating while we were going to breakfast.

Because it was Burma, these big halls were in good condition. They had two sides, the two long sides of the building were just a whole series of open doors, very big, arched doors. You could see right in through the women's meditation hall. Sitting there, row after row, very straight rows, were five hundred women meditating. It was a powerhouse, one of the great sights of my life. Every morning, seeing these women meditating, there was a tremendous power of stillness and power, of dignity and concentration in the way they were bearing themselves and engaged in what they were doing.

They were engaged in something very dignified, very serious, very engaging, and something very still, very intent. I was very inspired by both the intentness, the dignity, and the sense of concentrated power, powerful concentration that emanated from that phenomenally still room. There's a story in the suttas, the discourses of the Buddha, of a king who decides to go visit the Buddha. The king was a little bit afraid, I think, for his life. He wasn't necessarily a really good guy, had enemies. He came to visit the Buddha, who was staying in a grove someplace, and he had to travel to get there.

In a respectful way, he got off his elephants outside the grove. Then he walked in by foot into the grove. When he got close to the middle of the grove, he got really nervous. I think the sutta says that his hair stood on end because he'd been told that there was a large group of monks and monastics, monks and nuns together with the Buddha and elders, maybe five hundred people in this grove with the Buddha. He got spooked because there was no sound. The forest was completely still and tranquil. He thought, "Always in ambush, you know?" In fact, it was five hundred people, the story goes, who were meditating, and the meditative stillness was so palpable for him that it spooked him as a kind of introductory idea of concentration.

I think of concentration as a kind of clarity, a focus and a peace, clear, focused, peaceful—sometimes it's likened to clear water, but I think of it as like clear air. I live up in the mountains, and sometimes when I come down the hill, I look and see what the air quality is like. Sometimes it's phenomenally clear to look across the bay and see the hills there. Sometimes I can't even see down to the bottom of the hill, to the town below, because of the haze or the smoke or whatever it might be. But there are times when it's really clear, and after a rain or something like that, there's stillness and crispness to the air, great clarity. The thing about that kind of clarity and stillness is it's very easy to miss it, to lose track of it, because we tend to focus on the things of the world.

We look at the billboards as we are driving, or the houses, or listening to the radio, or listening to our minds, or focus obsessed by something. It is not that often that we actually appreciate the clear stillness of the air when it's clear and still. So concentration is like that. It's a factor of the mind. It's a quality of the mind that we can learn to appreciate and we can strengthen and develop. We can clarify the mind, so the mind becomes clearer and clearer, and the mind becomes clearer and clearer, then it is a useful mind that can be put to certain kinds of uses.

In the Buddhist path, concentration and clarity and stability of mind is not for its own purpose, but rather it's for the purpose of supporting intensive meditation, mindfulness practice, and leading to liberation. Concentration is sometimes likened to an unflickering candle flame. It's a very ancient simile. A candle flame is very dynamic. It's very bright. It's dynamic. It's active. It's hot, and it can flicker in the wind back and forth and become unstable. Or if there's no wind at all, it just stays very straight and still, just kind of floats straight up.

I love that metaphor because of the combination of the stillness of an unflickering flame, and the sense of having something dynamic and vital and vitality in that flame at the same time. Concentration is like that. There's something unagitated about it. When very still, unflickering, the mind is very focused and stable, but it's also very alert and very vital, very dynamic in its own way. That's a very important principle to keep in mind when you look at concentration: that balance or that combination of being, in a sense, kind of unmoving or still while being very dynamic at the same time. The alternative would be to have a very calm, stable, still mind, but a mind that's really dull and falling asleep.

Seeing the difference between a mind which is very calm but dull and a mind which is calm but very alert is very important for finding your way to a concentrated state, into *samādhi*. The Buddhist word for concentration, or the Buddhist word usually translated into English as concentration, is called *samādhi*. It's a well-known word. It's used in Sanskrit and Pāli

both. It's used in Hinduism and yoga traditions and all over. The word *samādhi* itself has a broader meaning than our English word concentration. The English word concentration has the implication, I believe, of centering, of centering oneself on something, having a focus which is centered on something, kind of one-pointed focus. That's an important element of *samādhi*, but *samādhi* includes a lot of other factors besides one-pointedness, so much so that it's probably better to think of *samādhi* as a state than a particular mental function.

It's a state that we enter into, or sometimes in the suttas it's described as a state we abide in, we live in. So it's something you enter into, or something that envelops you, or something that's broader than just one particular function of the mind. That's why, in order to enter *samādhi*, it's not just a matter of having a one-pointed focus, whether it's willful or any other way. It's a matter of accommodating and including, gathering together a lot of other factors, mental factors, psychological factors, together with the one-pointedness. *Samādhi* is a very key element in the traditional Buddhist notion of the path.

The Buddhist path, and the most famous formulation of this, I believe, is what's called the three trainings. All of Buddhism can be subsumed under what's called the three trainings. The first training is a training in *sīla*, in ethics, or integrity, virtue. The second training is a training in *samādhi*, and the third training is a training in insight or wisdom: *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*—virtue, concentration, and wisdom or insight. There is a famous notebook by the Dalai Lama where he translates this in his book on kindness, clarity, and wisdom—kindness, clarity, and insight, I think the book is called—and I like that. He wants to translate *samādhi* as clarity.

There's a lot of different practices for developing *sīla*. There's a wide range of practices for developing *samādhi*. There's a number of practices for developing insight. There's a kind of big toolbox that Buddhism, Buddhist tradition, has. Classically, in the Theravāda tradition, they say that there are forty different meditation practices for developing *samādhi*, and different personality types will choose different kinds of *samādhi* practices that are most suited for them. In the classic texts, they talk about a good teacher who would ascertain what kind of personality you are and then assign to you the meditation that's appropriate for you.

The teacher studies how you walk, how you eat, how you talk, whether you are a greed type, or hate type, or deluded type, or a faith type, or intellectual type, or whatever. Then you would get a detour. I've very rarely known many teachers to do this. Most teachers have a one-practice-fits-all. But classically, that was the idea: you'd work with a person's character and disposition and choose something that works for them. There's a lot of different forms of *samādhi* practices.

As I said, *samādhi* is not an end in itself, usually, but is a means to another end. It is the means to developing insight, support for the possibility of insight. It's a means to purification of all that which accumulates in our system and our psychophysical system through a lifetime of reactivity. The reactivity, if it's strong enough or chronic enough, gets stored somewhere in the psychophysical being, and that gets in the way of settling deep, quiet, peace. Part of the function of concentration practice is to help with that purification practice, somehow dislodge these things which are held in the system. It's also for the purposes of becoming more independent.

Concentration practice helps the mind become more and more independent from the obsessions of the mind, the kind of things that the mind is so quick to cling to, hold on to, or obsess about, be afraid of, whatever it might be. The Pāli word is *viveka*, a very important word. *Viveka* is usually translated into English as either detachment or seclusion or solitude. I'll give a talk on that one Sunday or Monday next month or so. For me, I think it's better in English probably to translate it as independence—a sense that the mind becomes independent from the usual things that it's stuck in or caught by. Concentration also is a means towards liberation, becoming fully liberated.

As a teacher likes to say, we develop our concentration, which belongs to the conditioned world, that part of the world that is created and formed and manipulated and constructed—because concentration belongs to the constructed world, makes something that comes together because of causes and conditions—and you bring it to the pinnacle of the possibility of the constructed world, so that you can jump off that edge of the pinnacle into the unconstructed, the unconditioned, the unmade, the unformed, that which you can't create. But you have to get to the edge of that pinnacle, the edge of that diving board, in order to jump into the pool.

The Buddha emphasized, or when we are reading the Buddhist teachings, there is a strong emphasis that the mind can be changed, the mind, the heart. The mind is malleable, and the mind is not a thing. The mind is an activity or composed of many different activities. Because it's an activity, it's very susceptible to being changed and affected by all kinds of conditions around it. If you're not taking some responsibility for how your mind is being shaped, then your mind can be shaped by the circumstances you find yourself in. It certainly can be shaped by the experiences you have growing up and your family environment, but it's also to be continued to be shaped by the influences in the present moment.

Some people lock into a certain kind of mindset and don't allow for any possible change, but that becomes very brittle and very painful after a while if you hold it tight in one way. If you're

more open and fluid with environment, but you're not taking some responsibility for how the mind changes, then advertisers and media will have their say on you, or popular fashions and popular culture, and all your friends and all your enemies, and your colleagues, and all these forces in society will actually shift and change your mind in ways that are sometimes very gross and very subtle. A very simple example, which is not very noble in my mind, was that I noticed that after I moved to this area in the early nineties, I was mostly going to school at Stanford, and our sitting group met in Palo Alto. Before that, I lived in Berkeley, and I'd been a student, and lived in Asia and all kinds of places, and I'd never been in a community that had so many new cars. I noticed that in my thoughts, what kind of car I should be driving was being kind of moving in the direction of thinking I should have a new car. I know that if I'd stayed in San Francisco where I was living, it probably wouldn't have occurred to me. But somehow my mind was being shaped by the local culture, and my mind was being changed by that.

The mind is malleable. If you don't take some responsibility for what shapes the activity of the mind, then other things will. Part of what we're doing in Buddhism is beginning to take responsibility for what shapes the mind. This is a very important teaching, because I believe—I could be wrong here, it does not apply to any of you—but I believe it's a very strong emphasis in Western American Buddhism to be focusing on having an experience. There's a really good experience, want a good meditative experience, and you're focusing on a certain kind of inner bliss or joy or concentration or something. But traditionally, the teachings of the Buddha were not very experience-directed. That wasn't that important. There's a lot more to be said about that.

What is important is how you shape your mind. That's really important. You take this malleable capacity of the mind and its activity, which we call the mind, and then reorganize it so that it becomes more useful, developing a skill set of the mind so that the mind can be used for further purposes along the path. There is no word in Pāli for meditation. We think of Buddhism as a meditative tradition, but there is actually no real word. You can't find something that is equivalent to the word meditation. The word that is most commonly used in Pāli is *bhāvanā*, and *bhāvanā* means cultivation or development.

The Buddhist practice is a practice of cultivating something or developing something. Whatever we think meditation might be, *bhāvanā*, the practices of cultivation, include much more than just meditation. The word *bhāvanā* is much broader. It includes practices in ethics and generosity. It includes how you live your life, your livelihood, the kind of speech you cultivate, many things. So *samādhi* is much broader than our English notion of one-pointedness. It's

a state of being, a state of mind, and includes many mental factors, and one-pointedness is just one of them.

We can look at some of the other factors that come into play when we enter into *samādhi*. That's one of the things we'll do in the course of this class. The Buddhist tradition distinguishes between right *samādhi* and wrong *samādhi*. One of the factors of the Eightfold Path is right *samādhi*. So it distinguishes between right and wrong *samādhi*. It's possible to get into a concentrated state and it be the wrong concentrated state, which is not useful for being on the path.

If you want to go out and rob banks, I suspect that you case the bank at midnight, you decide to go down to the local bank and do your job. You might be really concentrated, but that concentration comes together with greed and other factors. A soldier might be really concentrated. A boxer might be really concentrated, but that concentration comes together with other factors such as unwholesome factors that actually may be fueling that wrong concentration, unskillful concentration. When one-pointedness is joined together with obsessive thinking, obsessive preoccupation with greed or hate, then it's considered to be wrong concentration, unuseful concentration. Right concentration has the absence of obsessiveness of any kind.

Right *samādhi* includes a purity of mind and heart. Remember, in the three trainings, the training in virtue comes first as the foundation for concentration. Right concentration includes a sense of purity, mental purity or virtue. It includes a kind of purity of mind, sincerity of mind. It also includes a stilling of the mind. The stilling of the mind is a very important part of concentration, of *samādhi*. The different levels of *samādhi* involve progressive stilling of the different factors and activities of the mind, like the mind is actually made up of many activities. You think of the mind as being an intertwined cord or intertwined rope of many different cords. As the concentration gets deeper, some of the strands that make up the rope fall away, whereas as the mind gets more concentrated, so many different activities of the mind fall away and become quieter, get stilled, become quiescent. Part of the great peace and joy of a concentrated state comes from this great sense of stillness.

The analogies that are often used, you probably know, are really quiet lakes that are completely still and reflect the mountains in the distance. Right *samādhi* is not forced. It's possible to use our willpower or force to get into a concentrated state, and for the most part this is not completely accurate. But for the most part, right *samādhi* does not arise out of an act of force. It has a lot to do with the sense of allowing for a possibility. My understanding of the cultivation of *samādhi* is that one of the factors that needs to be there is a sense of allowing

or possibility for some kind of unification, of collectedness, of all these different factors that need to be collected in order to enter the *samādhi* state. I don't think it can be forced. It is a collectedness.

Some people actually will talk about *samādhi* as being a unification of the mind and body, that what's involved in a concentrated state is the mind and body get unified. As I often teach, maybe in my other intro class, if your mind and body are in two different places, you're not really doing the practice. Your body is never going to go anywhere but here, but if your mind is thinking about what happened at work earlier today, a conversation you had yesterday, or it's thinking about your plans for next week, then your mind is somewhere else than where your body is. So there's a fragmentation going on, a kind of split between the body and mind of sorts. What we're trying to do is to heal all the different fragmentations of our psychophysical being in order to enter into the *samādhi*. *Samādhi* requires an integrity, which requires integration, at least temporarily, of all the activities of our being. Sometimes it's called a collectedness—everything is collected together, integration.

Fragmentation seems to be a very strong quality of our modern society, and I believe there are a lot of different forces in our popular American society which support fragmentation, support the psyche being fragmented, and not merely settling, being stable, and being able to track one thing for any length of time. The media has gotten faster and faster. Occasionally we'll rent a video, like last week I finally saw *Gone with the Wind*, which I had never seen, and that movie was like three hours and forty minutes. If it were made in a modern style, you could have had all the scenes, and none of the words could have been shortened, none of the conversation shortened, but the whole thing would have been done in an hour and a half, because all the spaciousness in the movie is time, and music, and scenery. It's really slow, and a lot of the older movies have the slowness to them that people don't have patience for anymore. Let's get on with it. We're multitasking, and if you give too much space in the movie for just the scenery by itself, people bring out their Palm Pilots, check their email, and the pace of MTV kind of moves, and just the space in which movies go on, the pace of the news media, music media—there are a lot of short clips. Regular evening news doesn't really help you become concentrated or stable on some topic. You have a couple of minutes at the most, and then you are on to the next thing. The mind is always kept jumping and going.

But it isn't just simply that our society doesn't support a stable, concentrated mind. The mind itself doesn't support it. There are internal factors—the mind will sometimes rebel against developing concentration, partly because concentration does involve a stilling of the mind, and the mind doesn't want to be stilled. Even though there are a lot of benefits to stilling

the mind, it's ultimately a lot more pleasurable than the alternative. It's a lot more creative and intelligent than the alternative. Often a lot less energy is expended than the alternative when the mind is fragmented. But there's a tendency for us to be somehow addicted to our thoughts, and the mind is kind of short-term directed, wanting short-term happiness. Short-term happiness often is understood to be, "I just want to be free. I don't want to control the mind; any kind of control is a limitation on the pleasure or the joy or the freedom of the mind." It doesn't want to be controlled. It wants to be free to go, to be fragmented, go off in all kinds of directions.

When the mind is fragmented and goes in all kinds of directions, it doesn't settle and it can seem very important to chase after ten thousand thoughts. Our thoughts seem very important to us, but in fact the mind which is collected, the mind which is controlled in the way that *samādhi* goes to control, a collected mind, is actually much more satisfying than the scattered, distracted mind. But the mind doesn't know that. You might know that intellectually, but the mind doesn't know that. It's like an unruly kid who doesn't know any better, or a wild horse. It needs to be trained. You have to know that about the mind, that the mind will rebel often to getting concentrated. Sometimes, for the untrained mind, it doesn't understand the tremendous benefits from being concentrated, and it doesn't see, "Why should I go there? What's the purpose?" But the uncontrolled mind doesn't relax, or very rarely relaxes.

If you want to have very deep relaxation, you need to have a mind which is able to control in some way or other. The deepest forms of relaxation that can come through meditation come with having a great skill in how to control the mind. Even if you can get very somewhat relaxed by listening to music or laying by the ocean, listening to the waves, or doing a good massage, it doesn't compare at all to what's possible through very deep meditation. I'm often still surprised, I'm amazed at this little thing. I've known it for twenty years that I'm more relaxed after my morning meditation than I was when I woke up from sleep. Sleep isn't even as relaxing as meditation, as what a controlled mind can do.

Part of a very important aspect of developing *samādhi* or concentration is our capacity to let go. Probably it's one of the more important factors that support a concentrated state—our ability to learn to let go. In letting go, you can let go out of faith—the teacher tells you to let go, and you do. Or you can let go out of wisdom because you know the things you're holding on to are not worth holding on to. But somehow or other, beginning to let go, let go of the need to think about things. Joseph Goldstein used to like to say in meditation, "Nothing whatsoever is worth thinking about." I used to say that a lot until someone came up to me after a teaching and said to me, "Oh, you know, I used to be part of a cult, and they used to

teach us that.” So then, ”Oh, I better not say that.” But for the most part, ninety-nine point nine nine percent of the time, there's nothing whatsoever you really need to think about in an active, discursive, street kind of way when you are meditating.

There are times when you're developing meditation that you want to think, actually. But the thinking is directly related to negotiating the path of meditation. This integration with all the different activities of the mind are unified together for the same purpose. Even our thinking is unified for the same purpose, and there are times when our thinking is actually useful. But I think Joseph's teaching is very good, but very few of us get to that point where we let go of our thinking. It's to let go of all the stuff which has nothing to do with meditation at all. If it has to do with meditation, we have to let go of our judgments about measuring how we're doing. That's not on the path either.

In letting go, it also involves relaxing. This principle of relaxation is a very important one for developing concentration. As you're developing concentration, you need to be looking in your psychophysical being, in your body, your muscles, and your mind. Where is the tension? Can you begin relaxing that tension, letting go of that tension? The more you can be relaxed in meditation up to a point, the easier it'll be to enter into a concentrated state, a calm, concentrated state. If you don't, some people will try to get concentrated, but they're tense in doing that, and that then goes against the very thing you're trying to do. It goes counter to the event. Some people actually get more and more tense the more they practice, and sometimes that tension can give rise to a kind of wrong *samādhi*, a kind of useless concentration.

The paradox that often happens is that people will push and get really tense and strive and try to get concentrated, and then at some point, for some reason or other, they give up their efforts, give up the tension of striving. That can set up the condition that, then they've done a fairly good job, but finally, when they do relax and let go of the striving, then they drop down to a whole different level of concentration. But it's not their doing; it's kind of like they just let go into it. The development of concentration, of *samādhi*, requires a lot of respect and a lot of care. For those of you who have a tendency towards faith, it takes a lot of veneration, a lot of faith, but a lot of respect and a lot of care to enter into the practice of concentration with respect for the practice itself, but also a lot of respect for yourself and for your mind, and respect for what it takes to do the practice.

It's kind of like if you go into the forest, spend a week in the forest, backpacking someplace up in Alaska where there are wild bears or whatever, and you need to go in with some kind of respect to the forest. With care, you prepare yourself. You learn a little bit about the local

circumstances. You go in, and you're respectful of the forest as you go in, which means, in part, you're attentive and alert to what's there. You're not casual or callous to what's there, but it's a kind of respect or care that supports that intentness and involvement. When you sit down to practice concentration, I think it's a lot easier if you do it by first establishing a sense of respect for what you're doing, like going to practice concentration in a respectful way.

Like you go to Asia, for example, and you travel all the way to Asia to see some great, wonderful enlightened master, and you finally are able to get to her temple, and there she is. You enter respectfully and with care and veneration or faith. Even if you were a kind of flaming atheist, most people have some care as they go in situations like that. So respect, care—part of respect is you go prepared. You prepare yourself for such a thing. I also think a very important part of developing *samādhi* is the preparation you do before you actually start the practice of concentration.

That goes maybe against the grain of what some people would like. They would like concentration, and they like you can be told what to do: a, b, c, sit down there, you do it, set it up. But actually, you want to set up a context and environment, an ecology of the mind and the heart that becomes supportive for concentration to arise. That is, to a great part, my understanding of *samādhi*. You have a lot of responsibility for the arising of *samādhi*, but your responsibility is to lay the optimal conditions for it to arise by itself. *Samādhi* is not something you make happen so much, for the most part, unless you are quite an adept. But for the most part, it's something that even if you are adept at doing it, it's something like you have to figure out how optimally to create the conditions so that this thing, this mysterious thing, envelops you, or arises within you, or settles through you, or locks in within you this groove that you've got to settle into. You're on the groove, or whatever it might be.

That's why the idea of preparation is very important: preparing yourself in understanding what are the various causes and conditions that I can put into place to support the possibility of something arising. It's like that movie you may have seen called *Field of Dreams*, and the mantra there is, "Build it, and he will come." It's like that. You have to build it. You have to build your meditation, and then something will come, but you don't know what it is until it arises. So it requires preparation. That preparation can be your whole life, if you're really serious. In a certain way, you can rearrange and organize your whole life, and be concerned about your actions throughout the day, your speech throughout the day, your livelihood throughout the day, your ethics throughout the day. You can be concerned about the various factors—how you live your life in such a way that you notice which way to live your life creates more agitation in the mind and which ways of living tend to create more calm, more

concentration.

I can imagine, if you're really serious about developing a concentrated mind and you sit very diligently, and you sit and meditate in the morning for forty-five minutes, and then you go to San Pablo, where they have the casino, and spend the whole day doing the one-armed bandits, and all the lights and the flashing and the sounds, whatever concentration you've built up during the forty-five minutes is just blown away through that activity. The rest of your life can be supportive of developing concentration. Some people will take this very seriously and look into how they can reorganize their lives in some way or other to make that happen. Other people don't want to do that, or don't need to, because their lives are pretty sane to begin with.

One of the classic preparations for *samādhi*, or ways of supporting it to arise, is a practice called guarding the sense doors, which means not letting a lot of different sense input come into you in an uncontrolled fashion, letting there be some care about the sense input in your psyche. The more sense input you get, the faster it can be, and sometimes it will agitate the mind and make it harder for it to settle, get concentrated. It's said that moderation in food and drink is helpful as preparing to enter into *samādhi* or develop concentration. So be careful with your diet—not to be an ascetic by any means, but not too much, not too little. With your sleep, sleeping too much disturbs the possibilities of concentration. Sleeping too little can do that also.

It helps if you can cultivate a sense of contentment. Contentment is considered one of the precursors of concentration. It means using your intelligence and looking at your life, looking at places of discontent. Can you cultivate a greater sense of contentment in your life? It seems a little bit odd for me to say that, because a lot of people want to meditate so they can feel more content. I'm telling you, don't meditate until you're more content. But the two can go together.

It can be very helpful if you are very clear about the purpose of your meditation, so there's a kind of intentness or sense of pure purposefulness in what you're doing, so you really know what you're doing. Have a good sense of why you're doing this. What's the purpose of developing concentration? What's the purpose of meditation? So when you sit down, there's some clarity of purpose that informs what you're doing. That clarity of purpose means you're less likely to be filled with doubt and wondering what to do. Yesterday I counted my breath. Today I think I'll note my breath. Tomorrow may be a better day to listen to sounds. Maybe tomorrow I'll just take a bath. The mind can be very confused. But if you have a real sense of purpose, it's a lot easier for the mind to get settled, to get on the program.

Thinking about your sense of purpose, your intention, is an important part of all this. Spending some time outside meditation clarifying this by yourself or with friends or with a teacher can be very helpful for the purpose of developing concentration. A little more directly connected to meditation itself, having a clean and quiet environment is considered very helpful for concentration. You can understand that as you wish, but maybe making sure your place where you meditate, at your home or wherever, feels clean and orderly. So you sit down, you can enter into an orderly world or clean world, a place that feels calm. If you have a lot of things messy all over the room, it doesn't feel calm. So you create a calm, clean environment.

Some people will take it to the point of always bathing before they develop concentration, always saying, "As the body is clean," and I've heard of even people putting on clean clothes, so there's a whole sense of cleanliness and kind of purity, perhaps, that's supportive of developing concentration. I often feel different when I put on clearly clean clothes. I feel kind of cleaner myself, and it's easier to feel content and settled and concentrated. I said earlier that an important part of *samādhi* is letting go. *Samādhi* involves two important factors—many factors, but right now, two important factors that work together in combination. There has to be some feeling of some aspect of letting go, of relaxing and letting go, but it has to be together with making effort, being engaged, endeavoring.

If all you do is practice letting go, you might enter into a kind of concentrated state, but then you haven't put a lot of effort into doing it well. The effort has to be there. That way you can really make effort to let go. But if you practice, the tendency is if you only practice letting go, it tends to make the mind dull and drowsy, and we need to bring the effort factor to match that. People put in too much effort and don't have enough relaxation or letting go. The mind doesn't really become still and quiet, but actually stays more agitated, active, or energized.

Both these things—letting go and applying ourselves to the practice, making effort and applying ourselves—involve using our ability to choose, to choose what we do with our mind, seeing the point of choice where you have a choice. In choosing to follow your purpose to get concentrated, there is no path; it involves a choice, and that choice, that seeing the place of choice, becomes more refined the more you do the practice. For example, just a choice to sit down and meditate is a choice you make. You see the possibility of meditating, and you make that choice. You sit down to meditate, and you see the choice of turning the mind toward the breath, so you make that. You apply yourself there. You see the choice of letting go of thinking about tomorrow, so you make that choice, let go of it. You notice the mind has drifted off and is thinking about something. There's a choice. When you notice that, that's a

moment of choice—what do you do then? You could judge yourself and criticize yourself. It might not feel like a choice to do that; it might be automatic. Or there's a choice: you just very matter-of-factly come back and begin again with the breath, to re-engage yourself, reapply yourself to the purpose you set yourself to do.

A lot of meditation involves exercising your capacity for choice, but it's doing it together with a sense of relaxation and letting go, so that sense of choice doesn't become a burden. It actually becomes part of the beauty of what an alert, clear, peaceful mind is about. It doesn't feel like any burden at all, but actually something really delightful to do, to exercise this choice. At first, as you're developing concentration, there's a lot of applied effort that's required. We apply ourselves and apply ourselves. We can give the effort to the situation. We choose to apply ourselves. We choose over and over again. At some point, you can get into the rhythm, or the mind settles into a kind of concentration, and then it becomes less and less applied effort, but more a kind of self-generating effort. It's not you generating it, but somewhat generated by the system. In a sense, maybe all you have to do is keep it pointed in the right direction, and your choice just involves keeping the energy pointed in the right direction, as opposed to keep choosing to reapply and be applied, because the energy is beginning to control on its own.

There's no *samādhi* without relaxation. But relaxation gone too far puts us to sleep or leads to complacency. Complacency is one of the great hindrances to long-term meditation. Many meditators sooner or later become complacent in their meditation. They get kind of warm, fuzzy, nice feeling, and they become just a soka, you know. All their major conflicts and concerns are kind of deep, and they're not suffering so much, and things are comfortable, and just nice to settle back into this comfortable place. One of the things this points to is that meditation or concentration involves a balance of alertness, of applied effort, of using our choice and letting go and relaxing. It also involves using our intelligence.

I think that in my encounter with a good number of meditators, there's a kind of feeling that intelligence necessarily shouldn't be part of the practice, or that there's something wrong with intelligence, or we shouldn't be using it. But using our intelligence is a very important part of meditation practice. Everybody has enough intelligence, so it isn't like you don't have enough intelligence, or that person is smarter than you—it doesn't matter. This is not really true, but I like to think it's true that it's your intelligence which gets you into suffering, and so all the intelligence you need to get you into suffering is all the intelligence you need to get you out of it. If you are not a very intelligent person, then a lot of intelligence goes into your suffering, and so you don't need a lot of intelligence to do the practice. If you're really

intelligent, a really lot of intelligence has gone into your suffering. So don't take this as a law or rule, but everybody has enough intelligence.

It does involve using the intelligence you have, being alert, clear, thinking sometimes about it, following your way. It's kind of like if you're in the woods walking along, and you suddenly need to cross some terrible rapids, and there's a very narrow log that goes across, and you really intend to cross that—you have to be very concentrated. But you want to use all your intelligence to figure out how to get across. You notice a vine there, you notice this and that slippery rock there, and you're engaged. By the time you get across to the other side, your mind might be very still, but it wasn't stillness that avoided a lack of intelligence.

In terms of the preparation, preparing ourselves for practicing concentration, you might look at your life and look at what makes sense to do. The other thing you might do is think of it directly as a preparation you do for each particular meditation session. You can call this a setting up for meditation. I recommend each of you to find a way of setting up your meditation so you're not just simply going into your room and plopping down and beginning to meditate, but you can give yourself some period of time—a couple of minutes, five minutes or something—to set up the meditation, to prepare yourself for it. Each of you will have your own way of doing that, your own procedures, your own ritual. Some people like to do it very ritualistically, some people other ways. It might mean spending a couple of minutes unwinding, maybe going for a little walk first, or just sitting looking out the window for a while before you go meditate, doing something which is kind of relaxing. So you're not depending on your meditation to relax you, but you do the obvious ways first. Some people like to chant, some people like to recite the Mettā Sutta, some people like to do some loving-kindness meditation as a preparation for meditation. Some people, in order, will sit down in front of an altar with a Buddha figure or something sacred, so the feeling of being connected to something sacred. Some people like to read some inspirational literature before they meditate, so their sense of faith and enthusiasm and confidence may be as they go do the practice.

Part of preparing is to sit down consciously and respectfully. Part of that involves being careful and respectful for the posture that you take for your meditation practice. The posture that you sit in has a lot to do with how easy or difficult it is to get concentrated. So be careful with your posture. Develop a good balanced, alert posture, a good posture. Something gets developed over time. It's not like you just sit down and you have either good or bad posture, helpful or not helpful posture, but you actually begin cultivating. It might take a few months, but at first it might be a lot uncomfortable even, but you take and develop a posture which is supportive of being stable, rooted, concentrated, alert. A classic kind of metaphor for a good

meditation posture is to sit like a mountain, either physically like a triangle or containing a sense of being rooted like a mountain, stable and upright.

Once you actually mean to do all that, then you actually start sitting, and the sitting itself does a little set up. When I do my intro class, I often have almost the same thing every time, right, to kind of guide people one way, not one way of doing it. For this class, I'll do something different, guiding you into the concentration, but you'll find your own way of how you do it. For this class, what I recommend you experiment with, unless you have your own way, is what I call the seven-point breathing or seven steps of breathing, which is you take seven breaths and for each breath, as you exhale the inhalation, you feel a certain part of your body, and the exhalation, you exhale, and you count those seven breaths backwards: seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

The first number seven is your scalp, the back of your head, top of your head. Breathe in, feel that part, and then relax that part of your body. Seven, then your face. Breathe in, feel your face. As you exhale, relax your face—a lot of tension we hold in your face. Six, breathe in, feel the area of your neck and your shoulders. As you exhale, relax, soften that part of your body. Five, breathe in, and feel the area of your chest and your back, rib cage. As you exhale, relax that part of your body. Then the area of your diaphragm, your solar plexus, and then your whole abdominal cavity area, and then your legs and your feet. So you can do those seven steps. That's one way, for some people, can be a very powerful way of relaxing the surface tension of the day, reminding themselves that what you're going to do now is to be collected and unified for some purpose, to really be here and now with what you're going to apply yourself to, and then you will be intent. Intentness is a very important part of the intelligent engagement with meditation practice, and learning how to be intent in such a way as supports relaxation is part of the art we're looking at here.

Before we do meditation and give you actual instructions that you might want to try, as important as it is, setting yourself up for meditation beforehand is also how you emerge out of meditation. Some people, whatever signal they get that the meditation is over, the bell rings, and they pop up and think about their coffee or whatever they think about, and off they go. But that's actually kind of disrespectful of what you just went through. What you want to do is spend a couple of minutes—it does not have to be a long time—reviewing that meditation, what that was like. Part of the art is to learn how to do that in a non-judgmental way, but just kind of matter-of-factly review: what happened during that meditation? How present were you? How sleepy were you? How alert were you? How tense were you? If you're following the breath, how many breaths could you follow? What were the main things that

got in the way of being concentrated? How does this meditation compare to the meditation yesterday or last week, or the pattern of your meditations over the last while? That kind of comparison is part of the review. It's not meant to judge, but supposed to help you figure out, are you making progress—not in some kind of neurotic way, but just beginning to get a sense of what's working, how things were, the patterns. How did you engage yourself? What happened when you engaged yourself? How did you work with different things? How might you do better next time you sit down? "Oh, I was kind of complacent at sitting. Oh, in the last two sittings, last few days of sittings, I keep thinking about motorcycles. What a great idea it would be to have a Harley, you know?" So you notice that, "Oh, it's been going on for a few times now. I think next time when I sit down, I'm going to be more diligent and really try to cut off those Harley thoughts earlier." That reviewing helps you sort through all these things.

It may be even more important. Part of the function of reviewing is that, in a sense, you know that you're accountable for that meditation, that you're interested in it. So while you are meditating, there's a certain kind of greater interest in understanding what's going on. You want to understand your meditation, understand what's going on, track it to some degree. That engagement at tracking is one of the things that cultivates concentration. I hope that makes sense.

I do apologize for talking so much, because maybe it's a lot of material to take in, and I did earlier today when I was preparing for this. I should think this whole class has been a two-hour class, but this is the way it is. Next time, I'd like to sit a little bit, and what I'd like to do is for you all to stand for a minute and stretch your legs. Thinking about talking too much, we can call it the Tibetan style. Tibetan teachers, when you go on retreats, just teach, because it's so rare to get teachings, and then you're just expected to put it into practice when you get home. Why would you waste time with a teacher putting it in practice? Because you'd be better off learning. Not that I'm comparable, but that's how I would justify today. I'm planning, because it's already almost quarter to nine. We're supposed to stop at nine, right? That's what we said. I would like to go a little bit longer through the class, maybe to ten after. If that's a problem with anyone, then you can get up and leave. Or if you're comfortable doing this right now, go sit near the side there so it's easy for you to get up and leave and not disturb people, but it won't be longer than that.

To take a comfortable, alert posture, gently close your eyes and take a few moments to reflect on this idea that it really would take some sense of respect to engage in meditation practice—hopefully a joyful respect, a willing respect, but some sense of care, respect. It can be helpful

to take two or three long, slow, deep breaths. As you exhale, relax your body, your mind. Then experiment now with a seven-point breathing. As you do it, it's fine to breathe a little more deeply than you naturally would, just to get into it. You begin with the top of your head, your scalp, the back of your head, breathing in and letting go, your face, neck and shoulders, chest and back, rib cage, the diaphragm and solar plexus, the belly, the abdomen and waist, and lower back. Let everything sink. Let everything surrender everything to gravity. Then also your legs, feet. Take a few moments now to feel your whole body, the global sense of your body, whatever that means for you. Within the body, as part of the body, become aware of your breathing, kind of a global sense of your breathing, global as is easy to do.

In order to develop concentration, we want to switch our mind's activity from thinking predominantly to sensing. It's a practice of sensing more than of thinking. We want to sense the felt sense, the feeling of what it feels like for the body to be breathing, the sensations of expansion and contraction, pressure and release, of pressure and feeling, kind of the global sense of the body. Perhaps you can feel the breathing is like a massage, expanding and contracting, moving your body. Hang in there with that sense of movement and expansion, contraction, and if it's enjoyable, by all means enjoy it. If you are comfortable with a global sense of the body breathing, stay with that. If you're more comfortable or familiar with choosing a particular place to be aware of your breathing—the abdomen or the chest or the nostrils—then you can let your attention focus on that particular place.

The first two mental factors that are cultivated with concentration: the first is connecting the attention to the object of concentration, so connecting now to the breathing, turning the attention, and feeling, sensing the breath. The second factor is the ability of the mind to hold that breathing in attention over time, sustaining the attention, and the two different factors. The first one is strengthened by whenever you need to, choosing to come back to the breath and reconnecting. The second factor involves, once you are connected, doing what it takes to hang in there with the breathing over time, hang in there with a rhythm of breathing in and out. In order to support staying connected with each breath, begin counting your breath. A way to count is to count each exhalation and count up to ten. Each exhalation gets a count, and make sure you count each one. If you lose count, very matter-of-factly, begin again at one. Count in a relaxed fashion, but be somewhat intent enough so that you can stay there with the counting. You don't have to like counting. All you have to do is to count. Let go of anything which is excessive to being concentrated on the breath. Whatever else the mind gets involved in, it's normal for the mind to do that. You don't have to be upset; just when you notice the mind is involved with something else, reconnect to the breath and then remember to sustain

the attention with the breathing over time, letting the counting support you to maintain it over time.

It's not simply a matter of trying to maintain the concentration over time, the continuity of attention, but it's also a matter of being interested in doing that, being interested in discovering what happens when you do that. What happens when you are not successful? What happens when you are being interested in reapplying yourself and trying again, and maybe trying with a little different kind of effort, more application or relaxation? Don't be afraid of interest, curiosity, investigation. How can you do this? What does it take? Experiment. In the last minute or two of sitting now, very matter-of-factly, review what that was like. What was the quality of your efforting like? Were you trying too hard? Were you trying not enough? How could you have done better?

There are, as I said, many different ways of developing concentration, different concentration practices. The one that I'm offering as the foundation for this class, at least, is mindfulness of breathing. For the beginning of the class, I'd like to encourage you to count your breaths one to ten, then begin again, over again, one to ten, one to ten, keeping it up. If you lose track, start over again. The counting has a lot of functions. It certainly keeps us on track because you have to be alert enough to remember to count them. If you are agitated and distracted, then the counting tends to hold the mind stiller and keep you more on track, brings a balance from that direction, brings you more to a center. If you are sleepy or dull or not very energetic or engaged, then you have to arouse enough effort in order to maintain the count. To count, you have to have some energy. So if you are too sleepy, then whatever it takes to be able to remember to count, it requires you to rest up, in a sense. So it tends to bring more balance in that direction. If you're unbalanced and either too agitated or too dull, the counting can be very helpful.

You want to count in such a way that the counting actually feels helpful in terms of the inner voice that does the counting—maybe you need to soften it, sometimes you need to make it louder, clearer, more precise, sometimes more directed. So you experiment a little bit with how you count. One way of experimenting is to keep it fresh and not become mechanical. If you can, vary when you are in a cycle of the breath you count, meaning that you might first count at the end of each exhalation, and then at some other time, when you feel that gets more mechanical, just switch to the beginning of the exhalation, because you don't settle into your toes then. Then you might do it in the middle, right in the middle. Or then you might do it to the inhalation, count those. So you vary it if you feel you need to, if it's helpful to keep you on track, so that you're not getting mechanical or automatic about how you're

doing it, out of habit.

Counting, if you've never done it, is a very good way of finding out how concentrated you really are. I do it sometimes, and I'm surprised still to this day. Sometimes I think I'm much more concentrated than I am. I think I'm doing just fine. I count, and I can get to six, or five, or two. "Oh, I guess I'm not as concentrated as I thought I was." There's a way in which the calm mind sometimes can fool itself into thinking you're much more engaged than you actually are. The counting is a kind of truth teller, and it tells you what's really going on. So it has a lot of functions. For the first week, I'd like to encourage you just to use the counting, just to learn what it takes to be able to hold the breath in your awareness over the time of meditation practice. It's a training in what it's like to hold your attention or hold something in awareness. Don't worry too much about how concentrated you get or how concentrated you get in some other kind of definition of concentration. Just experiment and massage and investigate: what does it take to hold something in attention over time? What does it take to hold that? More and more of your psyche envelop itself or be enveloped by the breath, so that the integration, gathering together everything around the breath—that's what's going on.

I would like those of you who come to this class—as I kind of require, and I think it was posted in a newsletter—that for me, you sit forty-five minutes every day, because my understanding is you came to this class because you wanted to develop concentration, not to learn theory of concentration. What's the point of coming to the class if you don't apply it? You might as well not come, right? If you want to, if you apply it, you might as well apply it in a way that really makes a difference. Forty-five minutes. So that's the expectation if you come to this class. It doesn't have to be forty-five minutes all in one sitting. Some of you might be new to all this, that challenge it for that long. There can be two sittings in the course of the day, three fifteen-minute sittings. Some people actually might sit much better in fifteen minutes. The quality is more important than the quantity. Some people can get a higher quality sometimes by sitting shorter times. I don't care how you do those forty-five minutes, but forty-five minutes each day, okay? Got to be.

The other thing I'd like you to do this week is I'd like you to memorize the Mettā Sutta. There are two reasons for that. One reason is that memorization—what gets cultivated in the mind when you memorize—is what's needed for both mindfulness and concentration. It's a very ancient practice in Buddhism to practice, to cultivate, to memorize things. It's very supportive. We don't do it so much in our modern culture in the way people did in the past. So the concentration practice itself supports the meditation. What I want you to do when you're

memorizing the Mettā Sutta is to study, investigate, be curious how you use your mind in order to memorize. How do you engage with this task of memorization? What does it take? What are the qualities of the mind? What is the focus of the mind? Relaxation of the mind? What kind of involvement does it take? How do you hold something? Because you're holding it in awareness, you're holding something in your concentration. If you're trying to memorize, I want you to study and learn that. Find out what it's like for you. So it's more than just a concentration exercise. It's an exercise in discovering something about your capacity of mind, how it works. Is that clear enough? My hope is that part of that is that you'll learn something about how you can engage something helpful, but how you can also engage in your meditation that's comparable to something about how you engage in learning how to memorize.

Mark: Which translation do you memorize? OK, so you can either memorize the one we're giving you tonight, which is a different one, which will be a new challenge. Or you're welcome to memorize something different. You can look in the Teachings of the Buddha book and find something you like in there. Also, some of you might find that by memorizing it, you can use that—you can chant it or recite it to yourself before you start sitting, and that engagement, that focus on the memorization, the two, three, four minutes it takes to say it, will really jump start your concentration when you sit down to be with your breathing. So Susana copied, how might you make sixty? It's probably not enough for everyone here, but some of you are here with friends or partners. Take one and share. If you're coming for the one-day sitting, or Friday for the Monday sitting, or Sunday morning for the—well, if you can just wait a little bit and let the other people take first, then if there's none left over, we'll have more for you then.

So that's the two requirements: it's the forty-five minutes sitting and the Mettā Sutta. Suggestion: optional extra credit is for you to maintain a journal during this time, at the end of each sitting, to actually write down your reviewing. Write down, keep some record of what happened, and your engagement, your thoughts, your involvement with it. Then periodically, over the five weeks, review that and see if you can learn from that journal. We're not judging—you know, it shouldn't be a journal about how awful it was, or how terrible you were, or why you can't concentrate. It's really kind of focusing on the actual technical aspects of what happened to you as you sat, and how could you have done better, just in a very simple, straightforward way.

The other thing I'll say is that two weeks from today, which I believe is the fifteenth of May, I'm going to come an hour early, so at six thirty. Those of you who would like to come and

actually talk about what's going on with your meditation, there will be a kind of group discussion. I think it's very helpful, and we'll actually get to talk. You can talk a little bit about—maybe bring your journals and read out of them, or just talk about your discoveries and talk about details, talk about what's difficult. We'll do that separately from the class in two weeks. Hopefully that's going to serve some of you really well and be very interesting.

I'll end with this. There are three classic benefits to developing concentration practice or doing concentration practice. The first one is it's very beautiful. It helps to have—it's for the purposes of dwelling happily and at ease in the present in a nice way. The second is it cultivates insight and mindfulness. It supports and strengthens it. The third is it's a condition for the cultivation of liberation. So those are three wonderful benefits. If you're not interested in liberation in the future, then you can just have a pleasant abiding in the present. Thank you.