

Concentration: Week 2

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May 08, 2002

Keywords: samādhi, mettā, Mettā Sutta, ekaggatā, vitakka, vicāra, jhāna, vipassanā, Abhidhamma, continuity

How many people are here today who are new? Didn't they, weren't here last week? Q: So we have any more mettā suitors? A: I think some of the people out there know the only handout last week was a copy of the *Mettā Sutta*, which you can pick up on the way out today. The expectation is a little bit loud. Today we are a little bit, that's settled it better. Can you all hear?

OK, you can put it down at a table next or on the chair there. You, it's on a chair out there. So the only handout from last time is the copy of the Mettā Chant, *Mettā Sutta*, which if you're going to be in this class, you have to memorize. That's part of the deal. And I thought you'd have it. You know, I didn't say this, but I was expecting it memorized for today.

But when I mention that to someone, they were shocked. How could that be, you know, so soon? Oh, but some of you might have memorized it. Does anybody memorize it? Who would like to recite it? Begun Mister refers first three lines: Yes, please, if you don't mind standing. If you don't mind, this is what should be done by those who are skilled in goodness, and you know we have peace.

Let them be able and straightforward and gentle in speech, humble and not conceited, unburdened with duties and open, contorted and easily satisfied. Let them not do a single thing which the wise would get later. Be pure, not proud and undemanding in nature, wishing in gladness and in safety. May all beings be at ease. Whatever living beings there may be, whether they are weak or strong, omitting none, the mighty or the great, medium, small or short, the seen and the unseen, those living near and far away, those born and to be born. Let all beings be at ease.

Let none despise any being in any state or something that was lying before. Let love to deceive nothing, deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger

or ill will wish harm upon another, etc. Live life peoples in a to everybody fate. I the age, a mother. Even as a mother who, with her very life, protects her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all beings.

Radiating kindness over the whole world, do something before them. Attaining kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths, outward and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill will. Whether standing or sitting, or better standing or walking, seated or lying down, free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection. This is said to be the sublime abiding. By not holding on to fixed beauties, the pure-hearted one, with clarity of vision, being freed from all sense desires, will not be born again into this world. Great, thank you so much, needs a little refining, but the spirit was there. It was great. Thank you very much, Denita.

And I love reciting it every time I—it's like reflection for me when I hear the words or speak the words and am reminded about some of the values in it. It's a wonderful inspiration for me. It's a wonderful thing to memorize. And now, one of the reasons, the main reason I wanted—two reasons I wanted you to memorize it for this class is a concentration class. And so there is a relationship between how we use our mind to memorize something and then to recall something from memory, and how we use our mind to be concentrated.

And as you're memorizing the text, pay attention to what happens in your mind, how you use your mind to memorize. Not simply, not only—you know, you might notice difficulties you have, stray thoughts and distractedness and the judgments that might come in, but more specifically, when you're actually doing it well or succeeding, how is it you're using your mind? When you're being successful at holding a phrase or holding the whole sutta in your mind, what is it? What's that? What's the sense of felt sense in your psyche, in your mind, when you're holding something like that?

Maybe initially, when you first try to memorize it, it may be tense and stressful, but as you get into it and as you learn it, and as it becomes easier and easier, how is it you're holding it in your mind? What's the 'savour' in your mind? And as it becomes second nature to do it, but still, you know it has to become a focus. That focus that you're using to hold the sutta in mind might help you a lot with how to hold your mind in meditation, when you want to concentrate in meditation. And because sometimes in meditation, in a sense, you want to use your mind in a different way than how you usually use it in everyday life, especially when you do concentration practice.

And my idea was by memorizing that you get kind of—is another way into learning there a different way of using your mind. Because you have to use your mind differently. You're forced

to when you try to memorize. So that's my hope that you do study that and pay attention to what happens to you in the process of memorizing. And the second reason is that once you have something memorized, then it becomes a concentration device, and you can repeat it, and the repetition of it tends to focus the mind and concentrate the mind, stabilize the mind.

And there are times when, if you're really agitated, for example, and restless, that is really helpful to have something memorized. You recite it, maybe even out loud, and some people hold on to that as an anchor in very desperate situations and can really see a person through great difficulties. But even when you're not greatly agitated, sometimes people find just having something to chant at the beginning of a sitting as a way of kind of getting yourself concentrated. And then, once you're concentrated, you can continue with concentration meditation as you usually do it. Or you can switch over to the vipassanā practice.

So please memorize the text. And I'm hoping next week someone else will volunteer. In the course of the five weeks, the four people do it individually, and in the last week, when everybody has to memorize by then, unless you know it, we'll all do it together out loud. So, and the other requirement for the class for those of you who are new is to sit for forty-five minutes every day during the course of the five weeks. And it doesn't have to be continuous. It can be broken up into sittings, you know, twenty-five minutes, if that's what works for your life. But the total should be forty-five minutes each day.

One of the really important principles for developing concentration is that of continuity. That the continuity of the practice is one of the really important factors that creates concentration. And that's often overlooked because many of us will measure how we're doing in the moment and decide we're not concentrated or not working or do something, but we think we have to do more. And there is something we have to do in applying ourselves to the practice. But simply applying ourselves and staying in there in the continuous way is the continuity that builds something over time.

The analogy for this that's used in the suttas is that of starting a fire by rubbing two sticks together. And if you rub two sticks together to start a fire, you're at it for a while, and you decide to go get tea, and you come back and pick up your sticks and start again. Then you say, "But time to go back now," and then you come back after a while and rub again, "This is kind of tiring. I think I'll come back tomorrow." You're not going to build up enough critical friction to create a spark. And the same thing with concentration. With meditation, you have to have a continuity of practice in order for some kind of momentum to be built. And without the momentum being built, it's very hard for deeply concentrated states to arise.

So in terms of daily life practice, if you sit once a day, then it's sitting every day. And if you sit, you know, three days in a row, and then decide to go on vacation for three days, and then start up again for a couple of days, then off again, that on and off again is—it certainly is valuable. It's always valuable to meditate, but what you're not getting is the benefits of the continuity of momentum that's created day after day, which is very, very significant. And it's kind of invisible in a sense. You can't—you don't actually see how you're doing it. It's like a thing you're doing except you're showing up and just doing and doing it.

And the same principle applies on retreats. The continuity of retreats is really important. So it's the continuity of your practice which builds concentration. If you decide to sit for, you know, a sitting, and then go take a bath or take a nap, and then really going to apply myself now when I get back, and you apply yourself for another hour, and then you can get tea, that doesn't really allow the benefits of continuity to occur. And you might have tremendous willpower and dedication to keep practising for those one or two hours here and there. But if you're much more gentle and relaxed about the practice, at ease about it, but do it continuously to have a continuity, the continuity will bring the power, a lot of the power of the practice.

I wanted to read you this. Some opening of this paper that I have that's written by Eleanor Rosch, who is a professor of psychology, of Buddhist psychology actually, at U.C. Berkeley. It's an academic paper she wrote. It opens with this story. Some years ago, I was questioned by a visiting Tibetan monk about how psychology was studied in the West. Carefully, I tried to delineate our fields of psychology: cognition with its sub-areas such as attention and memory, personality psychology, development, and so forth. He looked puzzled. I attempted to explain what we meant by empirical method. He seemed even more puzzled. I talked about operational definitions and described some psychological experiments. Suddenly his look of intensely interested bewilderment turned to one of "Aha." So he said, "You are saying that in America people teach and write about psychology who have no meditation practice." "Yes, of course," I said. And he said, "But then, how can they know anything? And then, giving me a piercing look, he said, Do you think that's ethical? Is it ethical to study the mind without studying your own first?"

So concentration is one of the avenues into studying our mind, getting to know our mind. It's a concentrated mind that has the ability to really see deeply into our own psyche. In fact, the Buddha said—a kind of one of the kind of imperative declarations he makes in the sutta—he says, "Develop concentration." It's very clear, but it is really into the importance of developing concentration. To develop concentration, for one who is concentrated sees

things as they are. We usually think of the expression "seeing things as they are" as being vipassanā practice, and it is in a sense, but he says you must develop concentration. Then you can see better.

Vipassanā is often talked about as seeing things, not having a different kind of experience, but seeing your experience in a different way. Concentration is one of the great aids to learning how to see things in different ways. I certainly see it clear what's going on, but it often changes the perspective of what's going on in our life. It happens over and over again in my own life where I'm consumed, concerned about something, and kind of—I feel like I'm so maybe trapped in a box. I don't know how to get out, or how to figure it out. And then I meditate, and get still, and quiet, and concentrated, and somewhere there's a very different perspective of the possibility and the potential, and what's really the issue at hand, or what the problem is, or what's not the problem after all. A concentrated state changes a lot, changes how we see things.

Concentration is a—I think concentrated state, developing concentration is probably much more common than is often realized. And many people who complain that they have no ability to get concentrated—some of it's sometimes true, but sometimes we overlook how in daily life there's many situations we do get concentrated. I think often children who don't have attention problems naturally fall into sometimes very deep states of concentration. And I have known people, and it was my own situation, that when I started doing my meditation practice, I recalled states that I had entered into as a child, which I had long since forgotten. Some kind of returning memories of really good memories of really feeling whole and healthy and at home in the world that I experienced as a child.

One of them was a part of my growing up was in Italy. And when I was about eleven or so, I took the public transportation bus into town to go to school and the bus home. And we lived at the end of the bus route, right near the end. And I noticed that if I sat—and back then, the bus driver and the conductor who sold the tickets—and at the end of the route, the conductor would sit kind of a certain place every time, and he would tally up how many tickets he sold in his ledger, how many one way, how many round trips, how many children, whatever he did. And I learned that if I sat right behind him and looked over his shoulder as he concentrated on his work, I felt—I would feel a tremendous sense of well-being, very peaceful, very at home, very still, and I know now, until years later, that I get some sense of what's going on. I just knew it was great, and I would always sit in that place, so I could, you know, sit there with him. And it was my daily meditation practice, and I was kind of riding on his concentration, or riding on something there, somewhat to be provocative in the past or be evocative.

I've said that the amount of concentration you need to meditate is the amount of concentration you have when you take the written exam, the DMV. I don't know how it is for all of you, but at least for me, I'm pretty focused when I'm done taking that test. You don't want to get out of there when we finished. You know, my mind doesn't wander that much. I'm just much less than when I meditate. That ability to concentrate is right there. Sometimes fear is a part of it. Then the fear will encourage you also.

But back to how I felt as a child: the sense of well-being sitting behind the bus driver, the sense of being at home, the sense of delight and joy. I felt very much in my body at that time, a kind of feeling of warmth and of well-being kind of waving through my chest and my shoulders and my belly, and points that concentration is more than just one-pointedness. It's more than just thinking the mind has to be one-pointed and focused. It is the awakening or arousing of other factors also. And it's having a sense and appreciation that it's more than just developing one-pointed concentration. I think it's very helpful for knowing how to get concentrated to begin recognizing some of the other factors that get aroused as you get concentrated. And we'll talk about more of that as we go along these weeks.

The word for concentration is *samādhi*, which we talked about last week. The word *samādhi* is often translated into English as concentration. I don't think I said this last week. My favorite translation of it is composure. Did I say this last week? Because the word "sam" in *samādhi* is the same as our word "with," and the "dhi" part is the word "to stand" or "to pose," and so to compose. It makes a very nice, at least literal translation of the etymological origins of the word *samādhi*, to be composed. And I like that a lot, because composure, or something you do with your whole being, your whole body, you compose yourself on your experience rather than thinking it's a purely mental thing of focusing your mind.

Certainly that focus is an important part of concentration, but it's a composing ourselves around that experience. And so much more of you is involved than just this one mental factor of focusing. How can you compose yourself around experience? In order to be composed, you have to pay some attention to what you do with your body, how you hold your body, how your body relates to what you're trying to do. Are you composed in doing this? Are you settled and stable?

So the image is often used for a stable meditation is that of being a mountain. Imagine yourself as a big pyramid-like mountain. Some people like to use the word "concentric" to be a translation of concentration, because it's bringing things together into a center. So rather than concentrating where if you're focused on one thing, concentric somehow, maybe these people imply bringing everything together onto that center. And then I've seen people then

differentiate that with, contrast that with being eccentric, and most of us are eccentric, and at least in meditation, you're being asked to be concentric.

Now, to be eccentric means you're outside the center, outside of yourself, in a sense. And concentric, then, is everything's harmonized. Everything works together. Everything is integrated together. The sense of integration and connectedness is part of the reason why I think a lot of people feel at home when they get some degree of concentration. The word for one-pointedness in Pāli is *ekaggatā*. And so I want you to learn that there's a different word for one-pointedness than the usual word for concentration, which is *samādhi*.

Samādhi is a different factor than one-pointedness, one particular mental factor. In some of the later Abhidhamma literature, they enumerate that there are thirty-three to thirty-five mental factors involved in getting into the first *jhāna*, first deep state of concentration. That's a lot of mental factors to harness and get together. Luckily, most of them happen without our needing to organize or take care of it. But there's as many different things that come together to create a *samādhi* and *ekaggatā*. One-pointedness is one of those things, and some people emphasize it's the lead thing. It's the main thing that you have enough of this *ekaggatā*. One-pointedness gathers around it all the other factors. It pulls them in together, and you look like a magnet for the others if you hold that one-pointedness. But it can also work the other way.

And that is, if you focus or develop some of the other supporting factors for concentration, for *samādhi*, but outside of the one-pointedness, it's actually possible to enter into a *samādhi* without necessarily having a very strong one-pointed focus. Some of the various states of *samādhi* that can arise, one-pointedness isn't the one necessary factor for developing concentration. The other thing is concentration, or *samādhi*. *Samādhi* practice, or concentration practice, is very different from vipassanā practice. And I want to talk about some of those things, because most of us here have been doing vipassanā practice. And to really clearly see that there's a different practice might be helpful.

When you're doing *samādhi* practice itself, you don't try to confuse the two. One of them is that when you do concentration practice, there are such things as distractions. When I teach vipassanā, I emphasize that when you do vipassanā, there are no such things as distractions. So you're allowed to have distractions when you do concentration practice, and which means that you have to be wise about how you relate to so-called distractions, because what you're trying to do in *samādhi* practice is, in a sense, develop some kind of one-pointedness on one thing, and distraction is anything that takes you away from that. And if it takes you away too many times or too powerfully, it's very hard to develop that stability or this composure on

one thing.

So that's why if you want to develop concentration practice, it's helpful to practice in an environment which is peaceful and calm and hopefully quiet. Hopefully some way you can reduce the number of disturbances around you. If that's possible, it's helpful to have a clean environment and orderly environment so everything is helpful and supportive of the concentration practice. You don't want to be neurotic about this. You don't want to—you know, start getting earplugs, and, you know, patches to cover your eyes, and, you know, shooting your neighbors. Or you want to, because you also want to be realistic. You can put yourself in a sensory deprivation tank and enter into *samādhi* that way. If you really—but one of the things you're developing is also part of developing concentration, developing a strong ability to develop *samādhi* as inner strength. And that inner strength needs to become stronger than the forces of distraction.

So in the suttas, there's descriptions of the Buddha sitting in deep *samādhi* states and having five hundred ox carts pass by on the dirt road in front of him, just where you stay sitting. And when he comes out of meditation, he said he didn't hear it—that there is a so concentrated, so focused that he is not aware of the environment around you. Generally, when you do vipassanā practice, we're not encouraging you to have that kind of—sometimes it happens in vipassanā—not aware of your environment anymore, but it's not put up as being the point of the practice. You enter into deep states of concentration, that often happens—the environment, sensory input from the environment tends to fall away. So when you have a distraction, rather than ending your meditation, you want then to try to override it by developing a stronger focus, a stronger strength of being focused. So take it as a challenge, and we'll talk more next week about how to work with all obstacles and the many kinds of obstacles that get in the way of concentration.

But it might be helpful if you didn't realize there are distractions, and do what you can to minimize those distractions within reason. There are also prerequisites for concentration, and I talked some about this last time, and this time I'll talk about it from a little different angle. And prerequisites mean you don't just simply plop down on your cushion and just, you know, throw yourself into getting concentrated. It's helpful to hear prerequisites in terms of how you prepare yourself for that particular meditation practice. And they're prerequisites in terms of the kind of understanding you bring to bear to the practice.

Before you start, it's very helpful to have some—both for vipassanā and for concentration practice—to have some good understanding of what the practice is. So the first thing you should understand with concentration practice is the value of getting concentrated. And we

talked a lot about that last week, but you need to review that and think about it and really reflect for yourself. Do you understand how valuable it is to be concentrated? And from that sense of feeling value in concentration, then hopefully there's a sense of inspiration. And the inspiration is one of those thirty-five mental factors that supports developing of concentration. I can't support it.

The second thing you need to understand is what the practice actually is. Really understand what the practice is. You're doing the specific practice, the how to do it, what it takes, how it's done. To feel like you at least theoretically know what the practice is about, you've got good instructions. If you don't understand the instructions, then ask questions, and when you sit down, you feel, "This is what I'm going to do now. I am going to really apply myself with the breath, on yetta with the breath. This is what it's all about. It's being with the breath. When other things arise, I'm going to try to be wise about how to relate to that, so I can get back to the breath as quickly as I can." This is not vipassanā practice. It's not about learning how to work with these other distractions or work with the kind of forces that, in the same way as not trying to penetrate it, or learn how to be, you know, free of it while allowing it to continue. With concentration practice, learning how to be free from things by learning how to develop a stronger concentration, to biologically avoid them. There's lots more to be said next week about this.

But part of concentration practice, it's a seclusion practice or sensory restriction practice. It's a practice where we restrict our attention, we pause on. Sometimes it's talked about as a practice which opens attention to become unlimited and wide, expansive. Concentration is a restrictive practice, and we're composing ourselves on something very particular as opposed to all possible things. But to understand, "This is what I'm doing right now. I really can develop my composure in this particular thing, other issues, or the thoughts, other ideas, other things that I could be working on—I'm not going to do that now. This is what I'm going to work on for now." And hopefully understanding what the practice is gives you some sense of confidence, you know, that this is what you're going to do.

The other side of that, it's helpful to know what the practice is not. And it's not working on your psychological problems. It's not working on great ideas. It's not trying to figure something out. It's not trying to use a lot of things. It's simply—it's a very, very simple task. And the simplicity of it is simply to get still and quiet and peaceful, composed on one particular thing, and to have all the different elements of your psyche engaged together harmoniously on that one particular thing. So it's a simplification practice as opposed to, you know, so many of us are addicted, a very strong programming to be working on all kinds of issues. We

meditate and concentration practice is a reprogramming, or it's breaking old habits of how we use the mind and learning new ones, and learning something very simple, learning how to let go. A lot of it's letting go—just letting go of everything else besides the one thing you're focusing on.

The other thing that's helpful as a requisite for doing concentration practice is to appreciate your own potential to change, to change your mind, to change your heart, to change your psyche, and to have great respect for your own capacity to change. Some of us have no confidence we can change. But all of us can change. All of us have within us the potential to become awakened, to be fully awakened. We have the potential of becoming freer, becoming more loving. And to have great respect for that potential. I think it's very helpful for developing a meditation practice. I think it's actually a lot easier if you come to yourself with respect and care, and to—can you find some modicum of respect and care for yourself? And it's epidemic in our culture that people don't have that. People have come to the opposite. They don't have respect for themselves. Later, they come with a sense of lack of self-worth. But your respect doesn't have to be for you, what you can do so much, but rather for this potential that you have, and the potential. It's helpful to think of the potential within you as not being personal, because if you think of it as being personal, then it gets tied up with, you know, all kinds of personal issues and ideas you have. But this potential for awakening and love and compassion that you have within you—it is not a personal thing. Every human being has it. It's not there because of your personality, but rather it's inherent in who you are, this potential.

So understanding the value of concentration, understanding something about what the practice is and isn't, understanding your potential for change and respecting it. And the fourth thing is to understand something about what might happen to you as you develop concentration. When we do vipassanā practice, or at least me, many teachers, I don't want to suggest that anything particular is going to happen to you. We'll say the vipassanā practice is not about any particular thing happening to you. It's how you relate to what's happening, how you see it. It's not about having—developing some great state or getting a right state. It's just about learning how to be present for all states without choosing one—choiceless awareness. Concentration practice is about developing substates, is about particular experiences. So it's a very different direction for the practice is going. So having some sense of what direction you're going in is one of the things that will help you develop concentration. What might you expect as you're doing the practice? What might happen?

One of it, if you have some sense of the various things that might happen as you develop

concentration, hopefully it'll provide you with some patience and some trust in the process. If you know, for example, that continuity is one of the keys to practice, then you might have more continuity. Takes time, then you might be more trusting and patient in what arises. If you know that concentration practice often works like a—to dislodge repressed material in the psyche, and suddenly you might be bombarded by all kinds of things, and you know that that's—fears and angers and memories. If you know that that's part of the process, then, "Oh, you can be patient about that. Oh, I was told this might happen. I'll go back to the breathing. I don't own—I won't engage in it or think I'm a failure." If you know that you might have memories arise long since forgotten, if you know that you've been told you might start writing the great American novel or some great creative idea, then you may be more—less likely to be derailed by those. And, "Okay, just—I know that might happen. I'm just going to be patient and stay there." If you know that when you first sit down to meditate, first day or two in retreat, to the first twenty minutes of a sitting or whatever, that there's a tremendous amount of momentum from your daily life—of agitation, of thoughts, of concerns, of things. And that's what you expect: to have a momentum that has to work itself out of the system. And it's part of it. Just patience. You can't suddenly expect the momentum of your life to stop just like that, just because you'd like it to stop. You have to be very respectful of the momentum that's built up by how you've been living your life up to that moment. You sit down to meditate and then to be wise about how to practise with that momentum—not to be patient with it, not to fight it, but just very matter-of-factly continue with a very simple concentration practice, not being derailed by the fact that you're not working very well. You're agitated or restless for a while.

Concentration states are very susceptible to the attitude that you have, the attitude you are carrying. So you have to be very careful with the attitude you have when you're practising *samādhi*. If you have an attitude of defeatism, if you have an attitude of self-critical judgment, if you have an attitude of pride, if you have an attitude of impatience—all those things have a very powerful influence on what happens to you, as you know, in these kinds of states, and they can derail you quite strongly. So you have to have some sense of your attitude. What's the attitude with which you're practicing? I'm very careful with that—respect, patience, trust are very important elements. So that's what I want to say for now.

And now, what I'd like to do now is to have us sit again, this time with a little more guided meditation. If you'd like to stand for a minute, even sitting for a while, is the speaker system working or quiet? For people, everyone's happy with it. It won't be a long sitting, because I have a lot to say and know. So the class time's not to add up much to your forty-five minutes.

Don't depend on the class to fulfill your requirements for the day. Well, you busted it was. So compose yourself. Take a posture. Compose yourself with your posture.

And in the beginning of every sitting, it's helpful if you have a set-up procedure, some little procedure, some ritual or way that you have to help you get settled, to remind you to be here, to let go of the tension of the day. I find it very helpful to take a few long, slow, deep breaths and exhalation to let go of whatever tension or stress that might be easy to let go of. Concentration practices are, I think of as being embodied practice. Very important to be embodied. And so to use the set-up time of the beginning of the sitting to somehow or other embody your body. Take some deep breaths and feel your whole body as you breathe, and then you can return your breath to normal.

And since this is a *samādhi* practice—in vipassanā, we say, "Don't control your breath." If you find it useful, especially in the first five, ten minutes of a sitting, it can be helpful to control your breathing a little bit, perhaps to breathe a little more fully than usual. So this little bit of conscious effort involved with each in-breath and out-breath is a way of—that conscious effort helping you to stay connected, being involved, engaged. So the conscious effort to breathe helps center you on this phenomena of breathing. And you only feel the in-breath as carefully as the out-breath, the out-breath as carefully as the in-breath. And the operating word is feeling. When you are switching from thinking to sensing the breath, and then you want to develop as much continuity of sensing the breath as possible. So you've sensed the beginning, middle, and end of the breath, the in-breath or the out-breath, if the word makes sense to you. Compose yourself around the breathing. Compose yourself within your breathing.

As you continue a session of meditation on the breathing, chances are that your breathing will change as you continue sitting. And it's helpful to know, to track how it's changing as you stay with it. When you first sit down, it might be tight or short or tense. As you relax, it might become deeper and fuller. Then, as you get more settled, it might become light and slow and very subtle. Might even disappear. But be patient and not be ahead of yourself expecting it to be different than it is. But if you start becoming familiar with how it does change, then you can kind of track how it's going: "Oh, now if the breath is like this, I've got to that stage of breathing, then later you know, now it's changed to that."

Then, as a way of helping you develop the concentration, you can begin counting the breaths one to ten. If you lose count, start over again at one and count. Give a count to the exhalation and make the count right in the middle of the exhalation. Let your interest be with the breathing. If you find yourself interested in anything else, let go of that other thing. Just be

with your breathing, the counting. Develop a strength in learning the strength of letting go, so you can really let go of anything else. And now continue counting the breath. And now each time you count, give the count at the end of the exhalation just as it ends, and notice if there is any differences in how you feel concentration or anything at all between counting in the middle of the exhalation versus counting at the end, and now continue counting, but now count at the very beginning of the exhalation, just as it begins, or even just an instant before. And how was that? How was that? How was that different for you?

And then to ever end the sitting. And this is what you should do at the end of every sitting for the concentration class is to spend a minute or two reviewing what that sitting was like, what happened, how you applied yourself, what the quality of your effort was, your enthusiasm, your interest. Not to be judgmental, but just very matter-of-fact, so you can learn from your experience, so you can compare different sittings over the week and the weeks and see the patterns. So there are many different techniques for developing concentration for this class, for using the breath and the counting, and you might find it interesting to move around. How were you do the counting? How many found that interesting differences? And so you can—and sometimes you can use the differences for your—in your favor. So if sometimes, if you're sleepy, for example, you might find that maybe counting at the beginning of the exhalation makes you more awake, or simply varying it keeps you more awake, or keeps you interested. Or if you find yourself very agitated, or very tense, maybe counting in the middle and drawing it out changes how you are. Or if you're very agitated, it is very hard to stay focused, as you find yourself keep drifting off a lot, you might find that giving a count to both the inhalation and the exhalation in the beginning helps. You can get on track one to two like that, but you can experiment with that and play in different ways, and learn how it affects you, and find where it—what works best for you in different ways.

In developing a meditation practice, both especially for concentration, there are two factors, many factors involved, as I keep saying, but there's two factors I mention now that are very important. One is the factor or the possibility of relaxing. A deep *samādhi* state is a very relaxed state, and the other is to be alert. And we don't always know how to hold those two together, and we don't even know. Some of us are really attached to being relaxed, and we just go into the relaxed state and fall asleep. Some people talk in a *samādhi* state—I don't know if this is true, but they talk this way—that you want your body to fall asleep, but your mind to be wide awake. So there is a real—both these things are going on: deep relaxation, physical relaxation, mental relaxation, but also a kind of vitality and alertness in the mind, which is really clear, keen, crystal clear, and awake, like you know, just that you woke up

from a great nap. And these are two different factors. So alertness also, effort, relaxation, and effort—applying oneself—are important. It's important to look at these and see how they work. Relaxation is a very important element. And if you know some of the signs of relaxation, notice how you get relaxed, what happens to you as you get relaxed. It can be very helpful then to nurture, nourish along the process of developing concentration. Part of relaxation is loosening unnecessary control. Of course, sometimes relaxation is frightening for people because they don't want to give up control. But there's a lot of unnecessary control that we give up when we practice concentration. There is some control involved—controlling the mind to be present for the object of concentration. But we're letting go of control of knowing, for example, or figuring things out, or manipulating, or being right, or always, you know, it's a lot of different things. We let go of unnecessary control, understanding how you get stressed and how you hold stress in your body, in your mind. Your relationship to stress can be helpful. Some people are really attached to their stress because some people think this stress is what gets them by in life. They're more competent, more capable in their work or in their life. Or the people only think that people will like them more if they're kind of hyped up. Some people rely on stress to avoid facing themselves. Because if you're really always hyped up and kind of, you know, stressed out, you don't have to turn the attention back and really see deeply what's going on, because sometimes stressful states are often outwardly directed. What has to be done? We need to acknowledge stress that we carry with us. Vipassanā practice, of course, is very helpful if you have a strong vipassanā practice for doing concentration, because you have the skills of seeing clearly what's there. But you don't understand our stress. And sometimes understand the source of it and understand how it gets relaxed. Now it gets released. As we meditate, the process of its relaxing. I carry stress on my shoulders, you know. It's the burden of my sense of responsibility I carry with me, right? And I sit down sometimes to meditate, and one of things I'm aware of is how I carry it on my shoulders. Not aware sometimes going on being responsible kind of guy. But when I sit down to meditate, and I'm aware of it, and one of things it happens is that begins to relax and release us. And I cannot know. That's part of the deal. And I don't get upset myself that I'm tense and aching there. Just that's part of the deal. And I wish I could live my whole life wiser. But somehow that's one that still catches me, and luckily I meditate. But there are signs of relaxation, and it's helpful. I think—I think it might be helpful if you know some of the signs. What happens to you as you relax, and if you can get tracking what happens to you as you get concentrated, helps the concentration process. One of the things that happen sometimes is that the body starts feeling heavier. Sometimes it feels lighter. A lightness sets in, or heaviness sets in. Sometimes when there's a lot of adrenaline flowing system or a lot of stress,

the body can—adrenaline has a way of kind of lifting a person up. And sometimes when the adrenaline falls away, the body kind of comes back to earth. Sometimes the body feels heavier. The shoulders feel heavier as we relax. Sometimes, as relaxation deepens, the sense of lightness in the body begins to occur. Sometimes it goes from heaviness to lightness, sometimes lightness to heaviness. But the sense of weight in the body, some sense of solidity in the body, shifts and changes as you develop concentration. And sometimes, in the beginning stages of concentration, I find my body feels very—feel very at home in it, but it tends to feel very, very solid. And as the contraction deepens, my sense of a body becomes almost ethereal. Sometimes it even disappears. There can also be tingling and warmth on the skin that occurs. Now, this can be a classic idea that when our stress, sometimes the blood leaves the extremities, and when you relax, the blood goes back to your fingers, for example. And that you can—you can raise the temperature of your hand by relaxing. And so sometimes I can feel that warmth spreading through your body. And some people get cold when they meditate, so they shouldn't feel bad, but that's just the way. I don't know why that is. But some people find they get warmer when they meditate, and just recognize that all this is a sign of relaxation, things are going along that way. One of the interesting things that can happen as you relax is that things get worse. Unacknowledged tensions get revealed, and you can start feeling aches and pains. And to know that that's part of the deal, to know it when you sit down. I know that I often feel the tension in my shoulders. Oh, that's just part of the deal. I'm not, you know—meditation's not making me worse. It's like suddenly I'm getting tense in my shoulder because I meditate. It's revealing tensions already there that I'm unconscious of. And there's a whole series of tensions that reveal themselves as we meditate. And so just be very—to know that that's the case, and be very patient with that, very accepting of it. Oh, it's there because of causes and conditions in the past. It's there because the way I've carried myself around in life. I can't expect it to go away just like that. But it can go away. As I know, if I continue practising, it'll begin to unravel, and the others which I talked about in the sitting, is your breathing itself can change as you get more relaxed. And to track how it's changing also can help the process of developing concentration to know how your breath is. No straight breath is—maybe you normally carry a short, tight breath fast. Then know as you relax that it starts getting longer, softer, more relaxed, more open, deeper. Then to know that maybe after a certain point it goes in the opposite direction again. It gets very short, a very deeply concentrated state. The breath gets more subtle. And sometimes very short or very little movement goes on there. Hardly notice any movement at all, you don't—you? On how deep you really deep, exhaling breath anymore. You have this very tight little movement goes on, and sometimes the breath seems to stop entirely. Other signs of relaxation are

some people will see colors as they develop into a—get concentrated. Some people will see images. Some of them develop a great sense of space, of being very spacious, some sense of lightness, great sense of physical and bodily lightness. Some people feel very grounded. Some people feel increasingly at home in themselves, as many, many different ways you can feel. But there is a change that takes place as you go into a *samādhi* state, as you get concentrated. And to be a little cognizant and aware of those changes and be wise in relationship to them. Don't anticipate them. Don't be upset if they're not there, not happening quickly enough for you, but to notice when they do occur, to notice and appreciate them. And I believe the appreciation and noticing of them and tracking of them helps the interest of staying focused and developing concentration. They help keep you on track. It's kind of like using a feedback system. I will—you use them to feedback or to keep you on track to do what you continue doing what you're doing. So there's a lot of relaxation that can happen when you meditate. Some people think of meditation as the place they're going to relax. They use that for that purpose. There's nothing wrong with that. What I would recommend to all of you, if it's possible, try to relax before you meditate. You know it's really good. If you're already relaxed by the time you sit down to meditate, then you might say, "Why should I meditate?" Then there's much more beneficial things you can get from meditation than just relaxing. So if you even can just take five or ten minutes to sit and sip a cup of tea, or do something, kind of unwind, do something, so that when you sit down to meditate, you can prepare it and kind of come with a more relaxed disposition. It probably can help. Now, you can have too much relaxation. Mostly what you can have is too much relaxation is not balanced with effort. And one of the symptoms of too much relaxation is what sometimes in meditation we'll call the sinking mind. There's two kind of opposite directions of the mind that sometimes call sinking mind and drifting mind. And the sinking mind is a mind that's gotten dull and kind of cloudy, not really engaged at first. The sinking mind can be very subtle, just a little bit—you can be concentrated and very present for your breath or whatever, and then after a while the effort is not so strong, and effort starts getting dull, and yet the clarity of the breath starts getting a bit duller and fainter just a little bit, and you can still stay and stay present. But things are going a bit duller and heavier and be. And often when you're concentrated, often it is more of a pleasant state. You might congratulate yourself how well it's going, but the mind is actually getting duller and duller. The mind is sinking, so you want to track that. You want to track the vitality of the mind, vitality, the effort that you are making so you can be balanced. Develop senses. As soon as—the mind has to be balanced, not too far one direction, not too far in the other direction, not sluggish, not agitated, not hesitant, not striving, not dull, not out as agitated, I guess not. So when you notice a sinking mind, you want to adjust for that.

So again, the vipassanā practice, we don't usually do adjustments so much. We talk about just seeing more clearly. When you do concentration practice, you adjust constantly to keep you in that balance and keep you going on track. And so you can adjust your body. If I get too relaxed or too sleepy or dull, you can sit up straighter, develop a kind of more energy in your body, somehow be more a kind of intent physically. You can adjust your breathing. You can breathe more deeply to get more energy back in. You can really—sometimes, if you relax the abdomen more, sometimes that can bring actually, paradoxically, more energy, more alertness. Sometimes a deep or more relaxed breath will alert the mind. Change the place where you focus on the breathing, like the way we do the counting, for example. Or maybe if you pretend to follow the breath in the stomach and your mind is getting dull or sleepy, maybe move the breath up to your top of your chest or to your nostrils. Moving where you pay attention to breath can change the dullness of the mind. You can wake up the mind or get sharper a little bit. Sometimes, if people need to relax more, being aware of the breath lower in the body can help with relaxation. Higher in the body can help with a little more alertness. So you can experiment with this. How is it for you? How can you adjust the breathing? Some people who meditate will use the breath to soothe themselves. And this is vipassanā practice. Practitioners do this, too, and it's in the way of vipassanā practice. But if you're using the breath to soothe yourself, it's very good. If you're tense, it's very good practice. If you're tense, but if you're already somewhat relaxed, if you keep that up as a habit, you can start putting yourself to sleep, and the mind's going to get dull. And you have to be very aware. Are you—how you're connecting to the breathing? Are you leaning into it in such a way that you're kind of being kind of soothed by—it's the best word I can come up with—soothed by it, nursed and nurtured by it, or something? Trying to hang in there with relaxation and to rest with the breath. If that's the case and your mind is getting dull, if it's sinking, stop doing that. Otherwise you'll keep—you just do putting yourself more or more into sleep. So adjust your body, adjust your breath, and you can also adjust your mind, your mental state. You can inspire yourself. You might think of something that's inspiring. You could remind yourself to be patient. You can have wisdom, a clearer understanding of what's going on. You could, you know, bring mental energy into a situation, apply your mind more fully. It is a mental focus that's going on with *samādhi*. It's one of things going on. So can you put more energy into the mental focus, bring more mental effort into involved. So change your mind also. It's fine to do that. When you do *samādhi* practice, the other thing we do is—and probably go over ten minutes again like we did last time. It's now nine o'clock. Is drifting? The mind gets slightly over-excited, or it gets putting too much effort into the practice. And see, you want to be very attentive. Is the mind beginning to drift into thoughts a lot, or the mind beginning to

get distracted a lot? Then you want to bring it back into focus. You want to relax. Sometimes when the mind is drifting a lot, you want to relax more. Then you want to be soothed yourself with the breathing, rest with the breath. Sometimes developing a more receptive attitude is helpful. With the drifting mind, relax and become very open and receptive to the breathing, whatever your object of meditation is. Again, you readjust yourself. If you have too much stress, too much effort, it gets in the way. Too little gets in the way. If you're too tense, it gets in the way. You're too relaxed, that gets in the way. If the mind is drifting, it keeps—you know, you can. So mind, sometimes the mind—you get into a concentrated state, its sense of well-being that sets in, and then people get complacent, and then the mind drifts all too easily. You want to be careful. The mind isn't drifting. You stay on focus, you stay engaged, and you apply yourself.

The last thing I want to talk about today is some of things I talked again also about last week, but talk a little bit more emphatically about them. In the classic development of *samādhi* in Buddhist tradition, then there are the first two important factors that get developed in the mind and then eventually have to learn how to let go of them. So you have to first learn how to use them and bring them up, arouse them and apply them, and then you have to learn how to let go of them. But they are called *vitakka* and *vicāra*. And *vitakka* is usually translated as the initial application of mind, of attention, and *vicāra* is the sustaining of that attention over time.

So many people—some people are very good, and you know the mind drifts away and distracted, and they bring the mind back to the breath. He's very good bringing it back. But once they are there, they give up, or they become complacent, or they don't apply themselves any more. There's a different kind of effort that's needed to sustain the attention over time. So first you make the effort to bring mind back and apply it to the breath or whatever your object is. Then you make a different kind of effort to sustain it over time. To hang in there are all kinds of analogies which are given—beautiful. One is the *vitakka*. The initial application is a bird when it takes off, when it jumps out, you know, takes off to fly, and *vicāra* is when the bird is flying, or *vitakka* as when a bee is heading towards a flower, and *vicāra* is when the bee is buzzing around the flower, or a *uppāditā*. I love the analogy of if you're polishing a brass bowl. First you have to take your cloth, and you have to connect the cloth to the bowl, and then once you're there, you sustain the attention of the bowl by rubbing it and polishing it. So the initial application, and then sustaining the attention over time. Colloquially, in English, we can say hanging in there with it, an analogy that I like, or a sit image that I use for myself. Sometimes is fishing. I don't do much fishing, or I didn't—Spanish to

Kitty a little bit, but I don't. But so hopefully this is accurate enough. But if you catch a big fish, you are—you have to vary the length of fishing thread with the fishing line you send out. If it's a really big fish, and it's pulling away from the boat, then you give out. But if it's coming swimming towards you, you reel in. And what you don't want to do is have any slack. You don't want to be too taut, because any might break. You don't want any slack, because if the line gets slack, then possibly the hook can fall out of the mouth. So you want to keep it taut all the time. So you must take this taut connection between you and the fish through the line. So the same thing with the mind and the breathing. I sometimes imagine that here's a fishing line to the breath, and I've hooked the breath, and I want to keep that connection taut—not tight, not tense, but not slack either. Just the right tautness. Just keep it there. Keep it. Keep it there. So that means that if the sensing of the breath, the feeling of the sensations of the breath as being connected, I'm not going to leave that for one moment. So there's a—I say you, I'd like to stay in one place, usually in the body. Usually it's my abdomen, and I'll just hang in there at that one place, and try to have as much continuity in that one place as possible. So I do. The mind doesn't leave—the awareness doesn't leave that at that one spot. At any point in a cycle of breathing in and out, I'm tracking and feeling what's going on there, the whole cycle. That's where the line is taut and connected, and not letting it let up for one moment. Now, I can't always do that right, but that's the direction we're going towards. And as the mind gets more concentrated, it's that continuity that we want to have. And that requires letting go of all the other things that might pull the mind away, all the habits we have or the things we—ways in which we use our mind, we get interested in. So it's developing new habits of mind and breaking old habits is a very important part of the concentration practice: learning how to exert the mind when the mind is slack, learning how to restrain the mind or hold it still when it's agitated, learning how to encourage it when it's restless or dejected, and viewing the practice with equanimity when it is going well. Those are the things. So initial application of mind, sustained application of mind, learning how to apply just the right amount of effort in doing those things. Not being too tense, nothing to relax, but being very intent in what you're doing. And as you keep doing the practice, the initial effort that you make changes. And initially it might feel a little bit tiring to do it, but as you get into the groove of it, it becomes easier and easier and more relaxing. And eventually you have to let go of both the initial application of mind and the sustained application to mind, because you no longer need it, and they just get in the way because you know—it's like, you know, if you're trying to run all the way to the beach and go swimming, when you get to the beach and the water, you should stop running. But you need that effort to get there. So you need to have some effort, and then you have to know when the right time is to let go of that effort.

So again, I talked a lot. I hope this is useful. And if some of you have questions, I'll stay around a little bit and use that as opportunity for questions. Next week I'll come an hour early. I'll come at six thirty. And if that'll be a time—that hour, six thirty, seven thirty—be time. We can talk about all this much more, have a dialogue, and you can talk about how it's going in your meditation, how it is practising this at home, and we can explore all these things much more before the class starts. And now, I really hope that you have a real appreciation for the contemplative life, the life that develops our capacity for a great stillness, great peacefulness in the mind and the heart. Some other route: finding this contemplative stillness, peacefulness, silence. And it's really a beautiful thing. So many thanks. See you next week.