

Concentration (Week 5 - Part 2)

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One of my important moments when I was practising on my long retreat in Burma was after I had been practising for a few months there, practising on retreat for a few months. As I did on most days, I went into my abbot's little house to have an interview. One day, as I was walking in through his door into his room, I glanced to the right, where he had an altar, right to the right maybe, about ten feet away. On the altar there was a new Buddha. I had been there before, but I noticed behind, I noticed before, he had a few different small Buddhas there, and there was a new one there. I saw in very rapid succession: I saw seeing the Buddha, experiencing it as a pleasant experience, a pleasant sensation.

To see that Buddha, seeing the desire for more pleasure, and seeing the desire for more pleasure translate into, I want that Buddha. Normally we just walk in, see the Buddha, and say, I want it. I wouldn't exactly have known why I wanted it, but there are only steps that happened because it happened so fast. But my mind was struck—was concentrated enough and still enough—I could see the building blocks, that simple process of seeing it, seeing, experiencing the pleasantness of it, and then at the magic moment of trying to want more pleasure. Now, it took quite a lofty thing to want a Buddha image. It's a wonderful thing. It's a great religious object and all this stuff.

But the fact is that it wasn't some lofty inspiration that wanted me to have it. It was simply that it was a pleasant experience and I wanted more pleasure. Was that basic? The movement of wanting pleasure, pleasantness, pleasant experience, and not wanting unpleasant experience, is really foundational to much of human experience, much of human life. But often we don't see it at the kind of fundamental, foundational level. Often it's covered very fast in the mind, and pretty soon you know you want something, and you have a whole philosophical rationalization about why it's a good idea to have, and you might explain to everybody

else your philosophy why it's good, but the base was simply that you wanted more pleasure and this thing provides it, or you want to avoid some kind of tasting uncomfortable.

Some people find that as their mind gets stiller, calmer, more concentrated, it gives them a vantage point to understand a little bit the workings of the mind that they normally can't see so quickly. One of the things you might notice is the relationship you have to pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Your knee hurts. You have an unpleasant feeling. You have a pleasant sensation. Your body or mood arises.

It isn't just something that's there in a simple way, but there's a movement towards it, away from it. Here's a reaction. The mind might start thinking, the mind might start wanting, the mind might start pushing away, not wanting, resisting. There's this reaction to it. As the mind gets quieter and quieter, we tend to be able to see more clearly the difference between the pleasantness and the reaction to it. Did some of you have that experience today?

Could you be able to get a little calmer than you normally would? And could you actually track at the very end the difference between pleasant, unpleasant, and then your reaction to it? Did you have something like that today? Anyone want anything about their experience doing that? Anything unusual? You saw, you simply saw it. No one's raised their hands yet. So I was passing the mike as I was hoping someone's got a job. We can have Catherine once talk about what you saw when you looked at the difference between pleasant, unpleasant, and then your reaction to it.

The thing that I saw was a thought came up about a co-worker who I am struggling with, and I saw it was interesting that I wanted to cling to something that was negative. Then I had the thought, Oh, isn't that interesting? I kind of cling to negative reactions more than I do pleasant ones. That's a big insight. That's what I notice. So it's one thing to have a negative, to mean some negative thought I have experienced, and something else to cling to it. Then it's something else to realize that there's a preference for that disposition towards that someone else. Nothing happened, nothing interesting.

The sort of things I want to talk about today is the relationship between *vipassanā* and our mindfulness and concentration, and one of the ways that concentration is used, it is used as a platform from which to do *vipassanā* work or insight work. When the mind is calm and concentrated, then it tends to be much more insightful, can see more clearly things which an agitated mind cannot see. So teachers who emphasize concentration practice usually, at some point, will then ask the student to stop doing concentration practice and switch over, doing mindfulness or *vipassanā*. There's a variety of ways that can happen. One way is to just switch over and do mindfulness in the way that it's taught at Spirit Rock or taught generally

around. Just note what is happening. Maybe use the breath again, but do more mindfulness than breath, rather than concentration. Just take noticing what arises in your experience, and there's no attempt to direct it in any way. Or rather, it becomes a choiceless awareness, noticing what's happening as it arises and developing your mindfulness in that way.

When the mind is concentrated, and the mind won't wander off as much as it can if it's agitated or distractible, so once it's concentrated, you can much more be present for the arising and passing of things, and such a kind of open mindfulness to the experience. Some teachers will direct concentrated students to do *vipassanā* in directed ways. So to have particular—it can be that now that you're concentrated, look for this or explore this. One of the things that people might do is do exactly what I did for you: notice the difference between what's called the feeling tone, the *vedanā*, the pleasant-unpleasantness of the experience and your reaction to it, the clinging or the grasping or the desire that arises right after it. That connection between the *vedanā* in the feeling tone, the pleasant-unpleasantness and a reaction, is considered to be a very important place for being able to cut or stop or move or see through the reactive mind, the mind which is not free. So it is a more important place to discover equanimity and freedom by learning not to do anything, to be able to let go of the reaction, wanting, the clinging that might arise. Some teachers will direct the students to look there, look at that really carefully, and it can be very powerful.

Other teachers might—I never have known Western teachers to do this, but in Asia sometimes they do this—they'll tell students, Now that you are concentrated, look very carefully at the sensations in your body that are arising and passing. Look for what's changeable in your experience, and just are tuning in to what is always changing. So if there are feelings of vibration or pulsing or flowing or, you know, flashing in and out of existence, different sensations, then start looking at what is impermanent, what is changing. Then get yourself, use your ability to get absorbed, to get absorbed in those sensations which are arising and passing, so that more and more of what your experience is is that of things arising and passing. Because you're concentrated, you can get absorbed in that. Because you're concentrated, you can see that much more precisely. The normal constructed mind cannot notice the phenomenal subtlety by which physical sensations arise and pass, or mental sensations arise and pass all the time in a dance of our sensations. So that's something they might look at.

Other teachers might direct the students to look at what is called *dukkha* or stress or suffering. Look at the places—even when the mind is very basically, you feel a lot of strong sense of well-being because a person is quite concentrated—now to look in that field of well-being. Look for the places where there's some stress or some tension there. Still little bit discomfort.

Discomfort might be very, very minute, but look for it, smell it out, tune it out. Because that is where the cutting edge of your practice is, because that's where the suffering is, and see if you can let go of it or relax it or work through it. The more refined the mind is, the more concentrated the mind is, the more what's left in terms of tension represents or is connected to some of the deepest attachments that we carry in our minds and hearts. So the concentrated mind leads us to access some of the deepest places of holding. The way to connect to it is to feel or sense the tension that's there, the pressure or the unsatisfactoriness that might be there.

Now, in some very deep states of concentration, the suffering or the unsatisfactoriness is not very strong. Now, compared to everyday life, it's not much at all, but it might be a kind of tuning into that part of your experience to purify that. Also, as I continue the process of letting go, that leads to liberation. Other teachers will direct students to more thematic forms of *vipassanā*, for example, a study, or look at your experience from the point of view of what's called the twelvefold chain of dependent origination. I can't go into that now, but many of you know it. There's a very big teaching around what's called the twelvefold chain of dependent origination. It's a way of analyzing your experience. So look at the experience through that filter. Other teachers, myself, can now look through it—look at it through the filter of the *Four Noble Truths*, really used to apply that to your experience. Or some teachers will say, Look at the arising of self, self-concept, self-identity, self-clinging. We not really tune into it. Where is self? Some teachers will give the students the question, Who am I? You can't look at it. Generally, you're not supposed to find anything. But you can do some more thematically looking and looking and looking, so that the concentration practice becomes a platform for doing a variety of different kinds of ways of doing *vipassanā*. There is not just one form of *vipassanā* practice, which is most people introduce just one form—actually, variety.

All this is possible if you're doing a lot of concentration practice. Some people don't develop concentration to the point of getting deeply absorbed, going to the *jhānas* that we talked about last week, but only will do concentration practice to the point that the mind is no longer easily distracted, so the mind is stabilized, so it's easy to be here. If you sit down to meditate and you find that the mind is just really wild and you can hardly stay present, some people will find that that's the time to do some kind of concentration practice—very simple kind of working with the breath or doing loving kindness—until the mind is no longer easily distracted. You can hear and arrive, and then they'll let go of the concentration practice and start the mindfulness practice. Some people will wait much longer and do a lot of concentration practice, get really deeply absorbed, and then at some point in a work on the repose

practice and switch. Generally, sooner or later, a student needs to switch from doing concentration practice to doing repose mindfulness. The idea in Buddhism is that enlightenment comes from *vipassanā* practice, not from concentration practice, so that if you stay with the concentration practice only, you'll stay limited, and you'll somehow be able to switch into another mode of being with our experience, looking at our experience.

One of the important things to be realized by concentration is that concentration is a capacity to be concentrated and the experience of being concentrated are constructed phenomena, and all constructed phenomena are impermanent. So concentration tends to have a lifetime, or the concentrated state tends to have a lifetime. If you develop a strong concentrated mind through a lot of practice and then stop practising, that muscle is going to wither; you have to keep that muscle going. If you develop concentration and you're able to get concentrated, you're not going to stay concentrated. Sooner or later, it's going to fade away. I know a lot of people who suffer—a lot of meditators who suffer—because they expect their concentration to be stable once they get there. They think, Well, now that I got it, it's not supposed to go away. For some people, a good concentrated state might last for five minutes, sometimes it might last for half an hour, sometimes it might last for longer, but sooner or later it will fade away. It's very important to realize that it's impermanent, so we don't get anxious and upset when it starts fading away. Rather, can I take that as part of the course of what happens? Kind of be relaxed about it, and just kind of go with it until it—I was concentrated for a while, now I'm not—shift. Maybe if I'm on retreat, maybe it's time to do walking meditation, or to change what I'm doing, or to switch back to mindfulness practice, or just continue what I'm doing, but not be upset because I'm not to have a steep level of concentration.

To me, the real key to developing strength in meditation practice, whether it's concentration practice or mindfulness practice, is continuity of practice. So having some continuity of practice—anything I talked about—to practicing every day on a regular basis. The other is, whenever you're meditating, whenever you're practicing, to give it your best effort. Your best effort is not supposed to be that way—the best effort that's available at that particular time. Your best effort is always situational. When you are tired, your best effort doesn't look as good as when you are really alert. If you have just had some tragedy in your life, your best effort at being concentrated is not going to look as good as when everything's gone really well in your life and you feel really calm and settled. Your best effort—but what's important is that you give it the best effort that's available, not that your effort looks like it matches some high standard. It's the continuity of giving it your best effort which bears fruit over time. It is not having a very deep concentration all the time, but rather you're giving the best you have.

Sitting regularly, meditating on a regular basis, and then not being complacent, not pushing too much, not being too complacent about the practice, too lazy, but giving it the best that you have is available at that time. It's one of things that bears fruit. The other thing that's to do with concentration, the degree to which you can get concentrated, and especially if you can get really well concentrated—oh, it's really helpful to try to extend the calm or the concentrated state you're in as you get out of meditation, as you leave meditation. So don't think of it as something that has to stay only for meditation. You open your eyes, and then you jump up, and you know, jump in your car and go somewhere. But see if you can kind of stay in that subjective state of being calm, settled. You know that whatever the feelings, you are being concentrated. The thing is to keep it going as you start, as you get up from meditation for a while, so you can tend that period of time into your life.

The monk Gotama Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu talked here a few weeks ago. He gave an analogy for this, which was kind of nice. That is, if you take the work of going up, climbing up a ladder to the second floor of the building, when you get to the second floor and you've done your work up there and it's time to leave, you don't just jump out the window to go back, but you go down slowly down the ladder. So the same thing with meditation. If you get yourself into a nice state of calm or relaxation or concentration in meditation, if you kind of blow it away, just get up in meditation to start what you can do next, it's like jumping out the window. But see if you can kind of extend the sense of being peaceful, at ease, open, relaxed. Work the edges of that. If you do that, it does two things. It will continue developing that capacity for being concentrated or being peaceful. It'll help you to stabilize it. It also helps you to understand what it is that takes you away from that, what are the forces in your own psyche that trigger you to get anxious, to speed up, to lose track of your presence? What is it that can get you caught? If you get more you can be aware of what gets you caught, the wiser you can be about the world of caughtness. The wiser you are about the world of caughtness, the easier it is to meditate, get concentrated again, to come back to this still place. So leaving meditation is important. How you do it, to do it in a careful way. Try to stay present.

So now it's your turn. I talked a lot and ending last night last week. We didn't have much questions. So now it's the end of the five weeks. This is your chance to ask questions of anything that seems relevant, that I haven't covered or wasn't clear, or questions from your own experience of doing the concentration practice. Yes, you could use the mike. You had talked earlier about using this concept of joy, and as I've been trying to work that into my practice, I'm finding that. I'm finding a little bit that it, that it's working. But I'm also finding that there's a kind of effort that I'm a little self-conscious about. It seems a little contrived to

be able to hold it for any length of time.

What you mean is contrived? Well, I don't know if that's the right word, but it just seems to take a lot of energy to hold on to the joy for any length of time. I think what it is that in the past I've seen meditation as being a state where I'm relaxed, whereas this isn't that. This is having to come up with energy to maintain joy for being concentrated. Can you say a little bit about how you maintain that joy? How do you experience the joy, and what do you do to maintain it? It's partly an energizing feeling in my body. I notice myself smiling a little bit, and my posture being more so. It's also partly a physical exertion, and I have a kind of a mental image of the way you describe joy as being a combination of happiness with anticipation.

You might continue for a while, see if you, in continuing with the way you are doing it, the contrived way you're doing it, whether you can't, whether you can't get more concentrated, more absorbed, more present, less distracted, really here. Then at some point—oh, I don't know what the point will be—then, see if you can relax, let go. In letting go, maybe letting go into the joy, or letting go into some subjective experience of concentration, or letting go into the breath, if that's what you're focusing on, and relaxing. See what happens then. It might be that you'll have even more joy if you, in a kind, prepared way, let go into it more fully, and it's much more peaceful. The other possibility is that maybe it is too forced what you're doing, and so maybe you want to stop doing it. But as you develop the concentration in a more relaxed way, in the way you are familiar with, some of the same symptoms will arise, but they kind of come in through the back door rather than be contrived. Then you'll recognize them, and then you just have them help you along and let them grow. Does that make sense to you?

Someone else, please be sure if you can clear up some confusion that I am the way. I was reading last night in a book that on the seventh and eighth—yes, mindfulness in the eighth one is concentration. So I was wondering about your statement that mindfulness is considered—I mean, awakening or enlightenment is considered coming out of mindfulness and not concentration, in that concentration is the last step of the path. Also last week we were talking about the *jhānas*, the different states of consciousness, and I was under the impression those were stages coming out of concentration practice. The *jhānas* are stages of concentration practice. In the classic definition of the eighth of the concentration factor of the *Eightfold Path*, the last step is developing the *jhānas*, is developing these absorption states. I don't know if we necessarily have to see what's called the *Eightfold Path* as being a linear sequence. These are just the eight aspects, the eight wings, the eight component parts of the path. That's one thing to say. Some people do see it as a sequence, and some people will say that mindfulness is

very helpful as a foundation for doing concentration practice. But once the concentration is strong enough, there has to be some kind of insight, some kind of seeing that does it, somehow lets the mind let go, and that seeing is the insight practice.

Another way of saying this is that mindfulness and *vipassanā* are not synonymous. We often call them, we always treat them as the same thing, because we use the word *vipassanā* for what we do. Mindfulness is the mind's ability to know what is happening, recognize what's happening in a careful way. *Vipassanā* is when the mindfulness has, at a strong enough level of concentration, that it is seeing the three characteristics. So sooner or later, there has to be a yoking together, a joining together of concentration and mindfulness, and etc. There has been, in the history of Buddhism, and often even the way I talked here in this class, a feeling that there is a strong distinction between mindfulness practice and concentration practice. But in deep practice, I think that it's not so useful to think of them as being so separate from each other. You need a very strong level of concentration in order to do mindfulness practice deeply, and you need a certain level of strong mindfulness in order to do concentration practice. The other thing is that some of the experiences that happen as you go through the *jhānas* in concentration practice will also happen, maybe a little different degree, different degree of intensity, as a person goes through very deep *vipassanā* practice. Some of the same sequences of some of the factors come into play. So I think it's not so useful to see the *Eightfold Path* as being the eighth contraction's definitive end of the path. Does that answer? So Galina, that's very related. Just trying to get that difference a little bit more.

In mindfulness, the instruction is often just to be aware, for instance, of what this breath is like in when I'm doing this practice. It doesn't seem different from that. So I'm just—in other words, when I'm concentrating on the breath, I am aware of each breath as it comes, and I'm interested in what each breath is like. How is that not mindfulness? Is mindfulness when you just let whatever arises, you're willing to just let anything arise, and you go away from the breath? Not necessarily the breath. The breath can be both an object of mindfulness and an object of concentration, and there's kind of an overlap, so that you're using the breath as an object of mindfulness. Also, it tends to help developing concentration. But the difference, if you want to distinguish between mindfulness and concentration here, would be when you do concentration practice, you might actually know the details of what the breath experience is like. You're just holding the breath—you're holding the attention at the breath, at the experience of breathing. You're holding it there, not allowing it to slip off, just staying there, staying and staying there. At the end of your session of meditation, you might be very concentrated, but you haven't really learned much about the breath. You haven't seen great detail.

So it's like if you are looking out a window at snow falling. If you're doing concentration practice, it would be just like holding the attention and watching the flow of the snow going down. Just the going of staying there right there. Not going to get distracted at all. You're absorbed in that flow of going down. In mindfulness practice, you really try to get really close and see really what's going on there. You might see the details, the differences between different snowflakes, you really see the snowflakes for what it is in itself. In concentration practice, you don't really know anything. As concentration practice gets really strong, there is a—sometimes what we're focusing on is conceptual and not experiential or not immediate. So *vipassanā* stays in the real world, non-conceptual world. Sometimes in strong concentration practice, you're no longer focusing on what's the real world. For example, a classic practice for developing concentration is called *kasina* practice. In *kasina* practice, you have a disk, a dish, or a disk of different colors, and then you focus on the disk so much that if you close your eyes, there's an afterimage, and then you focus on the afterimage. You're not trying to see the disk more carefully for what it is, but you're actually trying—then you have this concept, this idea, this afterimage, and you try to hold the mind really still and get absorbed in the afterimage.

Some teachers who teach concentration will have the students stay watching the breath at the nostrils, but do not tell the students: Don't focus on what the sensations are. Don't get into the details of that's heat and that's cold and all that. Just hold the mind right there until a white light arises at the tip of your nostrils, and that white light is called a *nimitta*. Some sects focus on what's called *nimitta*, and then if it's just a pale light, ignore it, and keep staying with the breath. At some point, when it gets really bright, then you leave the breath, and you focus on that bright light, which is kind of like an afterimage. Some people, in Buddhist terminology, sometimes call it like a concept. So it's not really the experience. It's more like something the mind is creating, the function of concentration. When you develop very strong concentration on the breath, in going into the *jhānas*, for many people, at some point the breath disappears, and what they're really concentrating on at some point is something like a *nimitta*. Maybe then it's not like white light, but it might be a feeling of beauty, or a feeling of a lot of pleasure or joy that arises. Again, that's kind of a created aspect of experience. So the simple difference is that in concentration, you're not nearly trying to know what the experience is. You're trying to hold it there. So it's an anchor for holding the mind still. In some ways, concentration practice is really stupid, because it's not trying to analyze and figure and judge and manipulate and think about your taxes. You know it's not going to happen, but if you can just—teacher told me to stay there. Just stay there. Is that helpful? Thank you.

This is kind of along the same lines. But then when you—it feels to me like when you are getting very absorbed, and the breath kind of falls away, and you're just there with that very spacious, still feeling, how is that different from mindfulness? I mean, doesn't it just become a mindfulness state at that point? It could be. Some people will naturally or come on their own just move over to mindfulness, what's going on. But if you want to develop your concentration further, then you don't. Then you find something that you can focus in one-pointed way on in your experience. So if the breath disappears, then is there something else? There might be some feeling of pleasure in the body, some feeling that's really, some really nice feeling. Then you can kind of focus on that nice feeling and develop your one-pointedness there. If the breath has disappeared and you're in a *jhāna*, then you need to talk to a teacher promptly. But then again, you can focus on the *jhānic* factors and try to—right, you notice, you know, if some of the *jhānic* factors, like the joy, is there, and then work the joy, pervade it through the body. Pervading it is put in the instructions, and so you work it and pervade it through your body so it really gets strong and stable. If the joy has passed away and it's happiness in the third *jhāna*, then you can do the same thing. Try to pervade the happiness throughout your body, stabilize it, and really make it strong. If the happiness fades away in this powerful state of equanimity, the same thing—if it makes sense. If it makes sense to do that, you can try to stabilize and work it. If you're just getting concentrated and it's not a *jhāna*, just kind of you're somewhat concentrated, and your mind is not really wandering away, and it feels very open and spacious, you might be access concentration, and so then you have a choice of whether you want to place practice at that juncture, or that you want to do more concentration practice along those lines.

What role does intuition play in knowing? Do you use intuition to know? Feels like now is the time to go to mindfulness. What do you mean by what do I mean by intuition? Well, sometimes when I'm sitting, I'm there, and I have a—I guess for me, it feels it's a feeling, and it feels as if I should do a certain thing, and it feels really clean, and I've been following that, and then later I think maybe I shouldn't do that. So when we talk about shifting to mindfulness practice, I don't know if I should do that, if I have the feeling that now it's the time maybe to do it. I think it's fine to use intuition, whatever you know, whatever that is for you, whatever that means, you know. I think it's good to check it out. Intuition should always be double-checked first. So just automatically act on intuition—I hold, do it. But to check it on—is it clean, you know. It doesn't feel right and something, it's fine. So, you know, I think a lot of the unfolding of practice is through trial and error, and part of the prompting of trial is intuition. You try something out and see what the consequences are, what the results are. You might—if what you're setting yourself to do is, you know. Sometimes you might not—

you might try an error, not give in to your intuition and see what that's like. But yes, it seems fine as long as you learn from your experience, and then your intuition will get better and better.

My other question has to do with ethics. You mention that some teachers say go back to that as a foundation to cultivate concentration. Well, not so much to cultivate it, but if you're ethical, if your ethics are really off, it's hard to get concentrated. Sometimes, as some teachers say, you cannot get into even access concentration unless you are ethically clean enough. I don't know exactly where the line is, but I don't know how it works, you know. I feel shy to generalize how it is for everybody. But I think that to some degree you need to have your ethical life clean in order to get concentrated. How clean that is may vary from different people. So if you've robbed banks recently, you're probably not going to get concentrated, you know. Or you sit down to meditate just after having done this horrendous lie to your best friend, it's probably hard to get concentrated. So you, and to kind of make sure you have, you know, you develop, you know, some are clean, and for some people, you know, they might have to go back and clean up some parts of their life. As the mind gets more relaxed, it bumps up against the places where the mind is not relaxed, and so what does it take to relax those places? If those places have to do with ethics, what does it take to relax those places in the mind? Sometimes it means you have to call someone up, or you have to make amends, or you have to change how your behavior or your something. So the mind can be relaxed enough because the mind has to be relaxed to get really deeply concentrated. If part of your mind is not relaxed, you got to work on it. So that's where someone might say, Oh, you should stop meditating for a while. I think you have to go home and work something out.

Ilan in the back: I have a couple of different comments or questions. I'm not even quite sure what they are. Again, getting back to this distinction between concentration and mindfulness. For me, the experience of concentration is very relaxing, maybe because it is so dumb, whatever. But when I switch over to mindfulness, it's more agitating because I can feel that I'm searching for words to try to describe whatever I'm feeling or thinking, or even the word planning or thinking, it moves me into a different realm, and I'll notice that that's not—I have more aversion to that than the concentration, because that feels just so good. So I'd like you to comment on that, and then also as a follow-up to that, when you said to switch over to the mindfulness, is there some point you let go of that, too, and then you're—are you back into that sort of state that you get into sometimes with concentration, that you're no longer in that realm of words or thinking? You're just in a being kind of realm. So is it any good?

So often concentration practice tends to be more relaxing and refreshing, restful, than mindfulness practice. Sometimes when people do a lot of mindfulness practice, sometimes they're instructed if you're getting tired from doing the mindfulness to go and spend some time doing concentration practice to get the rest. Then when you're rested, come back and do mindfulness. Part of the function, one of the usefulnesses of concentration practice is to get that kind of rest. Now, it's common enough for people who have done a concentration practice first before doing mindfulness to feel a little bit like this: My mind is not coarser than it used to be in meditation. It doesn't feel satisfying. Some of that is just the awkwardness of one learning a new skill. If you spend your whole life walking, and that's really smooth and easy, and get where you want to go easily, and then finally someone gives you a bike to ride, and the first day on the bike you're really wobbling, just like you're really sore. It takes a lot of muscles, and it's really hard to ride that bicycle. You say, Well, why should I ride a bicycle if I can walk? But if you ride a bicycle for a couple of days, pretty soon you can ride without using your hands. It's really easy. It's actually easier than walking. So it takes a while to learn a skill.

With mental noting, if you're using mental noting of your experience, sometimes it takes a while to get the hang of it, to become smooth and easy, almost second nature. Some of the agitation that comes from using it falls away. Also, you might want to look a little bit at how you're being mindful. If you're making a commentary about your experience, maybe that's too complicated, and maybe you can make it more simple. Maybe it's just one word, label, and not a commentary about your experience. Keep it really simple. Some people do mindfulness practice without doing the labelling, without using words at all. There's an option to do both ways, to do it more silently. There's a kind of silent seeing of the experience, and there's the option of viewing it with very quietly, very soft whispers in the mind, labelling experience as you're doing it, using the mental noting. I've heard one teacher, like Joseph Goldstein or someone, say that his experience is that the people who tend to note as a group tend to go further in the practice, and as a group, the people who don't. But within individuals, there's a wide range of difference within each group. For some people, the noting just never works. They can go really far without noting. For some people, noting works really well. For me, noting was really fantastic, and it really helped my practice and really kept me on track. Some people will do the noting only when the mind is not so concentrated. Once the concentration comes from the mindfulness practice, will produce concentration. Once the mind is quite still or concentrated in doing the mindful practice, then they'll stop doing the noting. Some people will only note certain things. They'll only note if there's thinking going on, because somehow that's—or some people only note sensations. Some people only

note the feeling tone, *vedanā*—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. There's a different kind of culture, like an art, and so different people use the art form in different ways. The noting is not so important in and of itself. What's important is that there's a clearly seeing or sensing what that experience is really like. So if I hold up this bell, what's important is not that you label this a bell, but rather you see very clearly the roundness of it, the colour of it. You actually see kind of the sensation level what this actually is. Calling it a bell might actually make it easier to stay there, keep the mind there, really stay focused, as opposed to the mind thinking about your taxes, you know. Is this helpful? It is.

I have a follow-up question, though, if that's okay—probably both the mindfulness noting and then concentration. With the mindfulness noting, how accurate or how detailed are you trying to be? Or do you just have a couple of words that you just use, you know, on? It'll call for some people. There's no one way in which this unfolds for people. So different people, the practice unfolds a bit differently. You have to kind of find your own way. Some people find that there are certain times when accuracy is really helpful, and it just really helps us not be caught by it, and a certain freedom that can come by really acknowledging what it is, an accurate label. Sometimes label accuracy is not important at all. The main function of the label is just a nudging. The mind stays present. There are times in my practice where I've used to note yes for everything that's happening, just say yes to everything. Sometimes my mind has been really, really concentrated, still, and I just grunted at everything, just go in a quiet little whisper in the back, just acknowledging being there for it. So it doesn't have to be accurate. It just kind of, you know, just what keeps you there.

One last question that passes along, and this has to do with the concentration. I notice that when I'm really deeply concentrated at times, it's a wonderful place to get problem solved, because I'm serious, like the new solutions come, and when I'm too busy or whatever, I can't see them. So what I'm asking: Do you sometimes sit down and get concentrated in order to do problem solving, that it's not attached to doing meditation at all? Yes, oh, so it doesn't confuse you. As long as your intention is clear of that sitting, right then, right—as long as it's clear and fully clear. So if your intention is to meditate and not to problem solve, then the practice is working really well. If it gets you to the point where you're creative, something's not working really well. But if you get off the train to do the creative work, then you've lost the opportunity to continue the momentum of that good work to take you further.

Teresa: So I guess I don't understand the whole mindfulness thing, because when you're doing the noting, it's always the same thing, like either there's pain or an itch or so. How is this helping you in your life? Because if I'm going to note something, I want to note something

that's going to come up, like if perhaps I did something wrong in the day and need to make amends. Or, you know, I mean, it's like you're only noting sensations and pain, or stuff with your body—it has nothing to do with in the real world. So when does it, when does practice like all this mindfulness help you in the real world? Is it like you're outside and you can know when you're upset or so? Maybe—I mean, I don't do much noting in daily life. I tend to use noting in meditation, not so much in daily life. Sometimes I'll use it, but if we use, we substitute the word noticing for mindfulness. Your capacity, ability to notice what's happening in meditation will bring a number of benefits in daily life. One is, it's like a muscle or habit that you're developing, so that as you develop a habit of noticing the present moment more and more in meditation, then you're more likely to notice what's happening in the present moment outside of meditation. As long as you notice what's happening in the present moment in daily life, it's really helpful because you know. If you're not noticing what's happening around you or within you, all kinds of unfortunate things can happen.

So how do you know when you're not noticing? Because what you're noticing, like, you know, I mean, you can't tell, like, if you're asleep out there, or if you're asleep. You can't tell. See, if you're really asleep and you've lost your mindfulness, then there's no hope for you while you're in that state. I mean, if you're too lost to even know that you are not mindful, there's no hope then. But sooner or later you'll notice that's the case, and that's when the practice begins. Oh, I was lost for the last five minutes. Ok, let me try to be present now. Then you try to wake up and be present. But if you're really lost, my understanding of being lost—if you're so lost, you can't even, you know, don't even know you're lost. So when you're doing as both, when you say you have to switch over, I don't think that I unconsciously switch over. It's just like you, just—I don't know what I'm doing. I think I'm doing both together, something like that, and it doesn't make any—because you still pay attention to your posture and to your—you try not to move. If you want to move your hair, you know what I mean, you note that or something. So I started out to concentration. I don't quite follow it, like you sit down. You say you are going to do concentration, and then I guess when I'm concentrated, like if I've pain in my knee, I just say pain now and then, and I don't deal with it. I don't. I try not to move, I tell you, to your ears. So you're mixing up a little bit of mindfulness with the concentration practice. That's fine. I think to some degree they work together. They support each other. But if you want to get really concentrated at some point, or you know, if you are focusing on the breath, you would simply let the pain in your leg recede in the background, and you wouldn't be aware of it anymore. If you were really concentrated. So one strategy to get concentrated is to ignore certain things like that. Sometimes we have a very strong habit to be concerned about pain, so the mind goes there, and then we note it and do mindfulness.

But if it's possible, one strategy to get concentrated is just ignore the pain within reason, of course. So you can stay on track with the concentration, with the focus on the breath, for example. They are over here on the stage.

So we're going over now. It's almost fifteen minutes after nine. Let me say this: I want to thank you all for coming. I hope it's been useful, the class, and I'm happy at other times to answer other questions. If you do the concentration practice and try it for a while, if you want to come and talk about your experience, you can certainly come and talk to me or talk to other teachers. It's always good to talk about your experience. So I want to thank you and I'll continue taking questions for a while. If some of you want to quietly leave at any point now, you're welcome to do that. You don't have to be a captive audience. So please, question.

I have—isn't really, is it really so much concentration? If he's on you, I called it like this. I was actually not wanting to use a microphone. That's probably—it's not so much the concentration practice itself, but lately I can pick up a lot of other people's energy more than normal. I can perceive it, and I can—I don't know. It's somewhat fortunate. It has its fortunate aspect, and it's unfortunate, and I'm not really clear on how to work with that. So this is not really a question. So it can't be a question related to the energy. Sometimes it sticks a little bit, you know, for me, because if somebody has really strong negative energy, I don't—I definitely feel the strong—I can't be with this energy, like it's really intense for me, more than before, like I said, number whenever. So I don't know how. Also, I can also sense people's judgments, and that is also really—I don't know what. Sometimes I've gone after it, like I tried to work with them about it, and sometimes I don't really know what to do. So those are two examples that, if you wanted to walk me through what I would do with them, that would be really helpful too. Most big topic. I spend a lot of time with it now, but I think what you are talking about is—everybody has some experience of that, it's just a matter of degree. As people get more concentrated or develop mindfulness or other, for other reasons, some people develop a very heightened sensitivity to the issues of energy or emotional feelings or projections or judgments. As you said, feeling people have, and I bet just like anybody, people have to make a decision: Is it comfortable to be with this person or not? Am I capable of being with this person without it being, you know, pushing me over the edge in some way, or making me feel too lowly? Sometimes we decide on this person, you know, it's too painful to be with this person, because I just, you know, and then sometimes we pull back. Other times, it might not be too painful, but we decide, Oh, maybe I can work with this. Maybe I need to develop more mindfulness. Maybe we have to look at the ways in which that person's experience, that person's way of being, or judgments of me—even because people do judge each other

a lot, the world's full of judgments. What does it take for me to not be concerned about that, not to care whether someone likes me or not like me? To find that freedom, you know? So, rather than seeing it as a problem out there, I see, you know, what's the button that's been pushed in me, and can I—or what's the hook, and can I straighten out the hook?

I just wanted to ask a general question about practice in general. It's my understanding that to the extent that we can, we carry on the practice throughout the day, in trying to be aware of what's going on. Does that mean that, let's say, for example, we're driving, and we're going some place, and perhaps we're thinking a little bit about what we're going to do when we get there, and maybe also we have the radio on and so we're hearing stuff. Now, does that mean that would good Buddhist practice say, Well, you want to limit what's going on so we can more easily be aware of what's happening? In other words, turn the radio off. Don't plan about what you're going to do until—in other words, limit your activity so that whatever it is that you're doing, you can be more aware. Or do you just kind of, like, do what you would naturally do? Another example might be—you could be in the shower. Normally, when I take a shower, I start singing, but that's—now I have to be aware of two things. I mean, if I'm a good Buddhist, I have to be aware of my singing and washing myself. This might sound ridiculous, but I'm trying to get some kind of a handle on—do you modify your lifestyle to make it easier to be aware of what you're doing?

Yes, but you have to be careful what you do, you have to be wise about it. So I hope you don't stop singing in the shower. It sounds like it's a nice thing. It's a joyful thing. It's maybe a really nice moment in your day. But don't do that if you go on meditation retreat, don't sing in the showers then, because then your time is better spent just showering and can continue to develop the mindfulness practice. Just—okay with the radio in the car. You can experiment with—you experiment and see what serves you the best. Do you arrive where you're going more present, more calm, if you turn off the radio and stop thinking about tomorrow and just stay and drive? What's the most useful way to arrive? I've noticed that for me, I find a certain pleasure in listening to the radio, and sometimes I'm a bit seduced by that pleasure. But if I am, if I'm really honest or really notice carefully, I actually arrive in a much more satisfying state if I don't listen to the radio in the car, actually. So it notes, like, the moment—there's a momentary satisfaction, the pleasure of the radio. But if I let go of that momentary satisfaction, it allows a certain kind of deepening of presence, of beingness. That's very satisfying. So I've learned that tends to be a lot better for me. It also depends what you want to do with your life. So if a second question of retreat—if in retreat you're there because you try to develop mindfulness, then you want to modify as much of your life as possible to really support

that direction. Then in daily life, what is the purpose of your life? What is important for you? If developing mindfulness is really important, then what are you willing to modify so that you can strengthen its growth? But you want to make sure you have a balanced life, because if you start feeling grim because you're not living a balanced life, that's not good. So maybe then you start singing in the shower again, so you get a little balance. Does that make sense? Yes, you have Daniel. So he hasn't, isn't as yet.

I'd like to get a clarification about loving kindness as a concentration practice. I heard you say earlier that it helps you be present, helps one be present who practices that. That doesn't tell me anything that's distinct from many other things that help one be present or be more concentrated. So I wanted to know why is loving kindness in particular singled out as a concentration, something to do for concentration as opposed to other—there are other methods that help one be present and be more concentrated. Yes, lots and lots of things. Classically, in Theravāda Buddhism, there are forty classic objects for concentration practice. So there's lots of things you can use—almost anything you know for concentration. Part of the advantage of a kindness practice is it also helps condition or dispose or condition the mind to be more friendly. You can get concentrated on—you can get concentrated, you know. So things which are also element—kindness is a wholesome thing. You can get concentrated on hate. Some people are very concentrated in their hate. But that's not a healthy concentration. As what goes in Buddhism, wrong concentration is not helpful. OK, so it isn't that it produces more concentration or is a better tool. It has other benefits beyond concentration, the loving kindness. Some people find it easier to develop concentration in there than anything else. Some people find the breath as being a little too subtle to work with, so you really get concentrated. Rather, it is considered a little bit hard to get concentrated on because breath gets more subtle as you get more concentrated. Whereas with the loving kindness, the phrases stay just the same, and you can kind of go looking for them, or kind of, Where is that loving kindness phrase? So it has other benefits, and it's a good thing to do. It's a very pure and very purifying practice because of, you know. For example, if you use *kasina*, you know, this disk, you know, it doesn't really bring up the same kind of issues that the loving kindness will tend to bring up that you have to work through.

What was it that you referred to just now? You said the *kasina*. Then there's a classic meditation practice of looking at a coloured disk called *kasina*. Yes, you're welcome. Some will end then. So thank you. I'll stay behind, you can come up here. But so thank you very much for today. For today.