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SPEAKERS

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It's a custom here at IMC, to give the Martin Luther King Day to give a talk on Martin Luther King in honor of him. And but I kind of got my wires crossed. And I set up that I was going to do this series of talks on concentration. And so I think I'll say keep the course with the concentration talk. So, some of you are expecting a talk and Martin Luther King sorry, the case so, this is a second talk on this series on concentration. One of the really kind of pithy quotes from the Buddha about concentration. He says, cultivate concentration, develop your concentration for When the mind is concentrated, you'll see how things are. It's approximately that was the quote. So develop concentration. When you concentrated you see how things are. And this is one of their great goals of Buddhist practice is to develop a kind of clarity of mind, that we can see our life with great clarity. I can see deeply into our life, and so that we can see things as they are. And in Buddhism, the idea of seeing things as they are, is sometimes connected to seeing very deeply how the Four Noble Truths work in our lives to really understand very deeply in the kind of that deep recesses of our psyche, the working of clinging, grasping attachment, and the possibility of releasing that and freeing that and that's kind of the definition of the quarter, the quarter definitely, definitely just seeing things as they are. And so concentration practice creates this stillness, the stability, the clarity that allows us to see clearly see how things are. The one of the last week I talked about translating the Sanskrit Pali word Samadhi, not as concentration but rather as composure. Another kind of way I like to talk about it, which makes it point is to talk about becoming concentric, as opposed to eccentric. eccentric apparently means to be off center outside the center outside of yourself. Whereas concentric, I thought the opposite would be centered on yourself with the center. And so to develop ability, ability to be centered, not just here, but even more important to be centered here and now, to be able to have the mind still stable focusing on Something is happening in the present moment. And what many people will discover when they meditate probably all of you is that the mind has a very strong tendency to wander off in thought and work often wanders in anywhere but here and here and now it goes to there and then or you know, there and some time and, and so to stabilize the mind is to stabilize the mind here and now so it stays right here. It's rests here, it's a beautiful image I like for this idea of a stable still mine that's really kind of addressed. Here is that of a, of a big bowl, take a really large bowl, and maybe start to steep the sides, and you and you, you cast a marble into it. The marble will go around and around and around, up and down, up and down, slowing down. And finally, when all the Momentum is out of the marble, it'll rest at the bottom of the bowl. So if the present moment is the bottom of the bowl, then the mind is like a marble. And it's it goes this way. And that way it reacts to this and spins around and around. But as it settles, at some point, it comes to rest. It doesn't go to sleep, a concentrated mind is very alert, very present, but it's also addressed. And so it's kind of addressed in the present moment, alert and present. So what today I want to talk a little bit about some of the things to know about becoming concentrated, developing states of concentration. And one of the important things to know is that it's, it's best not to think you can do a frontal assault on getting concentrated.

It's more than the state of concentration that Buddhism talks about, is a state that is best seen as I think it's best seen as specially for anyway best seen as a gift as a gift that we create the conditions for. And a lot of our job is to create the proper conditions. So the mind can come to rest in this alert way the mind can be focused and stable here. And so there's a variety of conditions that that we we put in place in order for it to happen. And then when all those conditions are properly in place, then it becomes relatively relatively easy for the mind to settle. So one of the most important conditions for developing this concentration states is to live an ethical life is emphasized over and over again in Buddhism. Because, I mean, be ethical for this to be ethical, so you don't harm anyone, but also agitates the mind to be unethical. It's Very hard for the mind to rest there's a lot of can be remorse, it can be agitation, there can be fear, there can be all kinds of kind of mind spinning when our conscience is not settled, and so to live ethically is to have a clear and settled conscience. And with that it's easier, then all kinds of things are easier. It's easier to sleep. But it's also easier to do let the mind settle into the bottom of the bowl to come to rest here. And so that's one of the conditions. I remember once going on retreat after I did something that hurt some other folks. And Boy, was I not concentrated during that retreat. My mind was kind of just really churning away at what I done and who had hurt and what I needed to do. And, you know, I was never going to do that again. And there's something about being on retreat that allowed me to see the impact the consequences, the karmic consequences of my actions. Much more clearly, than I'd be going about my daily life where I get distracted and don't think about it. So it was a really powerful lesson How important is to be ethical. A concentrated mind is a mind that is, in some ways is ordered. It's kind of like settled that clear. It's ordered, orderly mind. It's not chaotic mind. And so it said that it's helpful to live in an orderly space when you're cultivating concentration. So if you go if you you know, have a room where you're going to meditate in that you make the room orderly, so that you feel settled, you don't feel agitated being in there, they weren't the rooms a mess, you know, you sit down and you kind of like it to kind of think supports agitation of the mind. But it also is not doesn't give the mind the lesson doesn't give the mind the atmosphere of being ordered or being settled to being clear and being clean. So the ancient books talk about keeping an orderly clean room or space to do your meditation and if that's what you want to do. They also talk about having clean clothes. So, so, put on clean clothes when you're going to get concentrated, nice clean clothes, you know, it's kind of creates a different atmosphere, a different feeling, it's kind of lifts the spirits a little bit. So and sometimes maybe not much, but to put on clean clothes, you know, take a shower, put on the clean clothes and you know, so, the, it helps. There are three attitudes, which are helpful to cultivate if you want to develop a concentrated mind. One of them is inspiration, to be inspired, or to be enthusiastic or to be kind of gladdened or made happy. By the idea and the practice of engaging in concentration, so if it concentration, just a chore, if it's something that you feel like you need to do, so you can, you know, you know, get a, you know, get a few stripes on your, on your shoulder for being a good meditator. If it's competitive concentration practice, I practice competitive concentration. You know, like, you know, there's someone sitting near me and you know, well, I'm gonna concentrate before them. Doesn't work so well. Remember, once in Burma, someone got pretty deeply concentrated. And somehow the teacher was impressed and said something in front of everybody about this person being deeply concentrated. And this other person I knew came to me and kind of huff and said I knew that person back in Berkeley. No way. No way.

You know he was I think he was jealous or I don't know, offended or something. So to be inspired gladdened is a word, *pāmojja* in Pali, be gladdened by the idea of concentration, the practice of it. So when we come to it, it's just the idea of it makes us happy. And I, I've felt this and I've known people who feel this to be gladdened and happy, just to have the opportunity to practice. It's a pretty special thing for you and for the world that you even get to sit down to practice let independent of getting concentrated. It's a noble and beautiful endeavor, and just be sit down and just kind of be happy or

content that you get to do this. So be inspired. One of the great inspirations for me that stayed with me for years. All kinds of kind of things that inspired me and my Concentration practice but I mentioned two of them. One of them was being in Burma meditating in Burma center called the Mahasi Center, very large meditation center there. That kind of when I when I first walked into the campus, this monastery, it to me It looked like a junior college community college campus in California someplace, it was very quite large buildings and walkways and that they would sometimes have, I think up to four or 5000 people meditating in this big monastery. during vacation times people would go there and be kind of a lot of people meditating. And they had a very large dining hall for women, the men and women are kept separate, kind of, and so the women ate in one building in the menu than another and has and then they had this meditation hall for the women as well. And every day when I went to To them, men's dining room to eat, I had to walk by the woman's meditation building. And it was a very large building that had open sides on two sides, the doors were kind of big, lots of this series of doors are all open and Burma is a hot place. So the doors are kept, you know, both sides are quite open. And there are probably 500 women meditating in there. And they're all sitting in very orderly, neat rows. And they're all sitting up very straight, straight, proud and tall was the kind of thing and they've set so still, and it was like a side of nature. I mean, that's kind of awesome thing for me every morning to go by and see 500 or several hundred women sitting very still very upright, very dignified. And that stillness and dignity was so inspiring for me in my own practice, and that carried with me that image for many, many years. And the other thing As inspires me image or sense, feeling sense that inspires me is meditating sometimes in the monasteries, sometimes in the, in the jungles of Thailand or the monastery in Burma, and meditating alone. And everything getting really still and quiet. Just to kind of kind of mean not that maybe there were sounds like those around the room or there are all these loudspeakers all the time. I mean, it was amazing, the loudspeakers and I don't think there's a quiet monastery in Southeast Asia. They all have neighborhood loudspeakers blaring away and their poor quality loudspeakers. But there was this to fit to feel as feel this kind of stillness of quiet I guess in me around me was was something like was like, I don't know. I just like sat Or like something very precious to inspires me. So that's one quality that's helpful to have to be inspired to be clad. And another is to be confident. So to be confident in a variety of things, it's helpful to be confident in your in knowing what the practice is. So to know something about the practice of concentration, how it's done, what to expect, what, when you do it. So to have confidence in the practice, to have confidence in the path of concentration, how it unfolds, and have confidence in yourself to feel Yes, this is something I can do. So to cultivate confidence.

The third is to have respect. I actually like the word reverence, to have a sense of respect or reverence for what you're about to do as well. Do not approach it with an inquisitive mind or greedy mind or demanding or a lot of expectation, but have more of a sense that Dharma willing, I'll get concentrated. It's not you know, I'll do my effort, I'll put the conditions in the place. But I'm not going to be the one who you know, it's not up to me, Dharma willing kind of attitude. And this is a very special thing. It's a it's a sacred thing to enter into the temple of Samadhi. And so we want to do with some sense of, I think, some respect or reverence for the whole phenomenon for yourself doing it. And then the last attitude is that of patience, a lot of patience, infinite patience, if you want to develop Samadhi states, it's best to be infinitely patient, so that in that infinite patient, you're become quite content, to just be quite content just to be as you are content with what's happening. Maybe that should be the fifth quality. cultivate contentment, be content. Be content with just breathing, be content with just being be content with, you know, with your life as best you can. In the Buddhist teaching, you put a lot of emphasis on contentment, cultivating contentment with the things that you have monastics are not supposed to be deprived people. monastic people are supposed to have just enough so they can be content just to be alive. So just enough clothes, just enough food, just enough housing, just enough medicine. From our point of view, they look pretty poor. But the idea is, it's not supposed to be an ascetic lifestyle. It's not

supposed to be a private lifestyle, but a lifestyle that it just enough so that you can practice well. So you can be content with what you have and engage the

So one of the things that's also helpful for developing concentration is to not be in the not be seduced by your thinking, not be, not give a lot of emphasis to your thinking. don't invest yourself in your thinking, don't somehow think that thinking is where it's at. There has to be a disinvestment from the world of thinking there has to be a dis interest in the world of thinking, that discursive thinking, and that's a very hard lesson for some people to learn. Because of the, you know, some people they think they are they're thinking, you know, They're so closely identified with thinking that if they stop thinking it's, it's frightening because then who are they they're going to disappear. Thinking is how we make ourselves safe from the world. So to put our thinking to rest can seem like a very threatening thing, because then how are we going to take care of ourselves? But as long as we're in the grip of thinking and thinking about thinking about things, it's not possible for the mind to settle. Thinking is little bit like having the marble spinning, spinning, spinning. And so it's hard to put let have thinking stop. But what's required is at least to know the principle know the idea that thinking is not the solution when you're doing meditation, and so at least yet you you're convinced enough, your mind might not be convinced, but you're convinced that the way forward is not through thinking. Because unless you have unless you're really clear about that, chances are you'll slip into thoughts over and over again. So there has to be a real kind of stepping back. disinvesting don't grant a lot of authority to your thoughts. And so the thoughts can begin to recede in the background. They don't, you can assume there's no switch for turning them off automatically. They get quieter and weaker over time they recede to the background, they no longer have center stage. And when the thinking no longer has center stage, it allows something else to have center stage, which is the object of focus for concentration practice, what we're kind of gathering yourself around and focusing on. So this disinvestment of thinking is very important. The, the Buddha put a lot a tremendous amount of emphasis, that in order to have that a condition for developing concentration, is to abandon what he called the five hindrances. And the five hindrances must be what he thought were the primary Mental preoccupations that interfere with a mind getting concentrated, within fear with the mind kind of being addressed and settled. It's a five preoccupations that keeps the marble spinning around and around getting caught up. And so these have to be settled in Buddhist language, they have to be abandoned, we have to abandon our interest or involvement with these things. So the five hindrances, the first one is greed. There's two different words that are used for this in the ancient word, world. Sometimes they talk about sensual desire, but sometimes they use the word greed, for the first of the five hindrances. So this kind of desire to really strong desire, longing, wanting something and the mind can get caught up various powerfully into the world of, of wanting. The other is second is ill will Sometimes called an English version, but ill will. And hostility, thoughts of anger, hostility or pushing things away or a verse kind of being an aversive mind. And this is very mind the mind is caught up in that and is looking around or thinking of Versa thoughts. And so I can't settle. The third is it's called isn't me this we're stuck with us in English, Buddhist English. In Buddhist English, it's called sloth and torpor.

I think most of us don't go around using the word sloth and torpor too often, but sloth and torpor is not ordinary sleepiness and tiredness. But it's a kind of lethargy. And that comes from resistance, lethargy that comes from an evaluation of the situation conscious or unconscious. And so you're kind of our energy gets drained and it's kind of like a it could be you know, we Might have plenty of reservoirs of energy within us, but we're kind of like so discouraged or dismayed or something that we just things just drain away. We don't have the energy enthusiasm. And then the fourth is restlessness and remorse. So here remorse or regret is very important to hear. It's important, why it points to the importance of being ethical. And the restlessness agitation is just a lot of energy, a lot of spinning, churning away and like you've had too much caffeine. I've tried to meditate on too much caffeine. And that didn't work well for

me. The and so the fifth of the hindrances is a doubt they say doubt is the most dangerous one. And doubt is doubt yourself doubt the practice doubt the teachings doubt the teacher. doubt this is the right time to practice just kind of vacillation, inability to commit to being here and doing the practice. So these five states these five kind of activities of them The Buddha says should be abandoned. So we abandon sensual desire. While we meditate, we abandon greed, we abandon ill will. we abandon sloth and torpor, we abandoned our resistance or lethargy, and we abandon restlessness. we abandon doubt. So that the, the marble isn't spinning so much. But then something very interesting happens in a when the when the mind is no longer caught up in thought, when the mind is no longer caught up in the five hindrances and desire and the ill will. Then at some point there's a tipping point that happens, so that the mind then begins to settle or begins to concentrate on its own. It's not something that we have to do so much anymore, but more like now the conditions are in place, that the mind the unfolding the deepening the settling of the mind can unfold on its own. And so at this point, the focus and concentration practice is very much on being receptive, being open dwelling or relaxing into the experience. Sometimes when the hindrances are really strong, you have to put a lot of effort not to be caught by the hindrances, but when their pool weakens enough, then the practice becomes more receptive practice. For me, I love the idea of allowing that when I do concentration, practice and do my meditation practice a sense of allowing experience to show itself and kind of allowing things to be there. For me, it's a feeling of opening and, and, and making space for things and letting things just go Calm and surface and be to let things be and show themselves to allow things to be as they are. Because for me the opposite for me or not allowing is I'm too too caught up in things I want things to be a certain way I'm fixing, evaluating, judging, pushing things away. But there's something about the movement of allowing that. Oh, it's a kind of like opening the chest, opening the pores, opening the heart, opening the mind. And then that openness, that's where things can begin to settle even further. So receptiveness allowing. So the Buddha talked about abiding or dwelling in states of concentration. and here also, one of the conditions again for becoming constant this, there's, I think, I think there's two conditions I want to emphasize now but getting concentrated. One is the importance of relaxation, so to speak. They relaxed, stay soft. So if you find yourself getting tense, or getting hard or forceful and doing concentration, it's possible to get concentrated that way. But chances are, it's not a useful concentration. The useful concentration we're looking for in Buddhist practice has a very soft, relaxed feeling to it. Not and sometimes peep meditators will develop a lot of attention sometimes sometimes in the face, sometimes other places in the neck. And on the eyes, forehead.

That sometimes happens because they're pushing too hard or too tense and trying to get concentrated. Social relax, to soften to very important. keep letting go keep letting go.

So I lost train of my last train. So I said we're going to talk about two things right? Letting Go or If I didn't tell you what the other one was, you can't help me. You're relaxing. Yeah, yeah, but there was something else. Well, music remember is, I mentioned that word before gladness. So, the so to the Buddha talked about the importance of having gladness that opens the door for deeper states of concentration. So gladness may be some joy or some delight. And so one of the sources of this gladness is no longer when the mind is no longer caught in the grip of its desires. When the mind is no longer caught in the grips of his thinking. And you've been trying for a long time to get in the present moment, the mind keeps wandering off, keeps wandering off, get caught up in all kinds of plans. And finally, the mind stops being somewhere else. And it's not no longer planning, it's no longer reviewing the past no longer having conversations or living in fantasy. And it's just finally it's here. It's settled in here in the present moment and clear. And it's such a relief. It's such a, it's such a difference between the mind that's caught up and the mind that's not caught. Some people naturally will feel delight. But not everyone does. So it's helpful, I think, to hear that the Buddha says, to avail yourself, of the joy or the happiness that comes when finally Your mind is free. Finally, the mind has not caught in all its concerns

and all its things. And so if that happens to you gets focused enough settled enough in practice. Very gently, don't make a big deal out of it. Let yourself be happy with that. This is nice. Wow. Yes, kind of like saying yes to it. And then the Buddha said that if you say if you feel gladness to the mind is no longer caught up in things, then there's a there can be a kind of a natural unfolding is natural settling further into these deeper states of concentration. So with that gladness, then that is that that's the condition for joy. That's the condition for settling further into more peaceful tranquil state. That's the condition for settling further into a deeper kind of feeling of happiness. And then that's a condition for settling further into real concentrated states of real concentration, deep concentration. And then with those kind of that momentum of this, gladness those three words gladness, joy and happiness, and fourth one is tranquility. And this letting go this patience, this allowing this receptivity, then sometimes we we drop into, or we enter into some of the deeper states of concentration specific states of concentration called the jhanas, the four states of absorb absorptions. So, those are kind of some of the background for it. It also then, then part of this also is having a concentration practice that you're doing a specific kind of, and I kept that for kind of for last, because I think all the other conditions are so important that it's good to know those before you hear about some of the choices of how, what the specific techniques of concern Might be when people hear that technique, sometimes they jump on that technique bandwagon too quickly without getting all the other conditions into place. But so what are some of the ways in which some techniques for concentration is possible that the more of the most common ones and all Buddhism is focusing on breathing is a meditation practice. And so there's just staying with the breath, staying with the breath, and not leaving it, not allowing sounds to get distracted. If there sounds in the room or other things going on, not letting the mind go to any of it, and just stay present, stay present. When we do Vipassana practice, distinct from concentration practice, then, it's fine to let the mind stay in the present moment, move around to notice the sounds or notice the H or whatever else is going on. But when we do concentration The idea is to corral the mind, keep the mind very focused and narrow on one thing.

So that as we stay focused, all the other things begin to fall, fall away. And here's an image that I like for this is that of the bow of a boat plowing through the water, it sets the boat has a course it sets the course it's going in some direction. And it's just going to go there no matter what. And it doesn't allow the water to interfere in a sense. And so it just allows the water just kind of washes off the side of the of the hull and just kind of gets pushed off the side, push off the Cypress side, and the boat keeps the course. So with concentration practice, we keep the course we focused on a particular point of attention. And whatever else comes up thoughts and feelings and sounds and sensations, whatever. We just let them kind of wash off, wash off. We don't get sidetracked by them. Just keep the core Keep the course stay with it. So if it's the breath, stay with the breath, stay with the breath. If you lose the breath, come back to the breath. One of the common ways to ports for this is to count the breath. I spent years counting my breath is by my own early years, early years of practice to develop my concentration. And the way that I counted was counted from one to 10. And if I lost count, I would start over again. And didn't matter if I got to two and I lost count that start over again. And then if I got up to 10, I got to start over again. So one to 10 one to 10. And that helped me stay focused usually, but this mind of mine I don't know about your mind can be pretty wild in there. Sometimes, once I resorted to counting to 26 on the on the out breaths and counting the alphabet reciting the alphabet on the in breath, hoping that I would get to Z and 26 together, you know, to see if I was really staying present. And because I felt like I need help here My mind was so crazy and busy and even I tried to count the usual way and it just went off and went off and, and I thought I need to do I need to be more active and do more just can do to make it more complicated here so I can stay focused. So this the letter and the number thing that it was kind of nice to do, but I did it only once in my 40 years. So there's counting the breath is a common thing to do. Some people will. Some people like to focus on a very particular small little area like a point like some people to get to the tip of the nostril the air going in and out. Other people like to do a wider place of the breath. I like to do the lower tour. Usually the belly, the diaphragm

area, and that that's kind of a wider, comforting, stable place for me and that's I find it very nice to kind of settle that go there and, and get focused there. Another thing that in our tradition that we use for concentration practice, is loving kindness, practice. loving kindness, practice is considered a concentration practice because you're focusing only on the practice loving kindness, usually saying usually it's it's using phrases that you repeat over and over over again, kind of like a mantra a little bit like a mantra that you would say over and over and over again. So just you do loving kindness and develop strong states of concentration. In fact, if you go to spirit rock, that's probably the most common way in which deep meditative absorptions The jhanas are taught is through the vehicle of these of loving kindness, practice and other things technique for loving for concentration is developing stration is the body scan. Some of you have done it, maybe he'd done mbsr or something. And I remember when I was meditating on a long retreat once my practice going relatively well, but I was a little bit imbalanced and teacher said, Oh, you need more concentration to bring you more into balance. And he said, Why don't you do the body scan. So you've been scanning systematically, bring your attention to the body, head, the face, shoulders, you know, just going through the body with one part at a time. And that systematic focus is a nice way to keep the mind engaged and help with the concentration. Some people will do things like chanting to help them with a concentration. Chanting is very helpful, especially if you memorize the chant, or if you memorize the because there's something about the engagement of memorization that does a few to a number of things. The kind of folk You need to memorize something is similar to the focus you need to be concentrated in to kind of stay there right with it. And also the concentration, that kind of memorizing something strengthens maybe the same mental muscle that you need to strengthen when you're developing concentration.

And then, and then if the nice chant that inspires you, you get absorbed as you chant, do the chanting, you get absorbed in it, you get. And so by the time you finish the chant, daily concerns are no longer operating so much, and then you're somewhat focused, and then it's easier to settle in, because you kind of emptied out a little bit of all the concerns. So concentration.

So I think the primary thing I wanted to say today on this topic, is the importance of creating the proper conditions. So the mind can get constantly created. And so there's a lot of different things that are considered conditions. But the idea that we create the conditions, we don't create the concentration, we create the conditions and then the concentration can come. So some of you saw the movie Field of Dreams, build it, and he will come, who was the little refrain through the movie. So it's that's kind of we build it, we build our whole Temple of conditions. And then concentration will come when we have everything in place or not, or some of the things enough enough in place for that. And so having this respect for those conditions, and, and to take the time to organize your life, organize yourself, so that those conditions are in place that supports that happen. So that's part two of this four part series. And concentration. So I won't be here next week. And because I'm offering retreat, and I'll pick up this theme in two weeks and do the last two talks when I come back from the retreat so thank you.