

## Sunday Formal Opening: Sitting Meditation and Teaching

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### **Ines Freedman:**

So we traditionally begin our retreats with taking refuge and with agreeing to the five precepts altogether. And when we hear the word refuge, it's natural to think of the word sanctuary. At least that's what comes into my mind easily. It's a, you know, a sanctuary typically, you know, we take shelter in a storm. We might shelter, you know, in-house or under a tree, but somewhere we're protected. And I like to think of the taking refuge as the sanctuary of the heart, or taking refuge in the sanctuary of the heart.

And we enter the sanctuary by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Taking refuge, going for refuge is a choice we make. It's a choice of aligning ourselves, aligning our lives so that the Dharma is at the center of our beings, at the center of what guides everything in our lives. The Buddha talked about both external and internal refuges. And the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha can be the inspiration, the teachings, the guidelines for our lives. And the inner refuge is the inner qualities that we develop.

So we go to the Buddha for refuge, you know, we might be inspired by the possibility of freedom, the possibility of completely being free of greed, hatred and delusion. And that possibility, the Buddha, the historical Buddha, the person, the human being who was free of greed, hatred and delusion. And you know, we can all connect with that because we've all had a moment being free of greed, and a moment being free of hatred, and a moment being free of delusion. And so the freedom can develop with this path. You know, and as these, the Buddha had certain qualities that he developed as the process of the path, and non-harming, compassion and wisdom. And as he developed those, and the path helps us develop those qualities in the same way that he did.

And as they become part of who we are, that becomes our internal refuge. And in the same way we go to the Dharma for refuge, you know, the external refuge being the teachings, the practices, you know, they've been passed on, you know, over the ages, over the eons. They've been passed on from one heart to another, from one person who loves humanity so much that they keep sharing the Dharma, just like everyone here is sharing the Dharma out of this love and compassion for each other. And this path transforms the teachings into this very deep internal refuge where the Dharma becomes how we live. And as we go for the Sangha for refuge, you know, that's... It can be seen as our companions on this path.

And this wonderful community we have, all of us here in this hall, and all of us on Zoom, and all those other beings that support or practice. And, you know, the internal refuge includes her own inner qualities of kindness, goodwill, generosity towards others and towards ourselves. Those inner qualities of wholesomeness. So let's chant the refuges together in Pāli. And, you know, we usually do this call and response, but I'd like to do it together, since I think most of you know these. And those of you online don't unmute.

So, we begin with an expression of homage or respect to the Buddha. You know, it means deep respect to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One. Namotasa, Bhagavato, Ararato, Sama, Samapurasa, Nama, Sambudasa, Nama, Nama, Nama, Nasa, Sama, Sambudasa, Namotasa, Bhagavato, Ardha, Tso, Samasambudasa, Hmm. We will now chant the three refuges in Pāli, but we'll do those call and response. I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dharma for refuge, I go to the Sangha for refuge. And then we'll do it a second time, we'll say Duttiyampi, and a third time Tatiyampi.

Buddaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

So an important part of taking refuge is taking refuge in our own goodness, in our dedication to not causing harm. The five precepts can be seen as the guidelines which we use to

make choices in our lives. They help protect us from harming ourselves and from harming others. The more we live our lives aligned with not causing harm, the stronger our sense of integrity becomes. The more we trust ourselves. And integrity nourishes is a natural trust in ourselves.

When our actions of body, of speech, and of mind are guided by kindness and compassion, it naturally gives rise to greater happiness and freedom in us, greater ease, greater peace. So in taking the five precepts together, we co-create the sanctuary of this retreat, a safe space, a shared refuge that holds us all in practice. So the precepts are, I'll say them, I'll describe them first, and then I'll agree to them together. The first is to refrain from taking life. It means helping any little, being careful with any little creatures out there, or in the hall, taking them out. But it really means acting with reverence to all life.

I mean, that's how I like to hold it. You know, connects me with my desire to treat all beings with care, all living beings, to refrain from taking that which is not given, the second precept. And to me it includes appreciating what we receive, to refrain from sexual misconduct, For the purpose of a retreat, of this retreat, it means not having any sexual activity at all. Outside of the retreat, it just means being careful and wholesome with your sexual activity, not causing harm with it. And to refrain from lying and to speak truthfully, it is easier in noble silence.

You know, how do we speak internally also? You know, the internal speech of the mind. You know, so speaking kindly and speaking truthfully. It's not true that we're the worst meditator. And you know, for those of us who are on Zoom and some of you live with others, you know, it might look a little different. You know, you might be a little more challenging navigating some social connection.

And as I mentioned in the other opening circle earlier is that remembering that it's a lot more important to be kind than to be silent. And so holding that close. And the last one is to refrain from intoxicants that cloud the mind. And I include devices as intoxicants. You know, so really consider, especially those of you on Zoom, may have more temptation. Since your devices are what you use for the retreat, But those of you here who may have your device in the room with you, really respect this gift, this incredible gift you've given yourselves. And don't touch it.

So we're going to ask you to verbally agree to the five precepts for the duration of the retreat. And I'll speak the precept and repeat after me. For the duration of this retreat, For the duration of this retreat, I agreed to refrain from taking life. For the duration of this retreat, I agreed to refrain from taking that which is not given. For the duration of this retreat, I agreed to refrain from sexual activity. I agree to refrain from sexual relativity. For the duration of

this retreat, I agree to maintain noble silence, and to only speak when necessary. For the duration of this retreat, I agree to refrain from intoxicants.

**Gil Fronsdal:**

So on this opening evening, I would like to introduce the theme for the retreat and offer some introductory words. And it's the same theme more or less that I did in May when I did a two-week retreat here at IRC. It was based on going through the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the discourse on the Four Foundations of Awareness. And going through progressively some of the exercises, some of the presentations of the practice there as a journey, as a seeing that it builds as you go through. And then as we went through them to bring forth some of the, I think some of the more profound teachings associated with mindfulness and practice. And I really appreciated the chance to do that in May and didn't feel finished and wanted to do it again.

And I wanted to do it for a month long because there's more that can be done, to go things kind of further or fuller or deeper, whichever metaphor you prefer. And perhaps bringing in some of the teachings from the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the discourse on mindfulness of breathing, which is often an orientation I like to stay close to, is the center of it all, is mindfulness of breathing, as support for this practice of *sati*. And what I'd like to say today is that the... is that the word, I prefer these days to translate the word *sati* as awareness, as opposed to some of the ways it's defined or described, which is fine, to find it more specifically. But some of the ways it's described like to clearly know what's happening in the present moment, that fits better under the Buddhist language of *jānāti* or *sampajañña*. He has a word for knowing that's in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. That's his own word, *jānāti*, as opposed to *sati*. That he has his word clear comprehension. that is its own word for it.

And sometimes I get the feeling that some of the ways that mindfulness is taught in the United States, what's being taught is not *sati*, is *sampajañña*, is this clear comprehension, this knowing. And the way the word *sati* is used in the sutta, is, in my reading of it, it's actually never really defined that carefully and closely. But the context in which it's used, it probably is better translated as awareness, which is a very broad, vague term. Some people might see awareness and consciousness as being synonymous. I try to avoid using the English word consciousness when I'm talking dharma. And so, you know, but awareness. And as precious and wonderful that awareness is, maybe no one really knows what it is. I certainly don't. I just have something that I do that's a reference for it. But I don't have a need to specify exactly what it is.

I once had an IMC asked the question, I think it was a Monday night, a room full of people, and asked them, how do you know you're aware? And I wasn't expecting, I didn't have an

expectation of what I'd hear back. I wasn't like I was doing it for rhetorical purposes. I was just curious. And to my surprise, the answers were so different. It was kind of mind-boggling or mind-amazing to me that I'd been using the word awareness so freely for so long. And there was such a wide range of references that people had for what that word means for them and how they know they're aware. And probably each way that they use the word is probably fine. I don't want to take that away from them. If it is an onward leading, if it supports them to get settled, to develop the practice of clarity, seeing clearly what's here, developing their peace, their well-being, developing unification of the mind.

But my favorite way of understanding awareness, that some people like to define, explain consciousness as well, that awareness is the coordinated, integrated working of many, maybe all, of our attentional faculties. We have many capacities for being aware, for attending, for receiving input from the world, inner world, not our world, and for that information to be registered and be known in some way, and to operate in a kind of integrated way with other attentional capacities we have. We have the capacity to see. That's its own faculty, and that's a kind of attention. We have the capacity to hear, we have the capacity to smell and taste, tactile possibilities. And over time, we've discovered in the last, I don't know, I mean 150 years or something, that humans have many different capacities for sensing.

That there's different neuro-receptors for different kinds of things. We have particular receptors for pain. Particular receptors for hot and cold, particular receptors that picks up certain kind of chemical signals that lets us know that we're hungry or that we're thirsty. There's receptors, I guess, maybe in our lungs, maybe I don't know where it is, in the blood, that measures the content of oxygen and carbon dioxide so we know to breathe more or less, to get more oxygen in if we need to. We have proprioception, we have balance, we have spatial recognitions, we know where we are in space, we know directions, we know... And so all these... there's probably lots more things that are going on all the time. And, you know, now we can name them, because people have studied physiology so much. But for most of human history, people didn't know. You know, they didn't know. But they were still operating. So they were operating without off-site, in a certain kind of way, without knowledge of it. And therefore they weren't trying to engineer it. They weren't trying to fix it or do something to it. It just operated merrily on its own, best it could.

A lot of these attentional faculties operate just fine without us having to do them. And they're operating all the time. And just to walk out of here in a little while and go to your room, you probably have to use maybe, I don't know, a dozen different attentional capacities in order to kind of find your way and know your way, but you do it without thinking about it. You

know where the door is. You turn, you get up and you turn around and head toward the door because you already have a spatial awareness. So there's all these different things operating. And when they operate in an integrated whole, then we have something called awareness. Is it a thing? I think of it as kind of the unification, the coming together. And that unification and coming together is becoming whole, becoming unified, becomes a functioning of our being, which we can rest in, we can allow.

And this movement of allowing our attentional faculties to grow, to open, become more sensitive, to allow to be, is part of the function of being present, being here, being mindful if you wish. It's part of it is just be able to see clearly what's here, but it's possible to overemphasize the object of attention. We also want to be very careful about how we're aware. And we want to be aware in a way that allows awareness to operate continuously, rather than being the doer who does it continuously, which kind of doesn't work. And so we have a whole field of attentional faculties. Some of them have to do with sensing, and some of them have to do with knowing, cognitive, And there's a variety of different knowing faculties, different ways that we know something. And they also come together and can operate to support us, to really be here in a unified, concentrated, settled, strong way to really begin seeing well.

And some of these things are a little bit surprising for people around Buddhist teachers like me who keep emphasizing being present, being present, being present. But the present moment includes the past and the future in it sometimes. That's what partly makes it rich, makes it fuller. When the bell rings at what is 12:15 tomorrow afternoon, the present moment bell, you'll be fully aware of that present moment and aware that that's the bell that's time to go to lunch. You're aware of it a little bit more, and you might not be planning that, or maybe you are planning it, but certain kinds of bringing in the future, bringing in the past comes along in a very, very natural way. You don't have to be planning it or intending it or being caught in it. It's just that 12:15 bell implies lunch, implies now we all get up. It implies much more than just the present moment. There's nothing wrong with that. It's part of the fullness of the present moment. And there's a whole series of things, the fullness of the present.

One attentional capacity that was really important for me to discover when I was doing mindfulness in Burma was kind of done indirectly, in a sense. We were expected to come to my teacher in Burma with a very detailed report of what happened in the sitting, kind of like field notes. And there was supposed to be no judgments about it, no commentary about it, no stories about it, just the field notes of the experience. And there was a period of time that I would sit for up to three hours at a time. That's a lot to remember, you know, to go back to the teacher. And he expected you, and he would ask you sometimes, like, he would ask you,

you know, you go in and you're ready to report on your meditation. and he'd say, when you stood up from your meditation to go leave, to do a walking meditation, what did you notice as you were standing? You couldn't say, oh well, I wasn't practicing then. I was sitting and then I was going to be walking, but in between didn't, you know, that was, no, I know that. You couldn't do that. You had to, you're supposed to do it all the day long. So you had to remember, So there was a kind of a heightened attention that operated so that I could know it, but know it so it would go into my memory banks. And it wasn't stressful, but it was more, I was a little bit more at-live, a little bit more present, a little bit more interested, a little more letting it register more fully, so I could remember. That's an attentional faculty we have, the kind of attention we use so that we can remember. And the reason why it was useful was it really kept me present. It supported that. So that's another attentional faculty. We have dozens of them, and they operate beautifully when they come together in a whole. and this self-consciousness drops away in a certain kind of way, all kinds of things begin to shift and change in that unified whole.

So as we go through this *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice, you'll see that the Buddha calls on particular attentional faculties and as a way of beginning to bring them together into creating something that is whole, holistic, and something that connects us to some profundity within us. The profound sensations, profound ways of knowing, as opposed to those which are, if you use the word profound, that are shallower, shallow sensing and shallow knowing. And so as we go through this, I'm hoping that this will awaken for you, your capacity for being aware. You're in a clear, somewhat deliberate way, but where the deliberateness is more about allowing continuous continuity of awareness rather than doing the awareness itself. But it takes some deliberateness, it's engagement, involvement, and beginning to recruit all your attentional faculties to help you feel Like, you're really here. You're really here in a live, living, full way with all of yourself.

It's not just the cerebral cortex involved in doing this practice. It's your whole body. So I like, in translating *sati* as awareness, I understand it to be the... the kind of coordinated, integrated kind of way that all these different sense and cognitive functionings we have work together in one big hole. And I also understand it more as that a huge part of that, that allows for all these wonderful capacities to operate and do what they're meant to do for us, is to be embodied. So much of this attentional faculties are embedded in the nervous system of our body, the neuroreceptors of our body, where we take in so much information, and the body is processing it all the time. And so to really be embodied. And so I think it's a little bit unfortunate we translated *sati* as mindfulness. I wish we'd translated it as bodyfulness. Thank

you.

So, that's kind of a little bit of an introduction. And I know this first evening some of you are really sleepy and probably couldn't follow any of what I said. That's completely fine. We're just kind of warming up here. Getting tuned in, tuning ourselves for what's ahead. Becoming well-tuned instruments.

So, and then tomorrow morning... at this, 8:15 I think is when the sitting is the instructional sitting. Given that this is an experienced student retreats and you all have your own practice you're doing, you don't have to exactly follow what I'm teaching here. If you have your own practice that is strong for you and something that you want to kind of continue, then what I hope is that we'll talk about that. What I hope is that what I have to teach will augment what you're doing, will support it, will help it become stronger or fuller or something. And so what I'm offering here, these morning instructions, either can be done as a full path in itself, or it can hopefully be done as a way to augment what you're doing. And if that's confusing for you, that's part of what we can discuss in the practice discussions.

So, but tomorrow, I think what's nice is tomorrow is to have the morning silent. So not to have instructions in the morning tomorrow, just to allow it to be your way, your practice. You've all had experience of being on retreat and settling, and you probably have your own process, your own way, and And I offer that to you as an entrust of you, in confidence in you, that you're in good hands with yourself. And so to kind of find your own way here on the first day. And first day is often a tired day for people, a sleepy day. But you all know that. And so, be gracious with how it is the first day, but kind of find your own way to settle in and to be here. And I'll give the Dharma talk in the afternoon, then the first set of instructions will be the Tuesday morning. But I'll be here to sit with you. So that's the plan. And so kind of reversing things. So now we can sit a little bit. For usually, for those of you who haven't been before, we usually, this evening's gathering, we usually start with a 10-15 minute sitting. And now for this time, we'll end with it.