

Sunday Formal Opening

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I want to take this occasion to say hello to the people who are doing the retreat online. These days many of our retreats are hybrid retreats, and so there's a large group of people who are doing it online and supported by an online teacher who they'll have practice discussion with. They'll attend meditation sessions here with all of you here in the room. You won't see them, but they'll see the front of the room here, and if you're in their view of the room, and if you walk across the front, they'll see who's here. And then they're attending for all the events happening here, so dharma talks and instructions. And then Liz Powell is one of our teachers here at IRC who's supporting the online yogis.

She was just here last month teaching with me. So welcome all of you online, and I'm happy to have you part of this. And we now have this device up here, we have this tablet up here. Just, I don't know, a few years ago I would have thought it was borderline un-sacriligious to have a device like this on the front here, and I would have been, I don't know, horrified. Anybody suggest we should do it? But now it seems like it's really important to have it, because this is the way that when I'm sitting up here I feel connected to the people online.

Otherwise I'm looking at the camera on the wall and imagining that they're somehow in there. But now I can see them and where they live. And so it's very nice. Thank you for being part of all this. And for all of you, both in person and online, on one hand, I want to offer you a genuine and wholehearted welcome to IRC. And then the other hand, the dream or the hope or the dedication is that when you come here to participate in our retreats online or in person, that you really feel like you're it.

You're IRC. It isn't like you're the guest now and we can welcome you as the guest. It's almost like we can't welcome you because you're home. Or we can all welcome each other because we're all equally part of the retreat, equally here. And that you really feel, hopefully we want

you to feel like you're not only welcome but that you belong, that this is your place as well. And maybe that's a tall order, especially if it's your first time here, to feel that way.

But certainly we would like that. That's my dedication. And so if there are things we can do to help you feel more like you're at home here, or feel connected and feel welcomed, then please let us know. We want everyone who comes here to feel welcomed, to feel like they can just be themselves and relax here, and be respected and appreciated for who they are. And the... A few things about the use of this room.

If you haven't noticed yet, there are some chairs that have a sign on it that say, for occasional use only. And that means that you can't claim that for yourself, those places. But if you're a first come, first serve, in that way it's kind of available for people. And people who are sitting a lot on the floor sometimes want to take a sitting and sit up on a chair. So hopefully they can find a chair that way. And if there's not enough chairs in here, or for some reason a different chair works better for you, you're welcome to bring other chairs in here.

We have these black mesh chairs. They're in what's called a fire closet, just past the water fountain in the hallway there. And you can bring those in here. If some of those turquoise chairs downstairs with rollers are just like the coolest thing, you can bring it up here. And if you see anything else that works for you, we want it to work for you. And we're very aware that these chairs don't work for everybody.

They're kind of like, hopefully, the middle way that kind of work for a good range of people. And then there's three cushions here on mats. And the way they're laid out with three brown cushions and the mats only makes me think that they're not claimed by anybody. Because usually when you, the idea here at IRC is that if it's nothing on the mat, then it's available. But as soon as there's a cushion, then it's not available. But there's something suspicious about three of them like that.

Does anybody claim those for any reason? Everyone is here. So I think that somehow those cushions ended up there, so they should be taken off. Maybe the managers can remove them later. And that means that if anyone, like those of you sitting in chairs, if you want to sit on the floor sometime, at least those will be maybe available then that way. In that it's COVID time, some people don't want to be in the hall here so much.

You're welcome to sit during the sitting periods in the walking hall. Some people will sit there. It's just more space, and it's less people. Some people will choose to sit out in the foyer out there, or in the hallway out there. If you're in there, also for the Dharma talks, there's a speaker system in there. There's a knob on the wall.

So you could also be in there. Again, if you want more space for yourself, if you want to feel safer or something, you can hang out in there. You just can't see. And we have these hearing assistant devices that work fairly well around the different places in the building, not everywhere, but for some reason if you want to listen to the instructions or the talk and not be in here, you can take that with you and listen someplace outside, somewhere else. Some people in the COVID times have set themselves out on the deck right outside the meditation hall, because then they feel a little bit like they're part of it, but they're fresh air and they have the hearing assistant devices with them. So we just want to make it easy for you to navigate, find your own way here in a way that works for you.

And I don't know if it was said in the manager's announcements, we'll keep the windows probably more open than they are now. But only the managers and maybe the teachers should be the ones who adjust the windows. So just let them take care of it. So now that you've been here for these few hours, is there anything that you'd like to ask at this junction so that, I mean more is coming, more information is coming, but anything that would help you at least be a little more settled? Yes?

Maybe this will be terrified later on but in my daily practice I find myself lost so like will there be instruction before every set or will it be a guided meditation or will it be like free like just do whatever. Yeah, so the only guided meditation will be the 8.30 sitting with the instructions. Sometimes it's 9 o'clock in the evening. Some teachers will offer a loving-kindness meditation at that time or something like that. But otherwise, it's silent sitting through the day. And so you will be lost sometimes.

All of us will be lost a little bit sometimes, if what you mean is lost in our thoughts. But that's part of what we practice with. That's what we have to wake up to and discover and see how it works. It's nice to have a guided meditation, but then you're not doing the work for yourself. And that's what we want to do here, is to do the work for ourselves.

During those times, can we use some kind of techniques like or three breaths, or just labeling techniques, or... Yeah, yeah. So you can do all kinds of things. So we'll give instructions in the morning, and then if you want to talk, you're welcome to do anything that's quiet and doesn't make any sound. Some people like doing heavy breathing, but we don't do that here. Non-auditory breathing, please.

But that's the kind of thing, that kind of instruction is something you can talk to the teachers with when you meet with them. Yes? Yes, that's the guideline that we provide. And the reason for that is, again, because we want to really be able to meet ourselves as we are. And when we start reading books, even though it's inspiring and gives us ideas, it's a little bit taking you

out of yourself. And sometimes it's inspiring to read a book and you go, wow, that's the best thing I ever read. Now I'm ready.

But that fades away after a while. Or you get, that's a great technique, and that fades away after a while. The idea is to really work with yourself and not have any distractions. And some people will go read a book when they're feeling challenged personally. And we'd rather you just keep coming back to the practice and be with the challenge rather than finding a way to jump out of it. So here we have kind of a radical idea of simplicity.

And if anything, the teacher here is simplicity. The lack of things that happen here is actually part of the teaching. Okay, so... Is this volume okay? Okay, great. Okay, so I'm going to share a few words about the theme for our retreat for our time together this week.

And we're basing this retreat on a kind of lesser taught sutta from the *Samyutta Nikāya*. And the teaching is, we're calling, As the Dawn Leads to Sunrise. It's sometimes referred to as the Sun Sutta. And it's quite a beautiful sutta. The teachings are a reference to the dawn as this metaphor, so that as the dawn precedes the rising sun, developing certain qualities prepare us for fully engaging in our practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

So this is a teaching of a series of accomplishments or cultivation that prepare us for embarking on this path that is a noble one. And referred to as noble often because of the people who walk it, that they are noble and that they have come to a certain understanding of the way things are and a commitment to freedom. And some of you are probably very familiar with this Eightfold Path teaching and others maybe not so much. The Buddha had many lists and this is one of them. But there's these eight Cultivations, practices that comprise this eightfold path. And I'll just share them now for those who are familiar and those who are not.

Appropriate or wise view, wise intention, having a wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, and wise concentration. So I name those not because those are the focus of our time together this week, but as a sort of seed for what we're practicing together and learning about this week is preparing us for is this Noble Eightfold Path. But the Sun Sutta is bringing our attention to these seven qualities that we, again, are spoken to as accomplishments, as cultivations that prepare us for being on this path of nobility. And they're beautiful, it's a beautiful list. There's, it begins with friendship, with good friends, spiritual friendship, which I love because in so many ways, if I consider my own, my own path, my own spiritual path, it really began with community and in community and receiving the love and support of others.

Now the second one is around *sīla* or virtue or ethics. So having ethical development as a ba-

sis for one's relationship with others in the world. I know if you want to live a life with a free heart, that having a clear conscience, having a life where we do no harm is really essential. And then we have a couple of qualities. So, in this Sun Sutta, we have the spiritual friendship and we have ethical conduct, accomplishment of *sīla*. Then we have accomplishment in desire, *chanda*, or aspiration is another translation.

And it can maybe strike folks as a little funny to talk about desire in Buddhist teachings, but the desire that the Buddha spoke to that leads to suffering is *taṇhā*, that Pāli is *taṇhā*, this kind of craving of wanting things to be other than they are. But this desire is really the aspiration, you know, what actually motivates us to be dedicated to this practice, which at times is not easy, and motivates us to have open hearts and open minds and motivates us to be kind, motivates us to be on this path of liberation. That's the third of these qualities. The fourth is *atta*, accomplishment in self, which again I think is such an interesting one. In our Buddhist teachings we don't talk very much about self unless we're talking about how there is not really one there. And again, *anattā* was this teaching of the Buddha as a characteristic of the way things are, this self that is, when we look very closely, there's nothing cohesive here.

It's just changing phenomena and conditions. There's really no permanent abiding self in that. The insight into that can bring so much release, so much freedom. And so here is this teaching of, but we need an accomplishment in self, and what does that mean? And we'll speak to this, but consider, you know, what it is to have a good character. You know, what is it to be a good, kind person in this world?

What are those qualities that we can develop in ourselves without attaching to or identifying with them? Then we have accomplishment in view, an orientation to the world, where we have this clear understanding that things are changing, that there is impermanence, and that our actions have consequences. Again, being a condition for this noble path of this orientation to the world as it is. And then we have this accomplishment in diligence or heedfulness. And not striving, but the persistence that it takes to do this, to do this practice, to keep coming and sitting and walking and staying close to our experience, staying intimate. That there's a real conscientiousness, a real diligence, persistence.

And then the last one is this wise attention, *yoniso manasikāra*. So what is this that we give our attention to? You know, what are the questions we ask and how do we give attention to this, to this moment, to the inquiry of who am I, of what is this life? And the wisdom that can arise in that, in that careful attention. So these are these seven. We're only going to speak in depth about five, given the length of our retreat.

But these are the seven conditions that the Buddha spoke to in the Sun Sutta. And I'll just

end by sharing some of the text of his words from the *Samyutta Nikāya*. So, bhikkhus, this is the forerunner and precursor of the rising of the sun, that is, the dawn. So, too, bhikkhus, for a bhikkhu, this is the forerunner and precursor for the arising of the noble eightfold path, that is, and then he goes on to list these. So, the first good friendship. When a bhikkhu has a good friend, it is to be expected that they will develop and cultivate this noble eightfold path.

And then it goes on, he goes on with each one. A good friend, virtue, desire, self, view, diligence, careful attention, all the seven. So this is our journey together this week. And I'm really, really happy to be here with you in it. Can you hear me? My audible?

So I'm gonna kind of begin with the formal part of our opening, the kind of the rituals in a way that we take as we enter the noble silence of retreat. But before I do, I just wanted to, I don't know if, Kirsten, did you say who you are? I'm not sure you got introduced to the people who are in our Zoom hall. Do you want to introduce me? Yes. Okay, so this is Kirsten Rodeham, and she's a lovely teacher of the Dharma, and she does a lot of nature teaching, and she and I, Shelley Galt and Gil will be teaching this retreat together this week, and it's a delight to be here with both of them.

So as I said, I'm Shelley. Third teacher, and I'm going to talk about something that we... a way of creating a safe container for our practice. Something that I that I say often, I say from time to time, is that we're always taking refuge in something. And often what we take refuge in is our thoughts and our opinions, our attitudes, our kind of habitual ways of thinking about the world. And none of these, I think, is a very reliable refuge for us, you know.

A refuge is meant to be a place of safety and rest, a dependable place. And retreat is a place where we're invited to explore our inner lives in a really close way, an intimate way. And that can be tender, you know, that can be delicate. So we want a refuge that supports this inner exploration, where our minds and hearts can feel safe, where we can rest. And in the Buddhist world, what is considered dependable as a refuge, what we traditionally take formal refuge in, are what are referred to as the three jewels or the triple gem. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

So the first is refuge in the Buddha. And for me, taking refuge in the Buddha means taking refuge, excuse me, in the possibility of liberation, of awakening. In the example of the Buddha himself who, he was a human being just like us, not different, who practiced really diligently and found for himself a path from clinging and suffering through life to complete freedom of mind and heart. I take refuge in that, that possibility, that model. And I also take refuge in the generosity of the Buddha and the compassion that he expressed by teaching this path

that he had found, teaching the way he'd found for the rest of his life. He spent 40 years walking around northern India just offering what he had learned himself in his path to others, to whoever wanted to listen.

Even though he knew that what he was teaching went against the stream of the social conditioning and the culture of the time, Even though he knew it would be frustrating and unpleasant at times, he just kept offering the Dharma. And that really inspires me. The Buddha said he would not teach that liberation, about liberation, if it was not possible. He would not teach about liberation if it was not possible. And I believe in the possibility of that, and I trust it as a refuge.

The second refuge is the Dharma. So the Buddha found a path to liberation for himself, and then he offered what he'd learned to all who would sincerely follow it. And what he taught is what we call the Buddha Dharma, teachings and practices that lead to awakening. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we take refuge, we express our confidence in these teachings, in the possibility of liberation. At the end of his life, when the Buddha was asked who would be the teacher after he died, one answer that he gave was that the Dharma would be the teacher. We can rely on the Dharma, on the path that the Buddha taught.

We can take refuge in it. And the third refuge is the Saṅgha, the community of practitioners. And classically this refuge is what's called the noble Saṅgha. Kirsten mentioned the noble, the noble ones. The noble Saṅgha, those who've had at least a taste of liberation. Their guidance and example are something that we can trust and call on.

But more broadly, the Saṅgha can mean all those we practice with. And for this retreat, That's those of us in this hall and those of us at home or wherever they are, wherever you find yourselves, the Zoom folks. All of us together are our Saṅgha. The presence of each one of us sitting together this week, whether we're sitting remotely or right here in this hall, can be a support to all the rest of us as we continue with this inner exploration. There's a shared commitment to practice that we make together. And that can fill this shared space, space that we all share.

And that can inspire us. We can rely on it. We can take refuge in it. So we'll take the refuges formally in Pāli, the language that they're usually repeated in, and we'll do it in a call-and-response fashion. So I'll call and you'll respond. And the way we do it is, first there's an homage to the Buddha, which is repeated three times.

And then we take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, and in the Saṅgha three times as well. And you can just follow me, and if you don't want to chant, you can just listen.

But I encourage you to put your voice into it as well. So, we can begin. Namo Tassa. Namo Tassa. Bhagavato. Bhagavato. Arahato. Arahato. Samma Sambuddhassa. Samma Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa. Namo Tassa. Bhagavato. Bhagavato. Arahato. samma sambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa buddham saranam gacchāmi Dhammam Saranam Gacchāmi Saṅghaṃ Saranam Gacchāmi Dutiyampi Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi Dutiyampi Dhammam Saranam Gacchāmi Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ Saranam Gacchāmi Tatiyampi Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi Tatiyampi Dhammam Saranam Gacchāmi Tatiyampi Saṅghaṃ Saranam Gacchāmi

So then the precepts, in the Theravādan school of Buddhism, in Thailand and Burma and Cambodia, Sri Lanka, there's a very common ethos or idea that ethics and the precepts lays at the foundation, the beginning of practice. And in certain schools of Zen, they have this whole curriculum that you follow, sometimes for years. And at least in one Zen lineage, you get to the precepts at the end of the whole curriculum. It's like the advanced practice. And then in early Buddhism that we base our teachings here at IRC on, for us, precepts and ethics are at the beginning, middle, and end. It's all the time.

It's integrated through the whole path. There's no Dharma without a care for avoiding the cause of harm. The ancient teaching is that the primary characteristic, the primary thing that characterizes the Dharma is non-harming. And when people come on retreat, they come from many backgrounds. And just as we know that people have invisible disabilities or invisible illnesses, and it's quite hard because people don't understand to accommodate them or make space for them or appreciate their challenges, people also come with invisible wounds.

That people have had terrible things happen to them over their life, and there's no way of seeing that. They're wearing the same kind of clothes as you are, so what's the big deal? And people come to these retreats. Often times, sometimes it's because it's the end of the road. They've tried everything else. They're challenged by something in their life, suffering, some big something, and they're coming here because this is the refuge.

This is the place where they feel like maybe there's some chance to kind of hold it with compassion or heal some wound or something. And maybe all of us to some degree, in some invisible way to even ourselves, there are ways in which we have very tender hearts that are easily broken, easily violated. And so when we come to do the work of a retreat, it's very important for our hearts, for inner lives, and for the community life, that it feels like a safe place. And that this is a place where we don't have to worry about killing and stealing and sexual misconduct and lying and intoxication. Each of those are challenging for some people in our

lives. Huge, huge challenge what they've gone through.

And it's kind of rare, at least if you read the newspaper, to come to a place where that's the dedication for the whole community. I think it does something really good to our hearts. It supports a lot of people. It's our contribution to make a safe scene, safe place. It's also our contribution to ourselves because the path of the Dharma is inseparable from being dedicated to a path of non-harming, living an ethical life. Enlightenment, which is the big goal of Buddhism, is actually an ethical transformation.

It's not like we leave it all behind. So we want to kind of create the environment that really supports this for all of us. So what we do at the beginning is we all give voice so that the hearts can hear it. That this is a community that's dedicated to the five precepts. So the first one is not to kill, and that means not to intentionally cause harm of any kind. It's much shorter than killing.

And not to steal. Or actually the way we say it here is we don't take what's not given. So if there's some delicious looking cake that someone has left on the dining room table, but it's not on the buffet table, so don't take a bite. It was an offer to you. Someone once maybe lost, they dropped their wallet here, downstairs somewhere, and someone put it in the palm of the Buddha in the statue down there, and it stayed there for a couple of days, until the person realized they lost their wallet and went looking for it, and there it was waiting. It's a safe place, this community is not kind of steal.

It's a huge impact on the heart. Here the idea is to restrain from all sexual behavior. We don't usually use the word celibate because then people wouldn't come maybe, but that's the idea. There's no sexual behavior here. But more importantly, since most of you are probably going to be careful with that, But we want to be careful that we don't know the sexual harm that people have experienced or the challenges they have with sexual addiction and all kinds of things that go on. So it's actually important to not behave in any kind of way that could be interpreted as having sexual connotations.

Something for you might be just like to put your hand on someone who might, I don't know, struggling with something. For you it might seem the most innocent thing and supportive thing you can do, but you don't know what physical touch means for people who are here in this environment here, and what their history of physical touch has been. So the idea is to really keep your sexual energy, interest, whatever it might be, really keep it private and keep it contained. And not lying means to be mindful. Honesty is mindfulness out loud. If you lie, you're going in the opposite direction of what we're trying to do here, which is to really see the truth of the moment and what's here.

And then to not engage in intentional ways of intoxicating yourself. I mean, so no alcohol and no recreational drugs for that purpose. And nowadays we have more, teachers are all talking in the back rooms, like, the psychedelic thing, you know, that's getting more and more popular. And yeah, yeah, there are people on my retreat who took microdose on something or other. Don't do it here. I think that there's wise ways of doing psychedelics, and I support it to some degree.

But in this environment here, we're trying to create a very different context, a very different atmosphere and way to hold people, many people who struggle a lot around these things, so they don't feel tempted, they don't feel challenged by it. So we want to really dedicate ourselves to an environment where it's a refuge for people who struggle with things like alcohol and drugs. And so we step up and make this commitment for the duration of the retreat. And I like to word these precepts with a preface, for the sake of our practice together. Because we're not just doing it for ourselves, we're really doing it for this practice container that we are forming here and living together with during this time. And then for the sake of our training together, I commit myself to not killing.

And commit's a kind of big word. But it's meant for the duration of this retreat. But I think that to speak to the heart in some deep way, I think it's really good for it to hear sincere devotion, dedication, commitment, so that this is what we're about here. So I'll do it in English, half of the phrase, half the sentence, and then you can repeat after me. For the sake of our practice together, I commit to not killing. For the sake of our practice together, I commit to not taking what is not given.

For the sake of our practice together, I commit to avoiding sexual misconduct. For the sake of our practice together, I commit to not lying. For the sake of our practice together, I commit to not intoxicating my mind. Thank you for that. I take it as being kind of a treasure that there's a community of people who would have that commitment, dedication, that we'll live together this way. And I hope it helps all of us kind of just kind of settle and relax and like, okay, good.

And maybe help you to sleep well tonight. And the fact that there are all these people online who are spread out all over the country, maybe the world, who are also doing this with us. I mean, the goodness of it is now spread across the lands. That's kind of cool too. So, by design, we end the evening around now with the hope that you'll go to bed. That some of us, tired from a day of traveling, are coming here, the transition.

So it's good to go to sleep, and sleep as long as you can. And if you feel quite awake, and you want to continue with the practice, you're welcome to stay in the hall. As long as you

like. Sometimes it's nice the first morning to sleep in. You'll probably hear the bell as it goes around. But if you turn over and go back to sleep, if you feel like you really need to get rest and recover from whatever you're doing.

But it's usually not very good to come late to breakfast. Because that makes things more complicated, because they start packing up after a while and bringing things away and cleaning up. Everyone, I think, has a Saṅgha service job, which is at 6.40. And some of you will be new to those jobs, and if you're not sure where the equipment is or have questions about it, Michelle and Lish will be wandering around, making themselves available. You can almost just wait until they come and find you or something, to see if you have any questions about it all. And within two days you'll be a master of the job.

You'll master it. And then some of you are bell ringers. And some of you, the bell ringers, are going to come up here and sit up here. A couple of things you should know about this bell. So if you want to sit up here, you can either sit in the place where I'm sitting here, or the chair's here. So you can sit in the chair.

If you sit in the chair, I think we'll try to have this bell sitting here on the corner. But you have to know that this bell has a, the bottom of it has a wire attached to it, you see? And it has a microphone here. And that's for the people online, because there's maybe a complicated system with Zoom. You can't do bell sounds on Zoom, and you have to turn on the original sound, and that's a challenge. And the original sound is not so nice either.

So they figured out a way around it that involves this mic and the bell. So if you move the bell, just be aware that there's a wire connected to this whole thing. And then when you ring the bell, You never want to strike a bell. They say strike the bell? Never strike a bell. You tap the bell.

Or you kiss the bell with the striker. You wouldn't call it a striker, but we should figure out a different name for it. Because what happens is, if you've never heard this before, some people the first time think they're doing it lightly, and it's a big clang. And you can't really undo that. But if you do it too softly, like that, I couldn't even hear it, you can redo that. So if you want to learn the art of ringing the bell nicely, If you hold it in your finger like this, it's very loose in the fingers.

You can just go like this and it flops around, right? Not like this. You're not squeezing it. You're just very loose. There's barely enough contact that holds it up. And then you don't just kind of go and just like directly onto the bell. You want to graze the striker off the bell.

And so one way to do it is you have this arc you make like this, a big arc like this. And that

as the arc starts going up, you're passing the edge of the bell here, and then you just kind of drop it and keep going. So it just grazes and barely touches for a moment the bell before it's being pulled away at the same time. Some people like to do it a little bit differently, like from the inside. But also you're pulling it away right away. Some people do it on the side, and then you're kind of like, you're still kind of just grazing it.

So it's kind of just going right by, and as it's going by it kind of falls against it. It's like falling against it as it goes by. Something like that. And so if you've never done this before in this bell up here, when we finish now, you can come up here and practice. Little bit. And I think there's a little... And those of you who want to sit, just go and come back. You know, in five minutes later or something. And then don't worry about it. If you're up here setting the bell and it's not just perfect, that's our practice. It's okay. So, thank you all and sleep well.