

Sunday Formal Opening: Sitting Meditation and Teaching

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So I want to just welcome both of you, all of you who are here and all of you online. And, you know, I like to think of you as those of you online as being in the back of the room and, you know, one more row away. And so we get to see your faces here on the iPad and get, you know, just stick and connect it with you. Yeah. And I'm just really happy to have Kim being the online teacher, you know, share her wisdom with you, support you the way Gil and I will be supporting those of you here. So let's start with a 10-minute sit.

So I'm going to go over some brief logistics, even though most of you know these, those of you here. Okay. But there's a couple of people, you know, a few people who haven't sat at IRC before, so it's worth hearing them. We do have hearing-assisted devices available, and if you wear them, especially if you're sitting in a chair, make sure you either clip them onto your body or there's a little place to clip them onto your chair. It doesn't sound that good when you fall asleep and it drops to the ground. So...

You know, if your legs dangle, you've probably noticed all the accessory cushions that are out there. But one other thing, it's okay to bring another chair into the room to switch out if you find one of the other chairs more comfortable, like the mesh chairs or even the blue ones from Aqua, maybe Aqua downstairs. So feel free to switch it out if those are more comfortable. Most people like these, but a few prefer the others. So, you know, and again, you know, most of us here have, you know, have to set a lot of retreats. And, but I'll just mention again, you know, noble silence.

You know, the importance of really respecting noble silence, only speaking when we're when it's necessary, maybe in the kitchen, you know, we need to say something or practice discussions. And one other thing, no, you know, most of us tend to not have eye contact when we're doing a retreat. But some people aren't used to that. So if you're not used to that, just know

that it's not mandatory to avoid eye contact, but to respect that other people have chosen not to have eye contact. And it doesn't mean they're being rude or rejecting you or anything like that.

We'll be, all of you will be scheduled to have practice discussions, one with me and one with Gil during the week, and we'll give the details of that tomorrow. So there'll be 15 minutes, right, 15 minute practice discussions. And those of you who are bell ringers, if you haven't rung this bell before, start gently. Okay. And if you're not sure, feel free to try it out when nobody's here. You know, so it's better to start gently and then much better than to start too loud, you know, which occasionally happens. If that happens, be gentle in your inner voice when you do that.

Any questions about logistics? Is that Bill going to live there? No, it's going to be moved. They stay there, right? Yeah. The whole time. Well, I guess they moved it here, so... So we'll move it back in there. I'll stay over here. So then wait. If there's some of you, but some of you can, who are bell ringers, can sit here on the chair, and the bell's right here for you. Yeah. Yeah. And again, the bell ringers, you can either sit there and when you're the practice, who are practice leaders in the chair or in Gil's seat, so you can reach the bell. Sit under the thing, set. Okay.

Yeah. Since it has been moved, it's not usually, it shouldn't really have been moved because it's a... And if it's over here, don't move it for yourself. Because it's wired, it has its own mic. And so the microphone that's right here on the cushion is specially configured to work with Zoom. So it makes a nice sound of Zoom. So if you move it, then you might disconnect the wire that's connected to the cushion of the bell. So we'll put it back over there. And if I need to ring it, I'll take the bell without the cushion, which is what I did over the last program we had.

So any questions about the logistics? Anything you need to know to be more comfortable, to be more at ease? Okay. So as with any retreat, I think it's incredibly special to... give this time to ourselves to practice. Whether it's a short retreat or a long retreat, it's just special time. It's set aside everything else in our lives and just really devoted to developing our inner lives.

You know, one of the things that can be helpful to start the retreat with really connecting with the attitude of bringing in acceptance to whatever shows up on retreat. Whether it's unexpected issues with the stove, which we've had. or whether it's something you forgot your favorite teddy bear, or whatever it is that may not be going the way you expect it to. And to bring an attitude of this is a moment of practice. This is how we practice. This is how we

practice equanimity. This is how we practice non-clinging.

If... you know, if we're, if we consider practicing only when we're settled and happy and feeling great, you know, that's not developing anything, you know, and life brings us both. It brings us the stuff that's really enjoyable and the stuff that isn't. And the idea is to just keep folding it into the practice. This is the practice, not a distraction, not a sight thing, but it's the heart of the practice, how we meet what we don't expect, what we don't want, what may not want, what shows up.

So let's begin really by just beginning to slow down, you know, keep the tension internal. You know, there's all these people to look at, you know, and so now let's just kind of bring it in to really your internal experience. You know, even though we can feel the support of this wonderful Sangha, you know, both online and on land, and, you know, but we can still be nurturing the inner heart. So the theme of the retreat will be the seven factors of awakening. And so I'll give a brief introduction to this theme, and then Gil will do the refuges and precepts.

So these are the seven beautiful qualities that naturally arise when we get into the flow of our meditation practice, and not something we force. There's something there just, it's natural, naturally arises. We often refer to them as the seven jewels. And like jewels, they're factors that valuable in themselves, not because they lead to something better or something later, but they're valuable in themselves whenever they show up. When they're present, even briefly, they're already experiencing some freedom.

Mindfulness. We're being mindful, we're not caught by something. When we're being investigation, tranquility, well, in order of energy, joy, tranquility, *samādhi*, and equanimity. There are... It's often, they're often paired with the five hindrances, you know, the forces of distraction and the seven factors of awakening in a way that when those five hindrances are suspended in practice, these seven jewels begin to shine. They develop and get stronger. You know, and the practice is often about, you know, cycles of periods when... the hindrances might be strong and we're kind of going from one from sleepiness to restlessness to desire to aversion to doubt you know or you know kind of hanging in one of them for a while so they might get really strong at times and then at other times the seven factors become really predominant.

So, but when we meet those hindrances with those qualities of the seven factors, they're not a problem. And they naturally, you know, they naturally arise and strengthen. You know, being mindful of the hindrance, being mindful of any unwholesome state, If we're mindful, it already transforms it. It already changes it in a wholesome way. Nothing that happens in

practice is a mistake.

One of the really important turning points in my life was the first time in my meditation practice was the first time that I saw a hindrance not as a problem, not as just something else that arose. You know, so, you know, really caught up in aversion, you know, the person next to me was making way too much noise, you know, or breathing wrong. I don't remember, you know, and I had all this anger, you know, and my mind just said, Oh, isn't that interesting? Yeah. You know, and it was like, wow, you know, isn't that interesting? And I just explored it. And it just wasn't a problem.

And that exploration of the hindrance was the factor of investigation. You know, and with whatever arises, we can bring these wholesome qualities to it. You know, the practice is not about fixing ourselves. You know, it's about learning how to relate wisely to what shows up, whatever it is. And those factors, they live in us a little bit at all times. You know, regardless of what we're doing, you know, they're available in moments of relaxation, in moments of loving, in moments of appreciation, of engagement. Whenever we're not caught up in wanting and not wanting, um...

And practice creates the conditions for these wholesome qualities to arise more naturally. And each of the factors supports all the others. You know, and one of the ways that we're presenting them, there's different ways of relating to these seven factors, but one of the ways we're presenting them in this retreat is the way that each factor tends to lead to the next. You know, the quality of mindfulness of being here, noticing what's here, allows us to get closer yet and really experience what's here, closer, more intimately. And when we do that, energy arises.

You know, we get, you know, really interested. Energy arises. We feel more alive. And when energy arises, it naturally brings a feeling of joy. And the joy as it settles a little bit, you know, creates the conditions for a sense of joyful tranquility. And the tranquility settles the mind, gets quieter and quieter until it gets unified into some deep *samādhi*. Or not necessarily deep *samādhi*, a *samādhi*. And the *samādhi* leads to a state of equanimity where we have no preferences to what's happening. This very deep state of equanimity can get very deep.

But these factors are available no matter what we're doing. If we're standing in line waiting for food... or in the kitchen, for those of you at home, you know, waiting for the water to boil. You know, those are moments where we can have a hindrance present. How much longer? If that person's walking too slow, they're taking too long to wash their hands. Or it can be a moment of, you know, oh, being mindful of the moment, investigating the way our body is sitting. You know, it can have any factor show up or just simple, an easy light state of

equanimity. You know, it's fine waiting here for half an hour. Hopefully it doesn't happen.

So these, you know, these factors can have... the flavor of each one of these factors can be the same, but it can be very light, or it can really grow into something very deep in meditation. So when we recognize them, when they're light, it helps them grow, it helps them strengthen. So, you know, maybe, you know, you're putting on your clothes mindfully in the morning, you know, and that, or brushing your teeth mindfully, any wholesome factor, you know, the more often that it's showing up, even very lightly, the more access we have to them, for them to deepen so that they're deep enough.

You know, they're called factors of awakening. Because when those factors are balanced, they create the conditions to awaken. They're not just factors that make us feel good. You know, I mean, in a way those factors are both, each one of them is the path and the fruit of the path. In the same moment. In the same moment, you know, it's both. You know, so it's freedom in itself, a taste of freedom, and it's the path. And so we strengthen them not for the purpose of having this great experience, but for the purpose of freedom, of freeing ourselves from clinging.

So, you know, Gil and I will be exploring them, you know, more or less one a day. And that's what I'll leave you with. So thank you.

So coming here at 7.30, gathering for this first formal time in the meditation hall. is in fact a time that these two halves of our community come together to be whole. The people here in this room and the people who are in the Zoom room. And it's very nice that we have this iPad here up front. We're not supposed to have any devices, but... But, you know, the Buddha needs to see too. And it's very nice to go through and see, like, I keep wanting to wave, but you're not down there, you're up there. But if I wave up there, then it's like I'm waving to all of you, which is okay, I guess, but...

And just to say, there were a few little hearts showed up in the Zoom room. And so a couple of things that we do, there are refuges and precepts at this point. And the refuges and precepts are considered to be quite profound and maybe some of the most profound things you can do on a retreat sometimes, if you understand what it is for yourself. The refuges and precepts in some ways are very personal and in some ways are very transpersonal or interpersonal or... And so this is a rich area, the whole idea of refuge.

And as I was sitting here thinking about this, there is a teaching, if I'm in Buddhism, that the spot where the Buddha was enlightened, it's called the *Bodhimanda*. It's something like the Bodhi spot. And there's a teaching, especially in more esoteric Buddhism, that any place you

are standing, any place you're sitting, is in fact your *bodhimanda*. And so it's a kind of an expression that where you are is the place to land, where you are is the place to be settled. And here is where the practice is to be found. And to find your refuge here and now, in your own experience.

To find something here as a reference point here that is not just about you. And this is where the inside-outside of the refuges is not so clear, or it kind of spreads. There is something that's holding us here. There's a context, there's a support for what we do here that's bigger or greater or more profound than your own efforts and your own understanding. And sometimes your own efforts and your own understanding, it's just not enough. It doesn't do it. It's not going to help you.

Sometimes people are reaching kind of rock bottom, trying so hard with their own efforts and their own understanding, and it's kind of a dead end at some point. There is something here that's profound, that's helping you, that's supporting you, that's guiding you, that's nourishing you, that I don't want to say it's outside of you, but it's not the part of you that you usually associate with your conscious effort and the usual identification of self and the one who can be. It's not that nothing you do with the part of you that can be a bad practitioner or a struggling person or a victim of reality or whatever it might be that we struggle with. And there's something bigger and valuable holding us, supporting us.

And it's a refuge allows us to be at home anywhere we're at. Refuge allows us to feel safe any place we're at. Refuge supports us to be calm any place we're at. And I think this is particularly important for many of us now as we come to practice after the month, the week, especially a weekend, of so many momentous things happening in this country. And to sit here at our *Bodhi Mandā*, to sit here in refuge, not to escape from there, not to get away from it exactly, but to be able to give the world, give this nation the gift of our calm presence. the gift of our profound rootedness from which peace and love and care can flow in a way that can't flow if we're anxious or angry or distressed by what's happening.

And so this work that we're doing here at this particular time in our history is actually very important to... And myself, I do hope that the conditions of our times outside of your own personal life is a motivation for you, not to be, to solve the problems of the world, not to have to kind of make yourself into this kind of super person who can fix everything, but rather... The very thing that we're doing here in terms of the core practice turns out to be the very thing that's helpful for the wider world. And so, you know, it's nothing really that special, but you can be motivated. You can add a certain dedication to really give yourself over to the practice.

To give yourself to this practice, to give yourself to the refuge, to give yourself to this *bodhimanda*, this spot, to be really present here to find your peace, profound peace of a heart that's at ease with itself. And so the refuges are sometimes often described as Buddha Dharma Sangha, and we leave it at that. And then there's also a fourth refuge that the Buddha talks about that doesn't get talked about outside of the *suttas* that much. But he talks about the language he uses, is that we, not that we are a refuge automatically, but we make ourselves a refuge. We make ourselves a refuge. And how do we make ourselves a refuge?

So the emphasis here also is on what we do, the action, the activity that we're involved in. It isn't looking for some inherent goodness that we carry with us so much. as it is to engage in an action that allows the freedom of the heart, the goodness of the heart to come forth. That's our refuge. And when the Buddha then defines what that refuge is, he describes it as the very practice we're doing here. The practice of mindfulness, the four foundations of mindfulness. That's how we become a refuge.

So the Buddha, the refuge in the Buddha, is to take refuge not so much in the person of the Buddha, but that he exemplifies awakening. He exemplifies the shedding, the dropping away of self-consciousness, self-preoccupation, drops away of attachments and greed, the dropping away of suffering, of anguish, of stress, And he represents that this is possible. It's possible for each of us. That potential is a support. That potential is this wider context that's bigger than your efforts. To take refuge in the Buddha, to take refuge in this potential you have.

So you can trust it. So you can trust there's more than here, than just your challenges, more than your conclusions, more than your suffering. Yeah. There is something really good, profound here. And here it's the potential that you have through this practice. To take refuge in the Dharma, simplistically it's to take refuge in the teachings of the Buddha. But the Dharma also kind of means the truth, the kind of the natural truth of what functions, what processes that move through us, the emergent qualities of the heart.

Yesterday, there was someone who referred to him. Maybe many of you heard this idea before, but that in practice, we see, we look, we live with the emergent rather than with the emergency. And so the Dharma is that when we put down... our selfishness, put down our greed, our attachments. When we trust mindfulness, when we give ourselves over to this being here at the spot in our *bodhimanda*, and allow something to emerge that is free of attachment, it's really good. And that also, it can't really be associated with the usual identity, usual sense of self, usual sense of what we judge ourselves or evaluate ourselves. It's not separate from you, but it doesn't belong to you.

So to take refuge in this natural processes, natural truths. And then there's a refuge in the Sangha. And we take refuge in the Sangha everywhere. Yesterday, there was a kind of beautiful when there was a group of people and someone referred to the Mother Earth, which was kind of nice. But then the person referred to our Mother Africa, and we all emerged from Africa. And somehow when that person said, I talked about how we're all kin. We all come from that same source, the Great Mother Africa. And that kind of changed something in my mind to hear that. I felt more in Sangha, in kinship, with the whole world kind of calling upon that common source that we all have as human beings.

And there's the Sangha of practitioners. Then we hear this retreat make ourselves a Sangha, a group of people who are sharing the practice and hopefully care about each other. and want to practice together, to practice and support each other. And as I said earlier, knowing that by supporting others through our practice, we support ourselves. Supporting others through all the tasks we do and caring for the retreat, we support others, and they're supporting us. But even more than for me, the most profound thing is, that there's something about the osmosis, the inspiration, the modeling, the reference point of a community of people practicing, which also teaches us there's more here holding us than our own efforts and our own understanding.

There's a relational field in which we're living and practicing, and that relational field is complicated and... And it's possible to select out of it subsections of it. You know, it could be that you're just annoyed with everyone having the wrong color socks. I mean, that's like, how could they come to a retreat center with those kinds of socks? And that's taking a little piece of the whole thing. That people are too slow at getting their food at the buffet table. You know, that's selecting that to be annoyed at, maybe.

So we take, that's only a piece of the relational field, but there's a part of the relational field that has to do that we're sharing the practice of awareness. We're sharing in being awake and attentive, and not just sharing in it, but resonating with it, resonating with other people's practice. practicing ourselves so we have that residence to share with others. There's a residence that moves through the building and through the community about what it is to be present, what it is to be attentive, what it is to be receptive, what it is to be caring, what it is to be not focusing on the annoyances, not focusing on the small things. but having the heart wide open in this wider field of residence that is through the practice.

So to take refuge in the community that practices, take refuge in our kinship with each other. And one of the profound ways we do that is the precepts. And I suspect, I don't just suspect, I'm pretty confident that none of you are going to go around killing, stealing, engage in sexual

misconduct, intentionally lying and getting drunk during this week. I'd be very surprised. So I guess we don't have to do the refuges. We don't have to do the precepts. We can just forget about them.

I think what we're doing here is we're creating this field of resonance, field of relational field, where something that's maybe even unconscious in ourselves is can feel safe. Safety is not an easy thing to come by in our world. And there's plenty of people who don't experience safety on a regular basis. Some places they don't experience it at all. And the heart needs to feel safe in order to really be able to let go into ourselves and be here in a profound way. And so something in our heart needs to hear the ritual. of everyone voicing that this is our intention, as a community, to come together and make this a safe place.

Safe for ourselves per person, for our possessions, for our relationships with each other. And help us really to know that so that we can lower our guard, we can walk around not having to be worried or afraid. And this is a phenomenal thing. for our world. For 40 people to come together this way and to have this degree of safety is probably more better for your heart than most of you realize. And so, but it's, and you don't even know what's in your unconscious, what life experiences you carry that are kind of still in there that need to hear this.

So we don't... They try to live to the best of our ability as a practice, as a training, to not cause any intentional harm. No harm making, no violence. We don't kill anything. We don't kill the ants. We don't kill the insects. We, to the best of our ability, as a training, we don't take what is not given. So every meal is offered. So... You're supposed to wait until the cook bows to you. That's the offering. So it's kind of symbolic of this whole idea of living in a field of not taking something until it's offered.

But then, you know, the yogi fridge is, there's already food offered all the time. And teas are offered all the time, so you don't have to wait for it to be offered. But the idea is to be careful with this. Now take what is not offered, not given. And, If you find someone's possession here at IRC, maybe put it under the message board so they might find it. They may look for a message, but don't keep it. Make it safe for them. And not to engage in sexual misconduct, which means that in no way have your sexuality, your sexual interests, your sexual desires, somehow spilled beyond... the confines of your own inner life.

So, you know, don't look at someone with the desire as part of looking. Track yourself, know yourself, keep it to yourself. You don't know the challenges people have had around sexuality in their life. And here, this idea of safety and becoming safe is so paramount. We want to be really careful with each other that nothing... touches on ancient wounds that people still carry. It means that there's no physical contact here, and it can be very easy here with so

many of us being friends to just gently touch someone's shoulder or their back, like, excuse me, or can I help you or something. It's kind of a very helpful, I've seen so many yogis be challenged by deeply challenged by this idea of being touched unwontedly on retreat, that it really should be our practice to really model that, to learn how to do it. Don't touch anyone here.

Some of you might be here with friends that you touch lightly all the time when you're around. It's just second nature. But we're trying to create this field of safety and not to engage in false speech. So it's relatively easy to do that here, because you're not speaking so much, and because you can kind of figure that here at IRC, it's okay not to say anything. So just don't say it if it's a falsehood. It's not needed. It doesn't help. And that's especially true to yourself.

And then this thing I'd hear of intoxicants. Some of us were here, this room a few days ago, and we talked about this. But it's a phenomenal gift we give to our society at large. By having this place be an oasis, an island, where people associated that here people do not take drugs. Here they do not engage in intoxication, alcohol. And... and even psychedelics and plant medicine, which are now deeply respected in many circles and valued in many circles. It's still a very challenging thing for some people where they're difficult relationships with drugs. And so to allow this place to be an oasis, a safe place, no one associates, they come here and they feel, oh, this is a place where this is not going to be tempted or be demonstrated or where I bump up against this challenge, my own challenge with it because it's really kept clean here from that.

And so living by the precepts is also profoundly valuable for you because one of the really core Dharma principles is that mostly what you have to do in this practice is get out of your own way. Mostly what you have to do is to avoid causing harm. If you can radically and thoroughly avoid causing harm and suffering, then you can allow for the flourishing. Then you can allow for the emergent to come. You don't have to know what it is. You don't have to try to attain something. You can just trust.

The refuges will hold you. The precepts will hold you. The community will hold you. But if you just get out of the way and allow the immersion to come, it'll be different maybe for each one of you. But if you get out of the way, I trust it'll be beautiful and nourishing for you. So the precepts also represent this way. We're getting out of our own way. We're making room for our inner goodness to surface.

So let's chant the refuges together. Okay. And those of you who don't know them in Pali, you can hum along or just listen deeply, and that's just as good. So I'll start. And the reason I do

it, usually we do it call and response, which has its own value. But for this retreat, because so many of you have, you know, are... experienced practitioners. There's something about it really feel like good to do it together. So just repeat, continue to start up with me.

Namo Tasa Bhagavata Bhagavatam Samma Sambudasa Namo Tasa Bhagavatam ahara so sammas sambuddhasa namo tasa bhagavato ahara so sammudasa budam saranam gachami damam saranam Sangam Saranam Gachami Dutta Yampi Buddha Saranam Gachami Dutta Yampi Dhamma Saranang Gachami Dutta Yampi Sangam Saranang Gachami

And for the precepts, we'll do it calling this response.

For the sake of our practice together, I engage in the training not to take life.

For the sake of our practice together, I engage in the training.

I engage in the training.

Not to take what is not given.

Not to take what is not given.

For the sake of our practice together.

For the sake of our practice together.

I engage in the training.

I engage in the training.

To not engage in sexual activity.

To not engage in sexual activity.

For the sake of our practice together.

For the sake of our practice together, I engage in the training.

I engage in the training.

Not to speak falsehoods.

Not to speak falsehoods.

For the sake of our practice together.

For the sake of our practice together.

I engage in the training.

I engage in the training.

Not to drink alcohol or drugs that will make my mind heedless.

Not to drink alcohol or drugs that would make my mind meaningless.

Thank you very much. So with that, the retreat has begun. And as usual, I encourage you to go to bed. As you know, the schedule is designed, so this would be an early bedtime. People are

often tired coming here. So please get a good night's rest and... if you need to sleep in in the morning because of the travel or just partying or what. And that maybe tomorrow morning is a good morning to sleep in and just wake up in time for the Sangha service or breakfast if it's okay with your Sangha service. So thank you.