

## Retreat Opening & Guarding the Sense Stores

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Very nice to be here and see all of your faces. And please know that we have yet other retreatants with us. We're intending to be with us, but who simply aren't able to be here this evening because of the time. So we'll be welcoming them at the first session tomorrow. And I guess we can welcome them now on the recording also. So... I'll just say a few welcome words.

It's really a delight to see all of you here and notice how widely spread out we are, even those of us who can make this time meeting. We have folks from in several places in the US, Canada, Chile, all around. Some of you, I recognize your names and that's lovely to see you again. Some of you I don't know yet, and I look forward very much to getting to know. I hope all of us here on our weekend time together please leave.

So I want to add my welcome. It's the solstice. It's the Persian New Year. It's the end of Ramadan. It's an auspicious day. So first thing I should say is my chronic bronchitis is back.

And I'm coughing. I'm coughing. I took the cough syrup. I was hoping by the time I started talking, it would take effect. So, oh well, old age, sickness, and death, it's only two out of three. But yeah, welcome.

It's really nice to see you all again, see some familiar faces here, and it's great to see you and hope that you find this weekend something quite interesting. And we'll turn it back over to Ken. Kim, so she can give us the introduction to the actual retreat. This is a retreat, not just to hang out and hear talks.

Thank you, Lee. Yeah, I'm... wanting to start orienting us toward this weekend of practice together. And just to speak directly to the opportunity that we have in online retreat. It really is a special opportunity to be able to have extended teachings over a number of days. And

well, you know, we've got parts of three days, the full day tomorrow. and yet be able to do that from our own home, not having to travel in order to get there.

But as Lee suggested in what he just said, we do want you to think of this time as retreat time, even if the conditions are not the same as they are at a retreat center that we would go to. So a few tips about being in this space, this weekend, and... is you may want to consider having relatively simple meals over the next few days. And, you know, whether or not you've set up for that, I'm not sure. But, you know, sort of letting go of the idea of doing complicated things, but more taking care of our basic needs like they are at a retreat center.

You may want to spend a little time cleaning up your space a little bit, actually. Believe it or not, neat surroundings are named, even in the *suttas*, as helping to condition the mind to be able to meditate well. So this is not a comment on your housekeeping skills or anything like that. But I actually enjoy kind of tightening up, tidying up the sitting space at least, the altar space, maybe the kitchen, these kinds of things. You'll have time to do that maybe tomorrow before we start. And...

Another important aspect of retreat, online retreat, is that it may be that you share the house with others, and that's great. And it may be that they're not on retreat. And so there is an opportunity, a suggestion really, that you have some conversation with others in your household about how you're going to handle this time. You know, will they understand about your being in silence? doing a lot of sitting, et cetera. Do you have some kind of an agreement about having meals together?

Sort of anything is fine as long as you've worked it out in advance. That's the kind of the easier way to do it than to negotiate it after the retreat has already started or when you're wanting to have more quiet time, but your partner didn't realize that's what you needed or things like that. Also, you don't need to be like stonely silent in the sense that I heard one teacher say it's better to be kind than to be silent. And I think that's a nice way to think about it is, you know, if somebody needs you at a given moment, you know, of course you would help your friend, your neighbor, your family member.

But generally speaking, you know, we would want there to be the understanding that you're on retreat. And people are sort of generally on board with that until, you know, 1 p.m. on Sunday. And then... One other thing that comes to mind is to say that the topic that we're going to teach on, I think is absolutely perfect for home retreat. You know, we're teaching about the sense bases, which Lee is going to introduce us to in a little while. But, you know, we're going to be looking at our sensory experience in the very setting in your life where you experience a lot of it habitually, right?

Right. So you go to retreat center and it's great. It's all silent and all the meals are taken care of and it's a beautiful place. And, you know, all of that is set up. That has advantages too. But it might be that it's easy to drop into, you know, very... a quiet space, you're having generally more pleasant sensations, you're not dealing with the usual stuff around your house and the sounds of your neighbors, seven dogs.

I don't know what your neighbors are like, but, and here we're going to be looking at all of our ordinary sense experiences right here in our ordinary setting. unless you've rented an Airbnb or something. So there's a lot of potential for wisdom in really seeing how your experience unfolds right there in your daily life setting. So it's a prime opportunity also to see the sort of humdrum elements of our life in a fresh dharmic light, if you will. So that's kind of makes me happy when I think about how we're doing this topic in this format.

Okay, so then I also want to say a little bit about two rituals that we do sometimes in our tradition that help to create a supportive space and community. So part of the space I just talked about of setting up your own personal space. And then we also have the space of our community that is just coming together now and which will be together for the course of this weekend. And we call these rituals, if you will, taking refuge and the five precepts.

And they're not always done. If you've mostly done retreat with Lee, I know he talks about these, but it isn't necessarily chanting, which I kind of like, so we're going to do the chants also. But these are very ancient, very longstanding ways of orienting ourselves to a practice period. It's kind of a top level way to think about them. So they can be understood though in various ways. And I want to kind of talk through that, not because I'm going to tell you how to experience them, but so I'll give you a range and you can sense into, oh, okay, this is how I can engage with the refuges and precepts.

So, you know, one kind of direct way that refuges and precepts support our practice, and I'll talk about them more specifically what each one is in a moment, but in general, they support our practice. Because meditation can go deeper when they're founded on these two practices. There's a way in which they protect the heart and the mind and also strengthen it in ways that are really beneficial, both for concentrating the mind and for having insights. And then another very direct one is that they support our community, our interactions together to be safe, comfortable, conducive to liberation and the teachings.

And then there's also a lot more subtle benefits, kind of at the level of the heart. And I want to talk through first the refuges, and then we'll chant those, and then I'll talk about the precepts, and we'll chant those. So the refuges. Yeah. So the traditional wording for the refuges is that we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. And what does that mean? So

again, there's this range.

So the refuge of the Buddha is kind of the, we could literally be inspired by, you know, Siddhartha Gotama, the man who lived in ancient India, who was a human being like us. who awakened out of greed, hatred, and delusion. He awakened and let go of all the suffering in his heart. He pulled the thorn out. And I find that actually quite inspiring that a person could do this.

And I mean, more broadly, there's the... the sense, the resonance with that, we can set up the notion, oh yeah. So like that, I too have the potential, my heart and mind too, have the potential to release greed, hatred, and delusion, to see through the way these things have been pulling me around like a bull by the nose ring my whole life and have an alternative, alternative way of living. Really inspiring. This potential is in all of the human hearts.

The refuge of the Dharma is the teachings, in a broad sense, the teachings that the Buddha left behind. So we don't have the Buddha alive anymore, but fortunately he decided to teach and some people decided to listen well enough that they learned these teachings, that they came to understand also what the Buddha understood. And then he, for 35 years, shared these teachings, for 45 years, shared these teachings all around India. And we now have records of them, some sense of them.

In fact, the teaching on the Sixth Sense basis is a very common teaching that he offered, not as common that we hear about it these days. But it was a big aspect of his teaching because it's so relatable. So the refuge of the Dharma is to understand, okay, there is a method here. There is a process. I can give myself over to that. I can trust that the unfolding of the Dharma will happen through my heart if I do these practices that were taught by the Buddha.

And then more broadly, the word Dharma, I find this very inspirational. It means nature, actually. The Dharma is just like how things work. And as someone with a scientific background, I have a great respect for the sense that there's a lawfulness to the universe and that we can through investigation and in this case also direct practice. We can understand that. We can touch into that. We can align ourselves with something that's just the way things work.

And if we do that in just the right way, The heart slips out of suffering. It just slips into the unfolding of nature as something that is inherently just what it is. And we can attune to that completely. That's really inspiring.

And then the refuge of the Sangha. Well, we're not doing this alone. You know, there are living examples today of people who are walking this path together. And there are people who have... seen some glimpse of what the Buddha taught. People like our teachers, you

know, Ayakima, Gail, the other teachers that are going to be mentioned on this retreat. And just the sense of, you know, the lineage that has been passed down from the time of the Buddha, that's a broad meaning of Sangha.

And then there's also the specific Sangha of this group of people. And what we might say sometimes people think, well, you know, this is kind of an approximation of that or something. No, this is the real thing. You know, people sitting, listening to the teachings, practicing together. This is it. This is what has been done for the last 2600 years to convey these teachings from then to now. And What an amazing thing that we can have the support of other people who are interested in this also, keeping it alive through the embodiment of their own practice and the sharing of the teachings.

So living examples of the teachings in action, refuge of the Sangha. And the idea of refuge is generally that it's not that you're taking on something new so much, I used to think, oh, you know, taking refuge, like I have to do this religious thing or somehow do something extra to take this on. The Buddha noted to us that we've actually already taken refuge. Refuge is just what we feel is safe or reliable in our life. And most of us have oriented around things like... our job, our relationships, our health, our home, these kinds of things, which are perfectly fine things to cultivate as livelihood and as supports in our life.

And They're not so reliable. You know, we could get bronchitis and our voice is not reliable. You know, we could, you know, many people come to practice because someone close to them dies or becomes ill and we realize, oh, this is not stable, that my life is not, my life is upended in some way or we lose our job or some such. And, you know, it's, so these things are... perfectly fine healthy things to have in a human life, and they're not so reliable. So we want to make sure that we're orienting ourselves to things that are more supportive. of awakening more reliable. And Buddha, Dharma, Sangha are kind of the names given to what we can turn ourselves toward.

So you're not doing something extra, you're deepening what you've already done and finding, you know, and agreeing and orienting toward these more reliable refuges. So let's chant. I always get excited talking about the refuges and go on for a while, but I'm going to share the screen so you can see them. We'll chant them in Polly, and don't worry if that you don't know Polly. You should be able to see that.

So this first one, the homage to the Buddha, Namu Tasa, Bhagavato, Arahato, Sama, Sam Buddha, Sa. We're going to do a call and response. So I'll chant that, and then you do your best approximation behind the mute button, please. because it's Zoom and it just doesn't coordinate well. We'll do that three times.

And then we have, we'll just do the Pali, the part in italics, but the English is here so we know. *Budam Saranam Gachami, I go for refuge to the Buddha or I go to the Buddha refuge. Dhamma Saranam Gachami, Sangam Sarnam Gachami. Dutiyampi a second time. Tatiampi a third time.* very simple so i'm going to chant and then you can um do so behind your mute button and it'll be good all right *namo tasa vagabato varahato samasang buddha Namutasa Bhagavata, Arhatta, Sama, Sambudasa. Namutasa, Bhagavata, Arhatta, Sama, Sambudasa.*

*Buddha, Saranam, Gachami. Dhamam, Saranam, Gachami. Sangam, Saranam Gachami. Dutiyampi Buddha, Saranam Gachami. Dutiyampi, Dhamam Saranam Gachami. Dutiyampi, Sangam, Saranam Gachami. Dhamam, Saranam Gachami. Tatiampi, Budam, Saranam Gachami. Tatiampi Dhamam, Saranam Gachami. Tatiampi Sangam, Saranam Gachami.*

Thank you. It's very beautiful. And then I'll just briefly say also that we do the five lay precepts. And these are, we'll chant them in English when we get to them. So... That would be easier for us to understand. But the understanding here is that we need to have our act cleaned up, if you will, in order to meditate well. And so these are ways that we commit to non-harming during our retreat time.

Some of you may already have these as part of your practice in your life. But they are quite simply a commitment, first of all, not to take the life of any living being. And this includes our insect friends and small beings. And now we commit to gently taking them outside. It's funny while I was talking. Talking a little bit earlier, a little spider was running around on my leg. And I kept looking down at it. But it eventually ran off.

I don't know where it is, but may it be well. And similarly, we would just have that commitment to take care with life. And then the second precept is the commitment not to take what is not given or, you know, more general language, not to steal. And we might think, okay, I got that one down. But, you know, just taking care with even around the house, are you borrowing, quote unquote, your partners, this or that that they may not have, they may have needed? Are you eating something out of the fridge that they weren't expecting you to eat? you know, these kinds of things, just really taking care with that kind of safety.

And sometimes at retreat centers, we point out if somebody were to leave their wallet sitting out in the dining room, it would still be there the next day, you know. And there are people who don't live with that kind of safety, you know. They haven't experienced that level of safety. So can we offer that?

And then the third precept is around sexual energy. And on retreat, we commit to celibacy,

so to not engaging in our sexual energy in outward ways at all. And you may need to negotiate with your partner what that will mean, but I'll invite the celibacy precept. And that is really about taking care with a very powerful force in our minds. And it's... It's something where in the context of the retreat, we certainly wouldn't, for example, start sending chats to somebody else whose tile we thought looked interesting, things like that.

And generally taking care with that kind of energy doesn't mean it won't arise. Doesn't mean we're prudish and it's bad that it arises. It's just that we recognize that. that flavor of interconnective energy can be disturbing or disruptive to having our own deep inner experience with looking at our patterns, understanding suffering, doing these subtle practices of the Buddha. So it's something that we would notice in ourselves but not express or act upon sexual energy.

And then the fourth precept is around not lying or not using false and harmful speech. We're not talking, but nonetheless, there may be Q&A periods and you may be talking with your partner or in some limited fashion in your life. And so taking extra care that that is truthful, that it's kind, that it's... meant to be beneficial in that moment. This has a huge impact on our ability to settle the mind. How many times have you sat in meditation and thought, I shouldn't have said that. I've had sits like that. So please take care for your own mind.

And then the fifth precept is not to intoxicate body and mind. And so we won't be using any controlled substances this weekend. And also the internet can be quite intoxicating. So please no email, television, podcasts, these kinds of things. A major disruption to the focus of the mind and to the continuity of mindfulness. This does not include your prescription medications or your cough syrup or anything like that. So please do take all of your ordinary medications.

And so we'll chant these also. Let me share that. And I apologize, I'm going slightly over. Okay. Five training precepts. So in English, again, we'll have to do it behind the mute button. But, for the sake of our training together, I undertake the precept to refrain from taking life. For the sake of our training together, I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given. For the sake of our training together, I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. We'll do the later one.

For the sake of our training together, I undertake the precept to refrain from lying. for the sake of our training together. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating body and mind. Thank you. I always feel inspired when people commit to that. So please, I'll turn it over to Lee to begin with our retreat topic.

Thanks, Kim. So the six senses in Pali, the six *Ayatana* But *ayatana* is a very interesting word because it refers to both the organ and the object, the eye and whatever you're seeing, the ear and the sound, the nose and the smell, etc. There is a word *indria* that is just for the organ, but what we see most often is *ayatana*. It gets translated in a number of different ways. Sometimes it's the organ. I think it's probably most helpful to translate it as the experience.

So the experience of eye and sight object, the experience of ear and sound, that gives it a more interactive meaning. We often think there's this me here and there's the objects out there, but it's not quite that separate. One other thing about the senses, I mean, there's the object and the organ, but we don't know it until there's sense consciousness. For example, the pressure on your left foot, oh, you weren't even noticing that until I said something. That was consciousness coming in.

You had the foot, that's the organ, and there was the pressure of it against the floor or the mat or whatever it's against. You didn't have sense consciousness. It takes all three to make contact. So why is this important? Well, we swim in the sense world. Pretty much everything we do is involving our senses. Either one of the five senses, and the Buddha talked about the sixth sense of the mind and the mind objects.

The mind objects would include thoughts, emotions, memories, intentions, etc. And it's actually quite useful to take the mind as the sixth sense. It makes a lot of what goes on easier to explain, even though it's quite different from the five external senses. So, yeah, if you're conscious, there are *suttas* that point out You're conscious of something. There's no consciousness without an object in the early discourses. And what you're conscious of comes through the senses.

The Buddha said that when consciousness arises on the eye, and sights its eye consciousness, the ear and sound, its ear consciousness, the nose and smells, nose consciousness of the tongue and taste, tongue consciousness, the body and textures, body conscious, the mind, mind objects, mind consciousness, just like a fire is reckoned based on its supporting conditions. When a fire is burning in a forest, we reckon it is a forest fire. Burning on a house, a house fire. Burning on chaff, a chaff fire. Burning on rubbish, a rubbish fire. Burning on cow dung, a cow dung fire.

It's the same way with the senses. We don't really have six separate consciousness as we have consciousness, but it's mediated through the senses. Yeah, consciousness is always there because it's always conscious of something. It may not be any of the five senses, but it's the mind consciousness. We need clarity and wisdom with how we're processing our sensory input. There are a number of *suttas* that point this out. We need to know exactly

what's going on, and we need to process it with wisdom.

So we're completely immersed in our senses. They're going to be sensory inputs. So how do we respond to our senses, our sensory input? If we want to get out of *dukkha*, it's going to require clarity and wisdom. I came up, I referred to, The sense is as not an amusement park. The first of the hindrances is sensual desire. We could say sense desire.

You see a magnificent sunset. Do you think, oh, that was such a magnificent sunset. I never need to see a sunset again. No, you're out there the next evening looking for another one. You eat some really delicious ice cream. When you finish, you think, oh, I never yet need to eat ice cream again. That was so totally satisfied. Oh, you're looking to see if the seconds left. We're hauling it out of the freezer the next day.

We are in debt to our senses, the Buddha said, just like if you take a loan, you've got to keep paying it back. If you get enthralled with your sensory input, no sensory input is ultimately satisfying. It only leads to wanting more sensory input. If we're going to get concentrated in meditation, we have to set aside that sense desire. You've got to get fairly far down the path to uproot sense desire. Even then, what's uprooted is passion for pleasure rather than sense desire. That's how you're fully awakened. Does that sense desire go away?

So the Buddha spoke often about the senses. In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the connected discourses or the thematic discourses, there are 56 different topics. And topic 35 is the six senses. six *āyatana*s and there are 248 *suttas* in that *samyutta* that book more than any other now admittedly sometimes this is a *sutta* for the eye and an identical one for the ear and a identical one for the nose etc and an identical one for sight objects and a identical one for sounds you know so There's one *sutta* and we got 12 out of it. So the number's a bit inflated, but there's a lot of information there. And if you're into reading *suttas*, it's possible to sit down and read all 248 *suttas* in one sitting. Because of the repetition there, you read that first one, you see the second through the twelfth or just, yeah, same thing, it's a different object. But there's a lot of important teachings on the *suttas*, on the *suttas*, in the *suttas*.

One of the most important is found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*. I'll read you what the practice is there.

Again, one contemplates dharmas as dharmas. So I would say phenomena as phenomena with respect to the six internal and external sense spaces. And how does one do so? Here one knows the eye, knows sight objects, knows whatever fetter arises dependent on the two. One knows how an unarisen fetter comes to arise. One knows how the abandonment of an arisen fetter comes about. One knows how the non-arising of

the abandoned fetter in the future will come about. One knows the ear and sounds, nose and smell, tongue and taste, body and textures, mind and mind objects. He knows whatever fetter arises dependent upon the two, and how an unarisen fetter comes to arise, and the abandonment of a risen fetter comes about. He knows how the non-arising of the abandoned fetter in the future come about.

Okay, so the fetters... There are ten fetters that bind us to the will of *saṃsāra*. And I suspect that's what's meant here. Wrong view of self, doubt, belief in the efficacy of rights and rituals. Those three go away at the first stage of awakening, stream entry. Then there's passion for pleasure and ill will, which are weakened at the second stage and uprooted at the third stage. And then there's the five higher fetters, which are desire for form and desire for formless.

That's all it says. It gets interpreted as desire for rebirth in worlds of form or heavens of form and desire for rebirth in heaven of formless. Iakama said that someone at the third stage of awakening likes it very much. So I think it means that if you're in the third stage of awakening, you like it to be nice, both the physical comfort and the mental thoughts, emotions, memories, etc. That way you don't have to do multiple lifetimes, but feel free to do multiple lifetimes if you're into that and don't worry about desiring specific heavens. And then there's ignorance, restlessness, and conceit, conceiving of a self. Right?

Okay, so any of those fetters arise, you should know it has abyss, and how you got yourself into that pickle, and how you can get yourself out of that, and how in similar circumstances in the future, you can prevent yourself falling into that problem. Now, in the *Abhidhamma*, there's a different set of fetters, which, again, these are things that, yeah, we see something, we smell something, whatever, and it attaches. These ten are sensuality, resentment, pride, wrong views, doubt, desire for becoming, attachment to rights and ritual, jealousy, avarice, and ignorance.

So there is some overlap there, but basically, When you get sensory input, check out to see, is this something that's actually going to attach and lead you down the path towards *dukkha*? Right? And if it is, figure out how to get out of it. Let it go. Ayakima said letting go is the essence of the spiritual path. I think she's right.

We're going to get sensory inputs. We have to get them in order to basically navigate the environment. We have to find food to eat, clothes to wear, shelter from the storm. But indulging in sensory inputs, no matter how pleasant they are, is not going to get us out of *dukkha*. In other *suttas* it says that, yes, they are pleasant, but they change. And if we're attached to them and they change, then we've bidened ourselves in *dukkha*.

So we need to understand what's going on with the senses and the mistakes we can make, getting lost in craving and clinging, getting lost in, well, all sorts of various ways that the craving and clinging and delusion can arise. The meditation practice, for actually getting out of that is the guarding of the senses. And I will share that with you.

The guarding of the senses or the restraint of the sense faculties occurs in the gradual training. The gradual training is the curriculum for the monks and nuns to undertake that leads from going forth, in other words, dedicating yourself to spiritual practice, all the way up to full awakening. It appears in about 30 different *suttas*, most famously in *Dīgha Nikāya* number two. And it's an important set of practices that we need to undertake. By the way, I have a book entitled *The Gradual Training*. You can download it for free from my website if you're more interested, where I go into detail there.

So first, someone hears the Dharma and gains faith and thinks, yeah, I'm going to commit myself to spiritual practice. They go forth and become a monk or a nun, or as a layperson, it's like, yeah, this is important. And the first thing to undertake is the precepts. which Kim led us through taking. The next thing we find in the gradual training is the restraint of the sense faculties.

And how does one guard the doors of the sense faculties? Herein, having seen a form with the eye, one does not grasp at the signs or details, since if one were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye, evil unwholesome states such as covetousness and grief might assail one when practice restraint guards the faculty of the eye and achieves restraint over the faculty of the eye and the same is reported recorded for the ear and sound smell and nose and smell taste and tongue body and textures mind and mind objects so The one does not grasp at the signs or secondary characteristics.

What do you think this is? You have some idea what it is. Yeah, you've probably seen one of these before. You might have one. It's a cell phone. How did you know it was a cell phone? Well, it's got this screen. It's the rectangular shape. It's about the right size. It's got buttons on the side. Yeah, that's the size.

The secondary characteristics would be, is it Android or iPhone? What apps are loaded? How much memory does it have? How old it is? The signs allow you to recognize something, to do the Sanya step, if you're looking at the aggregates, to identify it, to conceptualize it. And once you've conceptualized it, all the rest of whatever you've conceptualized that you think about it would be secondary characteristics.

So one does not grasp at the signs or secondary characteristics. It's not that you don't look,

you don't see. It's that you recognize it's a cell phone. That's it. You don't have to go any further. You might recognize it's my cell phone. I need to put it in my pocket because of going out. Right? But yeah, in general, you don't have to take most things that we take in through our senses any more than identifying it.

And even if you do have to process it more, you don't want to grasp at it. That's craving and clinging, as you might know from dependent origination. That's a setup for *dukkha*. So we want to practice seeing things and just knowing what they are. and not taking it any further unless it's necessary. Like you see something, it's food, it's time to eat. Okay, so now you taste it, et cetera. Don't get lost in the taste and go looking in the fridge for more if you're full.

Okay, it's basically using our senses to navigate the environment. And this is what the whole thing of guarding the senses is about. We so often get swept up with what's going on. You're walking down the street. You're going to meet your friend. And you pass a shop window. They've got those on sale and in the right color. And you go in and you've got enough money on your credit card. I mean, you were just going to see your friend. You saw something. You weren't guarding your senses. And you went in and you ran up your credit card bill again.

or you're walking down the street and you come to a bakery. Ever notice bakeries always have the door open? That's so the smell comes out, grabs you by your nose, drags you in so you get a nice healthy cinnamon roll, right? If you're guarding your senses, you see the sign for the bakery and just before you get to the door you exhale deeply and as you get to the door you inhale deeply You enjoy the pleasant smell and you keep walking. You don't get hooked. You don't grasp at the signs or the secondary characteristics. Right.

So this is why this is important. I have a question for you. How many *suttas* do you think there are where somebody gives a Dharma talk, the Buddha, one of his disciples, And one or more people become fully awakened. Do you have any idea about that? Hundreds, dozens, 13. 10 by the Buddha, 3 by Sariputta, 2 by Sariputta, and 1 by Kamaka.

So what are the most common topics? What are the most common topics in those 13 Dhammattal? Well, four of them are about the aggregates and four of them are about the six senses. This is powerful practice. If you have deep enough practice, deeply understanding the senses can take you all the way to awakening. Sorry.

So what it says on the schedule for me. that I'm supposed to lead a meditation on the six senses at this point. But I'm going to ask Kim if she can do that. It will meditate for about 45 minutes.

Absolutely, no problem. So let's see. We've been sitting for close to an hour. So why don't you take a moment to stand up or shift your body position if you'd like. And... Come back in about two minutes. I'll just leave silent for about two minutes.

Finding a posture for meditation, settling into your meditation spot. And first, just gathering your attention into the sitting. In particular, finding a balanced posture, whether you're sitting or lying down, even standing, Making sure that your weight is well balanced. Sometimes when we're on the computer, there's a way that we lean slightly forward. I do that at least. And so when you transition to meditating in front of the screen, maybe deliberately sitting back a little bit and also allowing the energy to come down, down into the fullness of the body.

Even sensing the weight, the weight sitting against the chair or the cushion or the bench or the couch, wherever you are, sense your body resting on that surface, maybe your legs or feet are against the floor. Feeling the stability of where you're sitting, rising up from the stable base that you're sitting on is the body with the spine in the middle. Even if you're lying down, you can have a sense of the straightness of the spine.

Even giving a brief time of attention to the posture can support the meditation. And gently softening. We have the uprightness and the stability as our grounding. And then we soften around that. It's not a stiff kind of uprightness that we carry. We can soften the eyes in the eye sockets, softening the jaw, softening the shoulders, maybe letting the shoulder blades slide down the back, releasing any tension in the arms or the hands, perhaps noticing the position of the hands such that they're comfortable, maybe a little bit back, so we're not straining the neck with our hands too far forward.

softening down through the chest, the belly, letting the belly be round, and all the way down through the legs and feet. Noticing that what we're tuning into is the body consciousness, the body sensations, bringing our awareness through this sense door, which is a multifaceted one, the body. It has external sensations like the clothing against the skin. It has internal sensations, warmth, brightness, proprioception, where your body parts are, providing a filling out of this sensory experience.

We have also the sound door, the ear door. Sounds are coming in. Normally, we're just immersed in the content, in understanding what we're hearing. See if you can subtly shift your perception to just note, oh, this is sound at the ear door that I'm aware of. That's contact. We have a functioning sense door, and so we can have experience there.

Probably your eyes are closed. or covered, so there's not so much coming in on the external

visual sense. Although you can still sense light through the eyelids, but there can sometimes be internal visual senses. There may not be. There may be smelling and tasting may be fairly subtle. But notice if there's anything at those doors that you can perceive, We are a sensitive being, born into a sensitive body. And it's known with the mind, mind or the sixth sense, very different than the others. Yet, as Lee said, so interesting to see it as just another opportunity for contact.

We have maybe emotions, thoughts, memories, things that come up from... within the mind, a whole other portal through which we receive experience. And in writing now, a deliberate sense of the quality called mindfulness comes from the mind, something that we can practice. It's a particular, in this instance, it's a particular orientation to experience. When we have mindfulness, When we have mindfulness, we have a chance to guard the sense doors. It's the guard.

You can notice what's arising and simply know that as it is, without grasping at the signs or secondary features. Perhaps there's a sound outside. It's fine to know that it's the sound of a car. That's the operation of perception. But we don't need to think about... If it's our neighbor's car, what make of cars that? Oh, it's a singing car. It's one of those electric ones. I should get one of those. This would be moving off into the secondary features.

So I'll invite now a period of some silence to begin practicing with this sense of guarding the sense doors, not allowing the mind to run off. into the signs and secondary features of the inevitable context that we get from without and within. It's natural that the mind will become caught up, will go into thinking or reacting in some way. So when that occurs, it's not a problem. No need to beat ourselves up for that. or any other such reaction, but simply bring the mind back. Start again with the sensory experiences that are present, perhaps noting, ah, there was a fetter that arose. There was the ear and the sound. Somehow the mind entangled those into a reaction, and then inviting again the mindfulness to help guard the senses.

This is a learning process, an observation process. The mind begins to settle down and become more still. It's fine to gently allow that. Take this first meditation as a chance to settle in and quiet down to whatever degree possible.

I'm just going to say a few words to kind of wrap us up. We'll bring us back. Okay. And then I'll invite Lee if he wants to send us off for the evening. So we're launched. We're now on retreat. And just a little bit more about this guarding of the sense doors, the first practice that we've introduced.

I have a friend who teaches in both English and Spanish. And he was doing a retreat last year

about... the sense bases in Spanish. And he told me that the word that's used that we say as guarding in English, in Spanish, it's usually translated with a word that's closer to something like caring or protecting in the sense of protecting. Like, what does it do for your mind to consider that we're caring for the sense doors? when we're guarding them. It's not a guard like a military thing, but more like that we're looking out to these vulnerable areas. I think Lee says we've left our senses hanging in the wind. And so we're looking out for them so that we don't have so much *dukkha*. This is the clarity and the wisdom.

So... Thank you for your care in taking on this practice. And may you sleep well with the appreciation of this beautiful caring that you've taken on through this practice. So please leave.

Thank you, Kim. Thanks for the guidance. Yeah, we leave our senses hanging out there. And all sorts of stuff comes wandering in. And we need to pay attention, be alert. Don't get lost in our senses. That's the key thing. It's probably the number one thing to work on this weekend. It's just be fully present with your sensory input.

And if you get lost, maybe it's helpful to trace back what the five cents input was that triggered you getting lost. Sometimes it's obvious, sometimes it's not obvious. But I found that practice to be quite interesting as well. I'm in the middle of some long distraction about something or it wasn't even while I'm meditating. How did I get here? Oh, yeah, I saw that thing. I heard that other thing, whatever it was. So that's the thing you can look at when you've let your guard down and gotten lost.

So we'll look forward to seeing all of you tomorrow. And may you have a very good night's sleep. You have a meta-filled sleep and see you tomorrow.