

Opening Circle

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So we'll go ahead and get started. Welcome, everyone. It's wonderful to be here again with many of you who have sat these retreats before. And welcome to our Zoom home. This is our Zoom home for the next four or five days. And I want to give a particular welcome to any of you who are new to retreats or new to online retreats.

And I was just so glad to see the rest of you here. Great. So I'm really happy to be teaching with my dear friend, Shelley, again. And, you know, we've taught together a number of times online and on residential retreats, you know, and I just, I love the way how clearly she, in heartfelt, she expresses the *Dharma*. And so it's always a joy to teach with her. And I'm really grateful for the support of our wonderful managers, you know, Fred and John.

Some of you have met them already. And, of course, Lulu, the dog in training to be a manager. That's always fun. And Deanna, who is also here, you know, to help Lulu, to support Lulu. And she's a retreat mentor, so she's mostly in the background helping out as needed. And John's doing double duty, actually triple duty.

He's manager. He's also recording the talks. And third, he's Shelly's husband. So thank you, John. And so, you know, it's, it's, you know, I feel we're just in great hands with them, with, with all our support. And, you know, we appreciate that some of you are in different time zones and you may not be able to do everything live.

But thanks to John, the audio recordings will usually be available maybe an hour after the talk. So those of you in different time zones, you don't need to exhaust yourselves trying to stay up for the last sitting and reflection. You can just listen to it in the morning. I find it, I always find it really heartwarming to reflect on how widespread this online *Dharma* community is, widespread on this planet. Yeah. We not only have people from a number of parts of California, you know, Shelly and John are in Santa Barbara.

I'm in Sunnyvale, California. Fred is in Oregon. And Deanna's in British Columbia in Canada. So we're, you know, all of us are from all over the place. You know, there's someone from Argentina, which is my home country, and Colombia and Germany. And I may have missed some things.

So, you know, I just looked very briefly. And many U.S. states, you know, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. I mean, we're all over the place, and we're all here. So it's wonderful. As many of you know, our retreats are run by the participants.

You know, IRC and IMC are completely donation-based, with no staff, only volunteers, people who are really dedicated to this beautiful practice we do. And, you know, together, all of us, you know, who are sitting in the retreat, the managers, the teachers, retreatants, in this virtual hall, we all have an essential part in creating this supportive container for ourselves and for each other on this retreat. So please know that just by sitting in the hall, by sitting here, you offer support to each other. But also note that since the managers are also sitting in the retreat, they'll only respond to your notes at meal times and before bed. So be patient.

And, you know, don't use the Zoom chat, but use the note process on our website. Okay. And if you do write the managers or the teachers a note, remember that doing so is part of the practice. So be mindful about writing and we appreciate if you're concise. So one of the things that, the wonderful things that has really inspired me in sitting home retreats is the power of imbuing your home space with intensive practice.

I've been really surprised, you know, when I did my first home retreat. You know, I did a month long. And when the retreat was over, every time I walked down the hallway, not a long hallway, I would just drop into a really mindful, connected space. It was really wonderful. So really, you know, notice, you know, that your space is becoming a *Dharma* hall, part of the *Dharma* hall. Mm-hmm.

You know, one of the things that we like to stress on retreat, you know, and I always think it's important to remind everybody, but it's particularly even more true on home retreats, where we sometimes need to deal with unexpected daily life things that happen, you know, is to fold everything that happens as part of the retreat. It belongs. Practice with it. Try not to view it as an interruption, as a problem to be gotten rid of. But notice any reactivity that comes up when things don't happen the way we plan them.

We can make room for it and relax into it as well as we can. And even in the most well-planned retreat, stuff happens. You know, and I've been at retreat centers where, actually, at the last

retreat, the stoves stopped working, you know, the residential retreat, not that long ago. And, you know, and we had to improvise. And so, you know, it was interesting because the participants didn't even notice, you know, the cooks did, and the teachers did, but the participants didn't notice, you know, and so try to fold it in, you know, whatever happens, you know.

And a couple more things I want to mention is, you know, we, it's really helpful at the beginning of the retreat to know where you're going to do your walking practice. The walking practice is an important part of a retreat. And it's, you know, when I've done my own retreats at home, I've done, during the day, I walk outside in my yard. And at night, I walk inside the house, which is actually kind of small. So I end up walking in kind of a circle between the kitchen and the living room, which works fine.

You know, it works fine. But the most common way we do walking practice is to walk back and forth for about 20 feet. So make sure you figure out so you don't have to keep deciding, what am I going to walk, what am I going to do, you know, just know ahead of time. And the other thing I want to say is that if you live with someone who's not on the retreat, please make sure you negotiate with them ahead of time what they can expect, what you might ask of them. You know, silence is very supportive of home retreats.

And some people are able to, in these home retreats, to prioritize silence. Maybe you live alone, you know, but you can leave notes. But that doesn't always work, you know, with some roommates or spouses or family members. So for instance, some of us might choose to have a meal with the family. You can request from them ahead of time that you'd like the conversation to not include politics or anything else too challenging.

You know, to keep it light, to keep it friendly, and that anything significant can wait after, wait after. And always I'd like to remember that it's much better to be kind than to be silent. So if someone comes to the door, you don't have to just stare at them. You can say something brief. So Shelley will say a few words now.

Thanks, Inez. And of course, I want to add my welcome to Inez's welcome and begin by welcoming Inez. Also, I feel very much the same way about her as she expressed about me. I feel like she's been a mentor for me in many ways. And I love teaching with her.

I feel like we're really well matched as teachers. We have a really good rapport and kind of understand each other in a way, I think, that is, that's really sweet. I'm unspotlighting myself so that in the same way as Inez too... And also I want to really also thank the managers and Deanna with Lulu for being really of great service to us during the retreat. And John, my husband, is also, I think he's probably going to be the chief cook around the house here the

next few days.

So I want to thank him for that as well. Well, I'm really happy to be serving you all this retreat. I really look forward to spending these days together practicing and meeting with you in our practice discussions as the days go on as well. So I want to just say a few words about the kind of the flow of the days. And to know, you know, an opportunity for retreat, retreat at home, retreat at a retreat center, is really a time to be able to become very intimate with ourselves, you know, with our inner lives.

I like to say that as something Gil often says, our inner life. We get to know it very well. And so the schedule for the retreat, the container of the retreat, is really designed to support that ability to get to know ourselves really well. So there will be silent sits and sits that are guided instructional sits and practice discussions, *Dharma* talk every day, and an evening reflection at the last formal sit of the day as well. The first silent sitting in the morning, morning Pacific time, will be at 6:30 every day.

So just be ready for that. Look forward to seeing you all at that. Instructional sit will be later in the morning, Pacific time. And the *Dharma* talk will be at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Pacific time. And everything will be, is on your, the schedule on your website page.

And so please, you know, check it, check it often so you, so you get familiar with the times. Excuse me. And we'll have practice discussions on Friday and Saturday. And they'll be in groups, groups of five people, I believe, and these are a time to bring up any, any kind of questions that you have about your practice and for us, for the teachers, to offer any suggestions that seem useful if you're open to suggestions. And group, I love practice group discussions because often one student will ask a question and that actually answers the question that you had, maybe.

And often also it will spark a question in you or spark a reflection about something that's going on for you in your practice. So there's a lot of wisdom that's shared between us in these practice discussion groups. They can be really rich. And each of you, each of the fully registered participants, those of you who aren't auditors, will have two meetings, one with each of us, one on Friday and one on Saturday, as I said. They'll be the same time of day in the morning Pacific time.

And they're really an important part of the retreat. They're not optional. So please do show up for your practice discussions. And it helps us if you can sign in a few minutes early and there'll be a waiting room. And then we can, I'll let, you know, we'll let everybody in at once and we'll, so that we can start on time and start all together.

And we really appreciate it if you can have your camera on during the practice discussions so that we can all see each other and that it feels a lot warmer and more comfortable when everybody can see each other. And make sure your full name is displayed on your little Zoom square. And we'll also have, in addition to the small group practice discussions, we'll have a Q&A each full day of the retreat at 6:15 Pacific time. And these are optional. You don't have to attend, but they're open to everyone, both full retreatants and auditors.

I think that's all I have to say about the schedule. And then I'd like to just make a few comments about protecting the retreat container. There is a container that we create, you know, a kind of a basket that holds us for these coming days. And on IRC online retreats, each of us, just as Inez said, contributes to creating this supportive container for ourselves and for each other. We co-create the retreat together, just as we do when we're together physically in a retreat center.

So it's really helpful to follow some of the same guidelines that you would at a physical retreat center. Please arrive on time for the online sittings and stay till the end of the sitting period. And it's helpful to leave your camera on during the meditation sitting periods, because it really supports a sense of community of all of us practicing together. And we realize that that doesn't always work for everybody, you know, for some people. So, you know, just take that encouragement to have your camera on.

And some people prefer to sit at an angle so that they're not actually facing the camera on their device. And that's fine. Or some people sit at a kind of at a distance so that they're not right next to their device. And that's also fine. Some people will lie down, of course, and that's also fine.

Okay. And there are also times when we do ask that you turn off your camera. If you need to take care of some household duty, if a dog jumps on your lap or something and you need to let him outside, please just turn off your video. You know, there's a little icon on the bottom left of the Zoom screen that looks like a camera, like a video camera, and if you just, you know, click on that like this right now. Boop.

Then that turns off the camera. And please don't eat on camera. You know, if you need to eat something, you can turn off your camera and eat or drink at that time. It's really supportive to have the sense of stillness, so, you know, just as we would in a physical meditation hall. So please be mindful anytime that your camera is on that you're visible to everyone else who's in the meditation hall at that time.

So if you need to move, if you need to move your device around, please turn off the camera. I

think that's all I have for right now, and I'll turn it back to Inez, and we'll have some breakout groups, I think. Right. Thank you, Shelly. Thank you.

And one second. We'll just leave us both spotlit, I think that's the easier way to do this. And so what we're going to do next, thank you, we'll have breakout groups as a time to hear from each other. Each group will have facilitators so we can keep it timely. We'll have about one minute each, so please be brief.

You might first say your name so the people in the group know how to pronounce it, where you're from, and if you'd like any pronouns. And then say a little something, a little something you want to share about yourself, about your life, or about your intention for this retreat, or anything else you'd like to share. It doesn't have to be deep. It's just a way to connect with each other, to hear each other. So, so if the managers are ready, we can go ahead and get started.

Send us to our rooms. And so I was just saying that it was wonderful to meet with you. I wish we'd been with everybody, but that we will see the rest of you at some point. I want to just make a few comments regarding technology, you know, and in our group, you know, Becca mentioned more than once. And, you know, really keep in mind that to get the most value from a retreat, it's really worthwhile to commit to not use our devices unnecessarily, which is more of a challenge in an online retreat because we're using our devices to be here.

You know, but when we do need to use them, to do it with respect, you know, it's a wonderful tool if we respect it and value it and use it mindfully. And one of the things that, for anybody who finds it really challenging to not be seduced by those little text messages that show up or anything else from the devices, you know, one of the things I did at one point in my practice is I would just bow to my computer or my device every time I used it. And that would just kind of slow me down from the compulsivity that can come with it. So take a moment and enter the body, you know, really respect this wonderful tool, if that's something that you resonate with. And just remember that with technology, as I think anyone who's used devices probably knows quite well, things occasionally don't work the way we want them to.

And if something doesn't work properly, try to be at ease with it, to fold it into the practice, fold it into the retreat. And, you know, and if it's something we can help with, we'll see if we can help. If it's something that just happened at your end, you know, just be at ease with it, take care of it the way you know to take care of it. And so I'll, and that's, that's all I had for today, for this opening circle. And I'm going to pass it on to the managers.

They have a few brief announcements. The first sit's at 6:30. So this is the other, this is the

way the other, the longer retreats are. Yeah. So, okay.

Great. And, and I think Shelly had a couple of more things to say. Yeah, just a, yeah. First, to ask if there are any questions, especially any kind of logistical questions, I'm going to put us in the gallery mode so I can see if anybody has their hand up. Looks like you're all pretty clear at this point.

That's great. So the formal opening of the retreat will be at 6:30 p.m. Pacific time, which is an hour and 45 minutes or so from now. And that'll be in this same, at the same link in our Zoom meditation hall. And we'll introduce the theme of the retreat at that time.

And we'll take the refuges and the precepts. And we'll have a brief meditation as well. So please be on time for that. It's really, it's really a useful time to be there. And I think that's about all I have.

I think, yeah, I think that's it. Just look forward to seeing you in a little while. Now we have time to maybe have a meal if it's the right time of day for you. And maybe it's time to connect with the other people you live with to make arrangements for how you're going to communicate before we actually move into the formal silence this evening. So... I look forward to seeing you all a bit later, and in the meantime, be well.