

Daylong Sit 1

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Well, hello, everyone. I am delighted that you're all here. And just a little earlier this morning, I went through the list of all the people who had signed up for this. And just that made me very happy. I recognized many names, people I know. And there were names that I didn't know. And that also made me very happy, that there's someone maybe new here, that in this kind of unusual way that I get to know you or get to share the practice together is very special.

And I'm also very happy that we have two wonderful managers, people who have been long-time practitioners at IRC and IMC and have been wonderful volunteers. They are kind of part of the wonderful support that makes all of what we do at IRC possible, volunteers like Elena and Svetta. So in a couple of minutes, I'm going to turn it over to them to make some announcements, just maybe filling time a little bit because people are still coming in.

It's been one of the inspirations that's happened in the last five, six years to be able to do these Zoom retreats. And there was a time, probably 10 years ago, that if someone had said, let's do Zoom retreats or daylongs and all that, I probably would have said, no, it can't be done. It's too difficult or something, or does not relate, *dharmic* or something. I probably, you know, may be a bit conservative, or who knows what was going on with me. And now, with the last five, six years, I have discovered how remarkably well these online retreats work for people.

Now I believe that they are the missing link in our whole practice system. We had people practicing at home before, and we had the retreat center. But there's something about being on retreat at home that gives people a different orientation about the practice, a different reference point for it, and a different way to kind of include the at-home life or the daily life somehow into this kind of retreat mode. And so it's not so separated, retreats and daily life,

retreats and home. And I've been very impressed by how well, how thoroughly, people practice on these, through Zoom, on these kinds of online retreats.

Sometimes we do them, as some of you know, we call it hybrid retreats, where there's an in-person retreat at IRC at the same time as people are joining, practicing along online. And I can't, I haven't done a careful statistical analysis, tested it. But repeatedly, I get the sense that people online, you know, there are a good number of the people online who actually listen better to the teachings than the people in person. And also, some of the people online seem to be practicing more sincerely and dedicatedly than even people in person. So, I mean, don't tell that to the people who are doing in person. But it's a short way of saying all this: I'm quite inspired by these kinds of retreats and by all of you that come and participate.

And I hope that being together, I hope that my support for you and teaching respects well enough your intention to be here. You're taking time to do this. I don't take it as a small thing. I see it as a very big thing, a very invaluable thing, that you're motivated to do this. And I'll do my best to support you here in this way. So thank you for being here.

So Elena and Svetta.

Good morning, everybody. Hello. Lovely to see you. My name is Svetta, and I'm co-managing here today with Elena. And we're going to start with making three announcements.

Under the Join Meditation Hall link at the upper right of the retreat web page, you'll see a Zoom Info and Phone Instructions link. You can copy those instructions if you want, and then you can phone into the meeting if you have internet problems during the day.

Hello, everyone. I am co-manager with Svetta. My name's Alina, and the second announcement that we have is to change your time zone that's displayed on the IRO website. Click on your name in the upper right-hand corner of the web page, then click Settings. The time zone setting will be at the top. Adjust to whatever time zone you would like, and then scroll to the bottom and click on Save.

And one more announcement. Please do not send chats to Gil because he'll be occupied and won't be able to respond. But you will be able to send Zoom chats to ask the managers, me and Elena. And if something is interfering with your ability to participate in the retreat, and of course you can bring your *dharma* and practice questions to the Q&A. This is what we had to say, Gil. I'm giving it over to you. And you are muted.

So thank you very, very much. And so you've seen the schedule, I trust. But we'll have two walking periods in the morning and the afternoon. And one of those each period, the second one, will be a time that you can stay a little bit, not the whole time, but maybe we'll take 15

minutes or something, if there's something you'd like to ask and for discussion. And I'll try to have the discussion be here, my Q&A, be somehow calm and peaceful so that it's supportive of the retreat as a whole. And hopefully you don't bring up something that's way out of the retreat, what we're doing here. But if it's important enough, of course. But the idea is to kind of stay connected to the retreat.

So in coming here today, for a variety of reasons, what's been on my heart is one of the primary, or maybe the central organizing principle for, or intention that I kind of dedicated myself to in Buddhist practice. And that was that I felt, at some point living in a Buddhist monastery, that I wanted to live my life in response to the suffering of the world. And I wanted to meet it or address it in some way. And then nothing else kind of made sense for me for what I wanted to do with my life. And it wasn't a logical decision or intention. It just seemed to arise organically out of the practice that I was doing, that that was what was most alive in me. Nothing else seemed to be as alive or as motivating for what to dedicate my life to.

So I've been living this way now for, you know, I guess it's been some 45 years after that decision that arose. And so I come here and that intention, that wish, is still there and quite central for me. And I'll offer the teachings and instructions that I have. I'll sit and practice with you with the idea that, in one way or the other, that's where we're trying to meet in each of us, how we suffer and how we can end that suffering, how we can go beyond it or become bigger than it so that we're not defined by it or lost in it.

And the second thing on my mind these days, partly because I've been teaching it recently, is how the mindfulness practice of the Buddha, the way he taught it, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, has a pivotal orientation around feelings, and allowing us to feel deeply and to feel something that some people might call spiritual. I don't know if I would call it that, kind of profound, that is not part of our ordinary sense world, the world that we walk around in and that, you know, looking for physical comfort or concern with discomfort, physical pain or pleasure, but some kind of deeper pleasure, deeper feelings. So I want to somehow touch on that as we go through the day, the importance of feeling.

And so we begin where the Buddha began when he taught mindfulness, is that he evoked our ability, our cognitive ability, to know. Knowing what is happening in the present moment is central to this whole enterprise of practice. And so we have an ability to know in a simple way, and we can know in a complicated way. Complicated would be to know something in relationship to its whole history, your history, your preferences, your futures, your analysis of, you know, how to fix something or engineer yourself with it, or, you know, there's so many complications we can make.

But the knowing that the Buddha emphasized was very simple. And it had nothing to do with the past, nothing to do with the future. But it had to do with just the simplest way in which you can know your experience in the present. Where maybe what you know is less important than how knowing connects you to the present moment. That knowing can be a felt sense, or a real sense that here I am, I'm now here with this.

So if I'm sitting, and I know my posture, you know, that I'm sitting in. So I can feel and know that I'm sitting in a meditation posture. But something as simple as knowing that I'm here in this body, in this posture, is, you know, it doesn't seem so special. But it's certainly special in relationship to all the other things the mind can be doing, many of the other things the mind can be doing. And it's keeping us here in the present moment, here.

So knowing, this very simple knowing, that we start appreciating how knowing is keeping us in the present, rather than pulling us into the kinds of knowing and thinking that often leads to distress. The second thing he emphasized was the verb feeling, to sense. We have a capacity to sense through the sense doors. That's called, in our body, the tactile sensations in the body, the sensations of sight, sensations of hearing sound, and so forth.

And so when he first started talking about, gave instruction for mindfulness practice, he talked about being with your breathing and knowing that you're breathing. And then as you're breathing, sensing and feeling the whole body. And then the third step that he gave is relax. Relax is the modern English, my simple version of what he said. He used a little bit more sophisticated word, which was the nice way of saying in English is calm, where calm is a verb. Translators want to translate it as tranquilize, tranquilizing the body. But, you know, I don't know how well that works for us to use that word. So for the beginning practice, as we get started, I think relaxing works really well.

So I'll guide you a little bit through that, and then we'll sit until, or a little bit before the hour, on the hour. So, about 40 minutes. So, to assume a meditation posture and to gently move your body around, kind of wiggle, sway, lean forward and back, maybe circle your head. And partly just to get into your body, and partly to be able to adjust the body to have a posture that allows you to feel a little bit alert and in which you can relax deeply.

It turns out that the deepest relaxation of the body does not come from being a couch potato, but it comes from actually sitting either upright or, if you have to lay down, to lay down more of what's in yoga is called the corpse pose. Of course, there are other postures you can do it in. But there are many reasons we have different postures, but to choose the posture that seems to work best for you, to have a combination of alertness and relaxation.

Gently close your eyes. And as a way of welcoming yourself into the present moment, into your body, breathe a few fuller breaths, imagining that the sensations of expanding as you breathe in, releasing and contracting as you exhale. Or a gentle invitation, come, come here, feel here, relax here.

And letting your breathing return to normal. And as you inhale, feel the muscles of your face. Allow them to relax, as if the muscles can fall away from the skull. Breathing into your shoulders, and softening on the exhale, softening the shoulders. Breathing into the belly as you inhale, and as you exhale, relaxing the belly.

As you breathe in, let there be a knowing of the state and quality of your mind, your thinking mind. Breathing in and now feeling, sensing, the sensations of your thinking mind, if there's any tension or pressure, contraction. And as you exhale, softening the thinking mind to whatever degree possible, releasing any pressure found in the thinking mind.

Then lowering yourself, centering yourself in the body breathing, to wherever the sensations of breathing is easiest or most compelling to stay with. Taking a few moments to let the knowing ability of the mind recognize that you're breathing, to recognize some of the details of that experience of breathing, where how knowing keeps you in the present is maybe more important than what you know.

And then with the knowing mind, see if you can also know very simply the sensations of breathing, maybe just one or two of them. And emphasize the sensing of the breath, staying with the direct experience in the body, as if the different sensations of breathing also is inviting you to stay in the present, to accompany it with a knowing, not so important right now, just a sense without thinking too much.

Consider which keeps you in the present more, the knowing of breathing or the sensing of it, or some combination of both. And whichever helps you stay present, knowing, sensing, or both, stay with that. Stay close. When it's helpful, relaxing the thinking mind so your thoughts don't take you away so much.

So you're breathing mindfully. If you become aware of tension in your body, as you exhale, allow that tension to soften, as if it can spread outwards and begin dissolving, so the tension is replaced by calm, a calmness of body. After sitting here these minutes, is there a way that you can dip deeper into your body, sensing what's happening in your body, sensing what might be calm in your body? Breathe with that calm, through it, let-

ting there be a calming wave of calming through your body.

So the two primary modes of attention, or means of mindfulness, on one hand there's knowing, and on the other there's sensing, feeling with the body. And different people naturally will have one or the other as what's easiest for them. Some people find it easiest to sense, and maybe they go through life sensing their body a lot. And that's their medium for connecting and knowing what's happening, first and foremost. And some people, it's through knowing, recognition. And they're a little more cognitive.

For some people, the knowing faculty of attention, when it's emphasized, helps the mind quiet down. For other people, it's so close to thinking that it spins it out more. Some people, staying close to sensing the body is what quiets their thinking mind down. And for other people, it takes their mind kind of, attention off the thinking mind, and so it has a holiday to do whatever it wants, and they get pulled off into it.

And some people find the wonderful balance of the two, where there's a kind of one whole cycle of breath. There's a relaxed, gentle knowing, sensing, knowing again, sensing. And they work together to keep us right there with the experience in a very simple way. And of course, the mind wanders off in thought. We spend minutes at a time thinking about something.

And the art of this is to, when you notice that's happening, to emphasize that right there, there's a very simple knowing. Right there, there's opportunity to sense and feel. What's it like to be lost in thought? To not waste time, if you can, being critical, being upset, thinking something is wrong. But rather it's just now's a time to bring knowing and sensing to this experience briefly, for a few moments maybe, and then to invite breathing back in, to start again with the breathing in a very simple, matter-of-fact way. Kind of like, of course the mind wanders off. It's not a crime. It's fine. But we want to come back and slowly allow the thinking mind to relax.

Some of the reasons why we get lost in thought a lot is because there's kind of an energy or an activation or a pressure in the thinking mind to produce more thoughts. As we relax in meditation, that activation and pressure is no longer there. And so a thinking mind can slowly begin to quiet. And you can support that process by, as you exhale perhaps, to relax the thinking mind.

So these two modes, knowing and sensing. And if you've never heard of this, which of these do you think is your specialty? Which one are you more naturally disposed to? And maybe that's the one that you want to emphasize when you do mindfulness practice. Or you might be so disposed to that, that's so easy, that it actually is a trap to do that. It keeps you in

the usual mode too much. And sometimes what's helpful is to do the mode that is not your specialty, not what you do naturally. And that's what, that little bit more intentionality, a little bit not going along with things as usual, might actually help keep you in the present moment.

So this is the area we're navigating a little bit to help us be present. I hope is you don't think of this as an engineering job or don't make it as a technique, try too hard. But think of it more as you're kind of working with, like if you're, I don't know, if you're canoeing down a gentle river and you have to kind of a little bit navigate around the eddies and stay in the current. It's kind of like a natural, easy thing to do, to move back and forth and come in and out.

So in the same way, it's kind of like you're floating in this river of experience. And you just kind of have to figure out how to put the paddle in, what to focus on, and where to be in a relaxed way that helps you stay present, stay here. And finally, one of my metaphors that I use for what mindfulness is doing is it's giving breathing room for our experience. It's just letting us know and see and feel what's here. And with that breathing room, with more space for everything, because we're just allowing it to be very simple in the present, something very profound within us can begin relaxing.

That can't relax if we're caught in things or thinking about things a lot, and having attitudes of for and against what's going on, or trying to get rid of something. It's just kind of knowing and sensing. This is how it is now, like breathing room, so that it can kind of, it can breathe, everything can breathe and relax. So I hope all that, all those words, are useful for you to kind of get tuned in, kind of interested in your direct experience.

So we now have 30, 29 minutes for walking meditation. Some of you maybe are new to walking meditation. Some of you have had a lot of experience. For those of you who have done this before, maybe you don't need to hear what I'm about to say, or maybe it's useful. You can do it your own way.

For those of you who are new or newish to this, given what we're doing here, in the middle of your life on a Saturday, to be practicing this way, you might want to spend this next walking period taking care of the simple things you need to do, drink, go to the bathroom, whatever you do, but do it in a contemplative mode. Don't rush anywhere right now. Imagine that everything is part of the retreat, and just part of the retreat is walking to the bathroom, walking to the kitchen.

And rather than doing real formal walking period, you might just find a nice place to stroll, to walk. Maybe if you have an outdoors to go to, or a hallway, or some big enough space, walk in

a circle, walk back and forth. And continue with this exploration of knowing and sensing, now as you're walking. But think of it as a kind of contemplative time. So you don't have to do walking like a technique, but you're doing walking as kind of a nice, relaxed, quiet time just to start being tuned in and attuned to yourself and discovering how the sensing and knowing works as you walk. So enjoy your contemplative walking time. Thank you.