

A General Talk
Given in Gainesville, FL
January 20, 2005

[It's OK to be HAPPY]

How many people here have practiced meditation?

Almost everyone. Ah. Good.

My name is Vimalaramsi, Bhante Vimalaramsi and I've been teaching meditation for about 20 years, in Asia and pretty much all over the world. I teach meditation in a little bit different way than most other people teach. I practiced in Burma for about three years, very intensive meditation, 16-18 hours a day. For one stretch, I practiced for about 22 hrs a day. But that, thankfully, was for only about three months. I've practiced with Sayadaw U Pandita, who was the head monk at the Mahasi Center in Burma. I practiced with other very famous teachers at the Mahasi Center and I practiced the Vipassana Meditation for about 20 years. I went through all of the things that they say you are supposed to go through and I wasn't satisfied with that meditation.

So, when I got done with the meditation of Vipassana, I came back and I started getting very interested in finding out if what I was actually practicing was taught by the Buddha or not. So I went to the original teachings which, this [holding up a book] is called the Middle Length Sayings, and this is part of the suttas that give a lot of instruction in meditation. And as I started studying what the Buddha was talking about with meditation, I started realizing that the instructions that the suttas give is different from the instructions that I was given and that's why I wasn't really too satisfied with that practice.

Please don't sit with your legs crossed. [you hear this request because it is considered rude to sit with your legs crossed towards an elder teacher or a Buddha image and also because it has been tested

and found that people only take in about 40% of what they hear if they cross their arms or legs.]

Um, So I began to practice just the way it says in the suttas to practice. Now I was doing two different meditations. I was practicing Mindfulness of Breathing, which is real popular and I was also practicing Loving Kindness Meditation at different times. I did an 8 month Loving Kindness Meditation retreat. I like to teach Loving Kindness Meditation to most people. But it's not suitable [meditation form] for everyone. It depends on your temperament and that sort of thing. Mindfulness of Breathing is suitable for everyone.

What I noticed when I was practicing the Mindfulness of Breathing in Burma at the Mahasi Center and all of this technique was that when people were practicing the meditation, they had a tendency to get very, very serious and very, very heavy in mind. When I started practicing the way that the suttas talk about, I started noticing that I had a lot of Joy coming up. When I was practicing at the Mahasi Center and I would get to a place where there was some joy coming up, I would go to the interview with the teacher and I would say, "I really feel a lot of joy now." And the first thing they always said to me was: "DON'T GET ATTACHED!" and geeze! I didn't want to be attached!

[Laughter] So, I had this happy feeling, I started pushing it down, getting rid of it! I don't want to be attached to anything!

TT: 06:00

As I started practicing the way that the suttas talk about, I started realizing that one of the enlightenment factors is JOY! So, I started playing with that when I was practicing Loving Kindness Meditation. I started putting a smile on my lips, then a smile in my heart, and joy would come up and my mind was very, very ALERT when I had joy in my mind. My mind was very sharp, very agile. I could see tiny little movements of mind that I had never seen before.

So I started realizing that, it's rather important to allow the joy to come up whenever it wants to come up. And then as I kept reading, I started running across things like the Buddha said like, "We are the happy ones!" I, uh, I practiced twenty years of not being happy, being serious and then I found out it's OK to be happy and that's an essential part of the practice. When you have a happy mind, your mind is very uplifted, your thoughts are very nice and pleasant, and when something happens and it makes your mind start to get serious you can notice it very quickly, you notice when your mind starts to get heavy so you can start letting that go and get back into your happiness and your joy again.

[Introducing the Hindrances] [WAR] and other things:

Now one of the things that is a real important aspect of the meditation, that almost everyone that I know that practices meditation hates when it happens. And it's called HINDRANCES. Do you know those? There's five of them basically. There's LUST or GREED, the "I want it mind." There's AVERSION or HATRED, the "I don't want it mind." There's SLEEPINESS there's DULLNESS. There's RESTLESSNESS and ANXIETY. And there's DOUBT. Now, the doubt is whether you are doing this correctly or not; not you can't make up your mind which dessert you want! It's not that kind of doubt.

Now when these Hindrances arise, they take your mind completely away from what you are doing and you get caught by them. Now an interesting thing with the hindrance is that they don't come up one at a time, they like to kind of gang up on you. So if you have, let's say you are walking down the street, and someone walks up to you, and they say something not nice and your mind grabs onto that and there's AVERSION in your mind. But there's also makes your mind RESTLESS and you have anxiety in your mind at that time.

TT: 09:56

These hindrances can arise for anyone and they do arise for everyone. They can arise at any time when the condition is right for that to arise, and they will completely grab your mind and you will be

caught by that and one of the ways that you notice that hindrances arise is, you have repeat thoughts. It's like it was on a tape deck.

You know, somebody comes up to you and they say something that's not very nice and you say something not very nice back to them and all of a sudden, you're having this WAR, back and forth. And then they go away. Then what do you think about? Ahhh. What I said and what they said and what I should have said and I'm right and they're wrong. That sound about right?

And then just like it was on the tape deck, it plays over again. And then a little while later, it plays over again. And then you kind of distract for awhile and then you relax for a little while and then all of a sudden, there it is again! OK. That means there is an attachment and that is the source of suffering. This is what the Buddha called, The First Noble Truth. There is SUFFERING.

The second Noble Truth is, the Cause of Suffering is Craving. Now, one of the things that I noticed when I was practicing for so long and so intensively with the Mahasi Sayadaw Method, was that whenever a hindrance arose, my mind would get tight. And I just didn't much pay attention to it, I was following the instructions that they told me how to handle a hindrance and that is: 'Watch it until it goes away.' But, when I got back to the instructions in the suttas themselves, the Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta, the instructions for the meditation is four sentences:

You understand when you take a long breath, you understand when your breath is long on the in-breath and you understand when it is long on the out-breath. You understand when you have a short breath on the in-breath or on the out-breath.

But the key words here are "you understand". Now those instructions that I just gave you, did it say anything about your nose, your upper lip, your abdomen? No, because that's not in the instructions.

The instructions that are given by most people, they tell you to put your attention at your nostril tip or on your upper lip or watch the rise and fall of your abdomen. These instructions come from

commentaries and they don't necessarily agree with the suttas. So the keyword is "you understand" when you're breathing a long breath, you understand when you are breathing a short breath, you understand when your breath is fine, you understand when your breath is coarse, you understand when your breath is fast, you understand when it's slow. You know what your breath is doing. That's what it means.

The next part of the instructions, it says,

"He trains thus. He tranquilizes his bodily formation on the in-breath and he tranquilizes his bodily formation on the out-breath."

Now what does that mean? If there's any tightness anywhere in your body, you relax. You tranquilize it. Sometimes you will be sitting and all of a sudden you will notice that your hand is real tight. You let it go. You relax. Sometimes you can be sitting and one of your shoulders will raise up. And you notice that, and you relax, and you let it go.

TT: 15:01

Now the next part of the instruction is very, very important. And this is the part that is NEVER talked about! It says:

"He trains thus. He tranquilizes his bodily formation on the in-breath and tranquilizes his bodily formation on the out-breath."

So, on the in-breath, you relax, on the out-breath, you relax.

Now, as I was doing this, I noticed that there was some tightness in my head, wrapped around my brain. There's a tightness there. And as I noticed that, I started relaxing it, letting it go. And then I started noticing, every time a feeling arises in the body, every time a thought arises in the mind, there's this little tightness in your head. So relax it. Now I was just talking about the Second Noble Truth. The Second Noble Truth is the CAUSE of Suffering is Craving.

What I discovered was that Craving manifests as this tightness! And what I saw as I did meditation retreats with this was that this is part of a very quick thing that happens and it is part of the "I like it" "I don't like it" thing that tightens your mind. And it tightens your body. But when you're practicing the Mindfulness of Breathing on the in-breath, you tranquilize your bodily formation.

One thing that I found out since coming back to America, I've been back about five years, is that everybody in America thinks that their body is from here down [pointing from the chin down to the toes!] . And their mind is from here up! When, in fact, your body is from here down [from top of head down to toes!] .

SO, you relax that tightness in your head, in your mind. As you let go of that, you feel your mind kind of open up, and expand a little bit, and then it becomes calm. There's no thought at that moment. Then you bring your attention back to breathing, on the in-breath, relax that again. On the out-breath, relax again. There's a distraction, let it be, relax, come back to the breath, relax.

So, you are using the breath as the reminder to relax both your mind and your body. This is revolutionary! It really is. And this is the main difference between what the Buddha taught and what everybody else taught. Everybody else, when they were practicing meditation, their mind would be on their object of meditation and it would get distracted. That's just one of the things that happens, You have a thought come up, a memory, whatever, a sensation in your body. And you let go of that, and immediately, come back to your object of meditation: the Breath. And you focus just on that one point.

But the way the Buddha taught, was, your mind gets distracted, you let it go and notice that tightness, that is craving, and relax and let that Craving go. Now you don't have any thoughts in your mind. Your mind is very clear, your mind is very bright, your mind is very alert. And you bring that mind back to the breath, and then you do it some more. You keep on relaxing, relaxing, continually, until your mind gets distracted again.

TT:19:50

Almost everyone that talks about meditation, they say that, uh, SAMATHA [serenity] that's a Pali word that means Tranquility in Pali, but it's been mistranslated for years and years and people call that absorption; being absorbed into your object of meditation. In other words, your mind will grab on that and not let it go, and your mind sticks to it. But actually the word 'Samatha' means Tranquility, Serenity, Calmness, Collectedness. And when you do this long enough, you get into a state that is called 'jhana'.

Now jhana is always described as having an absorption, your mind stays on your object of meditation, no matter what happens, it doesn't move, just stays there. And it suppresses distractions from arising. And these distractions are called HINDRANCES. But that's not the way the Buddha taught. The way the Buddha taught, was, every time your mind gets distracted, you let it go, you relax, and you come back. Eventually, the distraction will become weaker and weaker until finally, it goes away. It doesn't arise any more. And when that happens, there's a real strong feeling of RELIEF. And right after that feeling of relief, Joy comes up, all by itself! Really happy feeling, because you have let go of an attachment. And I'll explain what an attachment is in a little while.

Right after Joy arises, it will be there for a little while and then it will fade away. When the joy fades away, then you feel completely comfortable, in your mind, in your body. And your mind stays on your object of meditation without any effort at all. You can still hear things. If someone comes up and they touch you, you would feel it. That doesn't happen when you have absorption because your mind is absorbed so much on just that one sensation, that everything else is kind of pushed down. Now what I just described for you is called the first jhana.

So, when you're practicing meditation, I've been to a lot of different kinds of meditation teachers who have talked about this and they uh, they talk about their minds being very focused and very centered and

very concentrated. Now the word concentration is kind of an interesting word, especially in this culture because it doesn't mean the same as concentrated in Asia. You know when you're reading a book and you're really into it and someone comes up and talks to you and you didn't hear them? Your mind is very concentrated. You're really focusing. And to the exclusion of everything else around you. And that's what most people call jhana.

But, when you start comparing what the Buddha was talking about, you start seeing that the jhana he was talking about was a little bit different. It doesn't have that deep one-pointed mind that suppresses things. Your mind is very alert. Your mind is very aware. But it's calm. It's still. There's not a lot of moving.

TT: 25:00

A lot of times when people have meditation instructions given to them they say, "Well, just empty your mind." Does that sound familiar? How in the world are you supposed to do that? Never had any instructions that told me how. The thing is, your wandering mind is not your enemy. You've been working all day. You had a lot of things going on. You sit down to meditate. What's your mind going to do? It's going to keep doing what it's been doing all day. It's going to be running over here, thinking about this, thinking about that, and that's OK. It's to be expected. Don't dislike that.

As soon as you recognize that your mind is not on the breath, and relaxing, then simply let go of that thought. Don't continue thinking it. It's not an important thing. And then, you'll notice there's some tension and tightness. Relax, and gently, come back to the breath, and relax again. You might only get part of one relax in before your mind jumps away again. That's fine. Every time you let go of a distraction and relax and come back to the breath, and you relax, you're developing your awareness. When you first start meditating, your mind is going to flip-flop all over the place. That's not a problem. That's not something to fight with. That's not something to try to stop from happening. It's only to be recognized as, "Ah! Got caught by that one! That was away two or three minutes thinking a

lot!" OK. Fine. As soon as you recognize it, then just let it go. Don't continue thinking it. Relax, because that tension is there, come back to the breath. As you do that more and more, your mind will stop going away for such long periods of time, and it will start staying on the breath sometimes two or three breaths before it runs away again.

And that's fine.

As you become more familiar with being able to recognize that distraction, hindrance, and let it go, and relax, and come back, you are learning how your mind is moving. So your mind is on your breath, relaxing, and all of a sudden, you're thinking about what happened this morning. How did it do that? How did your mind go from being here and being very calm and balanced and relaxed to being over there? It is a Process that you will be able to recognize as you go deeper into your meditation. The wandering mind is what the Buddha called Restlessness. And sometimes a wandering mind is great fun. Oh, you can plan. Oh boy. You can plan really well. And it's enjoyable. That is Restlessness with the "I like it" mind. The GREEDY MIND. See, there's two hindrances right there. As you continue to let it go and relax, then you'll see how your mind jumps from one thing to another. And as you recognize that, your mind won't be distracted for so long, and when you come back to the breath, it will stay there for longer; natural process.

TT: 29:49

As you do this over a period of time and it doesn't take all that long, well, let's do it another way. Every time your mind wanders away, that hindrance is there. If you don't like those thoughts, if you try to push those thoughts away, if you try to stop those thoughts from coming up, you're fighting with it. You get real serious with it and you are identifying with those thoughts or with those feelings. You're taking them very personally. Any time you see that your mind is getting serious, there's an attachment. And that attachment, has Craving in it. And that Craving is the cause of Suffering. Now, every time you let it go and you relax, you let go of that Craving, and you

come back to your meditation object, the breath, and relaxing; every time you do that, that is called the CESSATION of Suffering. That's the Third Noble Truth. This is the practical Noble Truth.

As you continue doing that more and more, you're letting go, you're not resisting the thoughts, you're just saying: "You're there." OK fine, relax, and let it be there. You just don't pay attention to it anymore. And you gently come back to your breath, and you relax. Now because you don't have any resistance to it, you're not trying to control it, you're not trying to make it be something other than what it is, it starts to lose energy, and it gets a little bit weaker and a little bit weaker as you recognize that your mind is going to it. And then finally one time you let it be, and it just says: "I give up!" Whoosh! That's enough! And that's when you have the relief because you've let go of the identification with those thoughts and feelings.

Now, when the Buddha was talking about the Three Characteristics of All Existence, he said that everything is impermanent. Everything is changing, continually changing. Everything is a form of unsatisfactoriness because we don't want things to change, we want it to be the same. We want it to be still. We want things to be the way we want them to be. But it's never like that and that's unsatisfactory. And the last characteristic is that every thought, every feeling, every emotion, every sensation that arises in your body is impersonal.

Now a lot of you have done meditation. When you're sitting in meditation and you get an itch, what do you do first? First thing, your mind goes to it, grabs on to it, and your mind says: " God I hate that! I wish it would stop! I wish it would go away! I wish it would stop bothering my meditation!" But actually, that is your best friend at that time because that's part of the hindrance. "I don't like that feeling! I want that feeling to be different than it is!"

Now, being impersonal means, did you sit while you're in meditation and say, "Well, I haven't had a miserable itch for awhile. I guess it's time for it to come up! Don't you think?" No. It came up because conditions are right for it to arise. You didn't ask it to be there. It came up by itself.

What you do with what arises in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future!

TT: 34:56

This is the same with all emotions. This is the same with all sensations. It's the same with thoughts. If in the present moment, you don't like what is happening, then your mind grabs onto that and says, "NO! I want it to stop!" and that emotion, that sensation, that thought gets bigger and more intense. And, you can look forward to having it come up more and more.

Now, in Buddhism, there are some Pali words that are becoming more and more known. One of the words that's known is "Dhamma". Um, people that practice Mahayana Buddhism, they call it Dharma. That's Sanskrit. Doesn't sound as nice on the ear. I like Dhamma better. Dhamma means the Truth. It means, this is the way things are. It also means the teaching of the Buddha and some other definitions, but, for our purposes right now, we'll just say that it means the truth.

When an itch arises, when a feeling arises in your body, when a thought arises, the truth is, it's there! Profound, isn't it? [laughter] It's there! And it's OK for it to be there. It has to be OK, because the truth is, it's there! Now if you fight with the truth, if you try to control the truth, if you try to make the truth BE the way YOU want it to be, you can look forward to a lot of suffering. OR, you can allow the truth to be there, relax, and come back to your object of meditation. Now the thing with an itch or a pain that arises in your body, or uh, thoughts that keep recurring, the thing is they're not going to go away right away!

So, your mind is going to bounce back to it! Now HOW did your mind do that? What happened first? What happened after that? What happened after that? What happened after that?

There's a word that is very much used in the Buddhist circles and that word is mindfulness. And, when, the word mindfulness is kind of

like the word God. You hear it, you know it, everybody is supposed to know what it means but nobody really gives you a good definition. Mindfulness means, your observation of how your mind moves. So that's what I've been talking about. When your mind is on your object of meditation and a pain arises in your knee, a pain arises in your back. An itch arises, the feeling like you want to cough, whatever. When your mind gets pulled to that, it didn't just all of second just jump there. There are some things that arose and passed away very quickly and then your mind became completely distracted. As you become more familiar with HOW your mind moves, your observation power becomes stronger, and you will be able to recognize it more quickly. I can tell you exactly HOW all of those things arise. It's real interesting stuff. First there's contact. Then a feeling arises. Now feeling, is either pleasant or unpleasant or neutral. Right on the heels of that feeling arising, there is craving and it always manifests as a tightness in your mind and your body. And sometimes it's very subtle. Sometimes it's very gross. Right on the heels of that, are the thoughts about the feeling; why you like it and why you don't like it. And that's called clinging.

TT: 40:40

By the time you get to clinging you're pretty much caught. So, how do you handle this?

First, you notice those thoughts, and you let the thoughts go! And relax. You feel your mind kind of expand and take a little step down. Next, you'll notice that there is a tight mental fist wrapped around that feeling. That is aversion. I don't like that feeling there. I don't like it distracting me. I don't want it there. But the truth is, when the feeling arises, it's there. So, you allow the feeling to be there. "You want to be there, fine you can be there!" It's only this cough. It's only this want to sneeze. It's only this itch. It's only this pain. No big deal. It's fine for it to be there. It has to be, because, that's the truth. And you can't fight with the truth. You can't control the truth. All you can do is observe the truth. Allow the truth to be there by itself. Now you relax again. You feel that expansion, and, calmness. And you bring your mind back to the breath, and you relax again. And

your mind gets pulled back to it. And you notice: "Well, there's all these thoughts about it again."

So you let the thoughts be and you relax, and then you notice that tight mental fist wrapped around that, and you let that be, and you relax. And then you bring that relaxed mind back to your meditation, to the breath; on the in-breath, relax, on the out- Oops! There goes again!

Sound familiar?

Hahahahahaha!

See, it doesn't matter how many times your mind gets distracted by it. It doesn't matter at all. What matters is what you do with it when you notice you have become distracted. What arises in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future! If you fight with the present moment, you try to say: "I hate this feeling! I want it to stop! And Ooooooh!" and then come back to your object of meditation, you can look forward to a lot of suffering, and it gets bigger and more intense. Until it turns into an emergency and then you have to do something like scratch or rub or stretch or whatever. But at that time, you are not meditating, you are being involved with a hindrance, the dislike of that sensation!

But as you practice over a period of time, it becomes easier to recognize this as a process and as you let it go, and you relax, and you come back, and you bounce back and forth, a few times, a few hundred times? Ah, sometimes a few thousand times? Every time you let it go and you relax and you come back, your observation of how this process works becomes sharper.

Now, one of the favorite words in all of Buddhism is being attached. And it's one of the more misunderstood words. Somebody comes up to me and they say, "Do you like Ice Cream?"

And I say, "Yeah! I love Ice Cream!"

TT: 45:00

“OH! YOU’RE ATTACHED!”

You ever hear that one? “How can I give up my attachment to liking chocolate?”

“I’m too attached!”

But people don’t really understand what attached means is you’re identifying with those thoughts and feelings as being your’s personally, when, in fact, it is an impersonal process. That’s how you become attached. You take this “like” and you say, “this is ME. This is MINE. This is who I AM. And “I” like it and I am going to keep liking it! Whether anybody else likes me to do it or not.”

But as you start to let go of the thoughts and you relax, you let go of the feeling and you relax, and you come back to your object of meditation, you start to lose the attachment to that feeling sensation, thought, whatever it happens to be.

And THIS is purifying your mind.

This is helping your mind to see that everything that arises is part of an impersonal process. To let it be, and relax into it, and then come back to your breath.

Now I give a lot of retreats. And when I teach retreats you can only sit for so long when you have to get up and stretch your body, you know? I tell people that they have to sit at least for 30 minutes. That’s pretty easy. It really is. And then get up, but keep your meditation going while you walk. And you can walk at a moderate pace back and forth, keeping your eyes down, but staying with your breath, and relaxing. So everything that you do turns into part of the meditation. You don’t focus on your feet. If you are focusing on your feet, you never see the subtle tensions and tightness that arise in your body and in your mind. You stay with the breath and after you

walk for a little while, your circulation is pretty good, then you go back and sit again.

When your sitting meditation gets good, then you stay with it. Sometimes you'll sit for 45 minutes, everything is going good, sit for an hour! Fine. Next time you try it, then, 30 minutes is like 4 hours! So you sit for no less than 30 minutes. But when your meditation is good, extend it as long as you can. And that way, you'll be able to see more and more subtle movements of mind.

Now when I was practicing in Burma, they were real big on: "Life is suffering! And, by golly, you WILL SUFFER!"

[laughter]

So what they said, was, when a sensation arises in your body, you put your attention RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT SENSATION! You can be sitting and you get a pain in your knee. Put your attention right in the middle of that sensation and watch it until it goes away! "What does that do? It makes your mind skroooooosh! [Tighten]. And you can focus on it. You can get real deep concentration. But the pain gets real intense. So intense that sometimes there can be tears coming down. It can get very, very, strong if you put your attention into that sensation.

TT: 49:40

[A more loving way of teaching a westerner or anyone]

So this is another way that I teach a little bit more, lovingly? You don't have to make yourself suffer. You don't have to have this pain and sit with it and grit your teeth and force your mind to look at that. What you do is notice that your mind went to it, allow it to be, relax, and come back. Now when you do that, one of two things is going to happen. Either the pain is going to go away or it's not. But if it doesn't, you start getting more and more balance in your mind until it doesn't even pull your mind to that sensation anymore.

[sitting positions]

Now when I was in Asia, they insisted that everybody sit on the floor. In Asia, they don't have a lot of furniture. They didn't when I was there. They always sat on the floor. They were used to sitting on the floor. When I went to Asia, I was 40 years old. I spent forty years sitting in a chair. They told me I had to sit on the floor! And then they told me "Oh you can't use a cushion!" Sit flat on the floor. My legs and feet went to sleep in five minutes! So I started using a cushion. I didn't care what they said. And I would get up and I would do my walking meditation and I would see these Burmese monks come up and they would 'kick' the pillow that I was sitting on. They thought it was really disgusting.

Now if you're not used to sitting on the floor, and you do sit on the floor, and you sit cross-legged, you can start to notice that your body doesn't really like that so much. [laughter] Right? And all these pains come up and, oh boy, it's really intense. But they tell you, "Don't move!"

I don't teach that way. You want to sit in a chair. Fine. Sit in a chair. You don't have to make pain come up. It comes up all by itself. You don't have to force pain to come up. And I don't want you to sit in a way that will cause you to have pain come up. I want you to sit in a way where your mind is very alert, your mind is very aware and if a pain comes up and you sit with it for awhile, but it's still there and it seems to be getting more intense, and you get up and you start doing your meditation, your walking meditation, and the pain doesn't go away, I don't want you to sit like that again. Because that's going to hurt your body.

Now when I was in Burma, they decided that I was at a place where I should sit for a long period of time. I went to a retreat. First day of the retreat I went in and I talked to the teacher, the Sayadaw there, and he said, "How long do you sit?"

And I'd been doing this for years. "I sit for an hour. I walk for an hour."

He said, "Fine. Sit longer."

I said, "OK."

So the next day I came into the teacher and he said, "How long did you sit?"

"Well, I sit for two hours and I walk for an hour."

He said, "Fine. Sit longer!"

I said, "Uh, OK."

So the next day I come in and I don't look particularly happy, and he said, "How long did you sit?"

I said, "I sat for three hours. It was a killer. Walked for an hour."
He said, "Good. Why don't you sit longer?"

'Oh man!' "OK."

So, this is four days into a retreat. Now if you've ever done a retreat, you know that the first couple of days of a retreat your mind is real active and running all over the place anyway, and here I was with a teacher that was forcing me to sit for long periods of time.

So the next day I came into the teacher, and I was shaking my head and he said, "How long did you sit?"

I said, "Four hours. It was really hard. Lot of pain comes up."
He said, "Did you move?"

I said, "Yeah, I moved all over the place. It was hurt! I got cramps and all kinds of stuff."

He said: "Well, don't move."

TT: 55:02

"Oh. Man. OK."

Next day I come in to talk to the teacher, I have tears coming down. I'm not really crying, but the pain is so intense, that it caused my eyes to water. And he said, "Well, how long did you sit?"

I said, "I sat for four hours. I never want to do that again."

"Did you move?"

"No. I didn't move."

"Good. Why don't you sit longer?"

"No.[audience laughter] That's long enough!"

But he kept after me and after a few days I started sitting for long periods of time. And I was sitting on the floor and my legs were crossed and all of that. And I started sitting for 6 hours, 7 hours, 8 hours like that. And then I started noticing that my ankles started to swell really a lot.

I went to the teacher and I told him that my ankles were swelling up a lot.

And he said to me, "Well, that's because you're sitting with your legs too tight."

And I still have that problem, because I was not sitting in an appropriate way. I was sitting in a way that actually hurt myself. And I did that because the teacher encouraged me to do that. I don't encourage anyone to sit that way. I might encourage you to sit for 6 or 7 hours but you are going to do it in a comfortable position and you're going to be ready to do it. It will happen naturally.

I have students that can sit for long periods of time. Now what's the advantage of sitting for a long period of time without moving your body? You get to watch HOW your mind moves much, much more precisely. Your awareness at that time is much quicker. You're able to see how mind starts to grab onto things and you can let it go very quickly and it's a pleasant experience. So, I'm not going to force you to have a lot of pain come up.

[hindrances]

Now, Hindrances are real peculiar things because this is where all of our attachments are. This is where, some past memories can be, and let's say, you can be sitting and all of a sudden, anger arises, or sadness arises, or some kind of depression arises, or boredom arises, or whatever the catch of the day happens to be. And it pulls your mind to that and you'll get caught with it for a little period of time. As soon as you notice it, then you let it be and you relax and you come back to your meditation, to the breath and relaxing. And then you bounce back and forth. And as you do that you start seeing this is part of a process too.

It's very necessary to your spiritual growth to have the hindrances arise. Because that's where your belief is that this is who I am. "I'm mad" and "I don't like it." And "I want it to be different that it is." You hear all those "I's"? That identification? That taking it personally? That heavy mind? That mind that gets so caught up in the dislike of a feeling that you don't even know where you are? Have you ever had somebody say something to you and you get really mad and then you get into the car and then you back up and hit something? Know what I mean? Were you really driving? No. You weren't driving. You were caught by what happened awhile back! And you were so caught up in your thoughts and in your dislike of the thoughts you want for things to be different than they are that you didn't know what you were doing in the present moment.

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Now, you're going to like this. The fastest way to let go of an emotional state, the fastest way to let go of a hindrance, is to Laugh at Your Self for getting caught by it! Somebody can say something and it really ticks you off, and you walk away, and your feet are stomping into the ground, and your mind is er-er-er-er that no good..... and if you notice that and you laugh at yourself for acting this way, you're not caught by it anymore. It goes from, "I'm mad and I don't like it" to " Oh. It's only this anger! Hah! Look at that!" Easy to let it go.

At that moment, you are practicing the entire 8-fold path! OK? You're practicing the 8-fold path by laughing with yourself for getting caught. It changes your perspective. It changes your view of what is happening in the present moment.

The 8-Fold Path

Now, when I talk about the 8-fold path, I change the words around a little bit from what most people think the 8-fold path is. It's a bunch of Right this and Right that and I don't like that. So I change it to Harmonious. And the first part of the 8-fold path is Harmonious Perspective. Most people call this Right View. But it's a harmonious perspective when you can see that what you were identifying with and taking personally is an impersonal process. You've changed your perspective to: "I'm mad and I don't like it" to "Oh, it's only this anger. It's not even mine. I didn't ask it to come up." So, you have a harmonious perspective with that.

Now the second part of the 8-fold path is called, by most people Right Thought. And there's nothing further from what the actual Pali is talking about. It is Harmonious Imaging. OK? The imaging is ...holding onto concept that "I am that thought, that feeling." And that brings up an image in your mind and in your body. Harmonious imaging means letting it be.

Now the next part of the 8-fold path is generally called Right Speech. Now when I was practicing in Burma, Right Speech, Right Action , Right Livelihood ; they said these three things are morality. And they

don't have much to do with the meditation. You took your five precepts. You took your eight precepts, that's what it's talking about. But I don't go along with that. When I was practicing that way, I did believe what they were telling me about this stuff so it turned in from an 8-fold path to a 5-fold path. But Right Speech is what I call Harmonious Communication and that's the communication with yourself of letting go of these angry thoughts and communicating, "Oh. It's only this. It's only this feeling."

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The next is Right Action; Harmonious Movement. When you have a mind that is pulled down and very tight that's identifying with the thoughts, and identifying with the feelings, your mind is very heavy. And that movement is very sluggish. Your mind is very caught up in the whole process. But the Harmonious Movement is being able to watch, letting go, and watching your mind move from a heavy state to a light state.

The next is called Right Livelihood. I love this one. I call it Harmonious Lifestyle. If you practice being happy and having a happy mind, you are practicing Harmonious Lifestyle. If you are practicing having an uplifted mind and wishing other people happiness and you give them a smile, that is Harmonious Lifestyle. If you smile with yourself for being caught, that is Harmonious Lifestyle.

The next is, they call it Right Effort and it's in four parts. But, I call it Harmonious Practice. The four parts of this is:

Recognizing when your mind has unwholesome states in it.

Letting go of those unwholesome states, and relaxing.

Bringing up a wholesome state and

Keeping that wholesome state going.

When you laugh with yourself for being caught in an emotional state, you are bringing joy up. That's a very wholesome thing, isn't it? Lot more wholesome than dislike, or anger, or sadness, or depression or whatever the catch of the day is; fear, anxiety.

The next part of this is called Right Mindfulness and I call it Harmonious Observation. Harmonious Observation means being able to see this as it happens without trying to control it, just laughing with it, watch it.

Now the last, when I was in Burma they called it Right Concentration. And they said, "Well, you don't practice this kind of concentration when you are practicing Vipassana." So, they were actually teaching me, the 4-fold path. Now, the Buddha said that Right Samadhi [Sama+dhi] 'sama' means "tranquil" and 'dhi' means wisdom and I translate that a little bit more by saying "collectedness of mind". It's a mind that's very still, calm, and stays with your object of meditation very easily. The Buddha described it as being in one of the 4 jhanas. Now, jhanas, at the start of the talk, I started talking about the jhana being the, in this country, it's called absorption, and that's really a long way from the true definition.

Jhana arises because you have let go of an attachment. Then you have Joy and Happiness and Equanimity and all those other wonderful states of mind that can arise. It is a level of understanding, that's what a jhana is. It's not an absorbed mind, that you sit like a rock and somebody can come up with a stick and beat you on the head and you don't even know it happened. It's not that kind of mind! It's a mind that is very alert and balanced and a mind that is really beginning to understand 'everything that arises is part of a process.'

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Now that's the 8-fold path. And the act of laughing with yourself for being caught means you're practicing all 8 of those at the same time!

Great Stuff, Huh?

Too many times, I've been to different meditation retreats that other teachers are teaching and I walk around and I look at people and their face is very screwed up and their trying real hard and they're VERY serious. You come and do a meditation retreat with me, the first thing I am going to tell you to do, is you got to smile. And a smile is incredibly important to the practice because the corners of your lips dictates what's happening in your mind. When the corners of your lips go down, so does your mind. Your mental states get heavy and you start identifying very strongly with those mental states. Corners of your mouth go up, so does your mind. It helps joy to arise.

Now, you remember a little while ago, I said I was told, "Don't be attached when you have joy arise!" How are you attached when joy arises? "Oh! This is a great feeling. I really like that, I want it to stay around." Fastest way to make it disappear. By being attached to it. It is a Feeling. Remember I told you a little earlier there's three kinds of feeling. There's a pleasant feeling. There's an unpleasant feeling. There's a neutral feeling.

OK? Same coin. Different sides.

What do you do with an unpleasant feeling? You see it, that your mind has gone to it. You allow it to be. You relax. You come back to your object of meditation. What do you do when joy arises? You see your mind has joy in it, you allow it to be, you relax, you come back to your object of meditation. You're not going to get attached that way! But it is nice. And the Buddha said "this is a pleasant abiding 'here and now', and, it is! It's no fooling!

The more you can practice having a smile on your face with your daily activities, the easier it is to see what your mind is doing in the present moment. Your mind in light, your mind is agile, and when it starts to get heavy, you notice it really quickly. So, if you can let go of that one, that's not worth hanging onto and relax, and start smiling again.

The meditation is about being observant and watching how mind moves. It's much easier to watch your mind move when it's happy than it is to watch it when it's unhappy because you start identifying with all of these thoughts and these feelings. Now, you're sitting in meditation and you have a hindrance come up; a sadness, a depression, a dislike, fear, anxiety, whatever it happens to be. And you sit with that and you let it go and you relax and you come back to your object of meditation and you bounce back and forth and you might not have let it go all the way but you only have so much time to sit. Now I got to get up and I got to do my daily activities. But you start feeling more balanced in your mind. And then, with your daily activities, if that sadness starts to creep up again, you're able to see it more easily and let go of it more easily.

The meditation is so that you can have a truly balanced mind that doesn't shake and wobble. It doesn't grab onto things and say, "I don't like this!" "I do like this!" "I want this!" "I don't want that!" One of the reasons everybody gets so tired, and, you got to sleep, you got to have 8 hours of sleep because you're spending a whole day going "I like this!" "I don't like this!" "I like this!" "I don't like this!" [laughter]

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And your mind is completely worn out! It says, "Uh! I got to go to bed! I'm wiped out!" [laughter]

As you begin to be more aware of how your mind is moving, then it doesn't happen like it's on a roller coaster. You don't go through these high highs and these low lows. It starts to be more like little waves. And as you get better at doing it, the equanimity can get stronger. And then somebody can come up to you and they can say incredibly not nice things and your mind has such balance in it that you go, "OH. OK. No problem."

Practicing being happy is the path of the Buddha. Everybody thinks that if you're on the spiritual path, you better be serious with it. And I

agree. Be seriously happy. The more you can smile into things, the more balance you have in your mind.

7 Enlightenment Factors.

Now they're seven enlightenment factors Right?

You have Mindfulness, Investigation of your experience, Energy, JOY, Tranquility, Collectedness, and Equanimity. Now, Joy is right in the middle of that. That's your balancing factor. It is very necessary for Joy to be there. If you miss one of those Enlightenment factors you'll never get enlightened.

Everything has to be in balance. The more you can practice smiling, the more you can practice having an uplifted mind, letting go of heavy thoughts, of emotion, laugh when you get caught at these things. You know the world out there, is getting more and more crazy. I mean, when I came from Asia, I spent 12 years in Asia. And when I came back, in the airplane, right before we landed, I landed in San Francisco, I started to feel very strong FEAR, ANXIETY, and GREED. Now, I'm starting to feel really, really intense FEAR and really, really intense GREED.

Now, how do you cope with these kinds of things? How do you handle these kinds of things? You can take these thoughts and these feelings as yours personally and you can fight with them and cause yourself to get depressed and frustrated and angry and all of those kinds of things, or not. It's your choice. This is why I like the Buddha's teaching; because you have to be responsible for yourself. When you are really responsible for yourself and watching your mind and letting go of this stuff, and you start cultivating an uplifted mind, you start affecting the world around you in a positive way.

You know I have people that come up to me and they say "Well, there is all this Tsunami, there's this terrible thing and what can I do? It makes me so sad."

What you can do is make yourself happy and start affecting everyone else around you. Keep your mind uplifted. If you feel like going out and gathering things and sending it off to Asia, and helping those people, you can do that. That's up to you. But watch your own mind. Watch how your mind gets caught in dislike and dissatisfaction.

TT: 1:19:46

Since coming back to this country, I've really noticed some key words that seem to be used a lot.

Stress. Depression. Anxiety. I never heard those words over in Asia. But they're used a lot here. And I read in the paper some years ago, couple anyway, that, I think it was by next year, 1 in 4 persons was going to be taking drugs for depression. Well, I know how to get rid of depression. Be happy. Smile. And give it away! Give your smile away. Say things that make other people happy.

Let's share some merit.

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Transcribed by KK
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