

Orientation for the Retreat

Joshua Tree 3

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Bhante Vimalaramsi

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BV: For some of you, you know what the retreat is going to be like; for others, you don't. So I'm going to give you some instructions that will be very helpful.

I want everybody, when they're doing their sitting meditation, to sit NO LESS than thirty minutes. You can sit longer when your meditation is good. If you're used to sitting on the floor and you want to sit on the floor every time, that's up to you. You can sometimes sit in a chair, sometimes sit on the floor, whatever keeps your body comfortable. I am not into having people have huge amounts of pain. I want people to be as comfortable as they can. The pain will come up by itself; you don't need to make it come up.

Now, when you're doing your walking meditation, I do not want you to put your attention on your feet. You stay with the loving-kindness meditation. And I want everybody to be practicing loving-kindness meditation for this retreat. And we have the booklets over here that have the instructions; and there's a thing on the 6Rs, you can grab that before you leave tonight.

When you practice loving-kindness meditation, you first start by sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself. You remember a time when you were happy and when that happy feeling arises, it's a nice warm glowing feeling in the center of your chest. As soon as that feeling arises then you make a wish for your own happiness: "May I be happy, may my mind be peaceful and calm. May my mind be filled with joy. May my mind be clear and alert." Whatever wish you make

for yourself you want to feel that wish. You know what it feels like to be happy. You know what it feels like to be peaceful and calm. Feel that wish. Take that feeling and put it right in the middle of your heart and radiate that feeling to yourself. While you're doing that, your mind IS going to wander. You're going to have stray thoughts arise. And that's OK. Thoughts are not the enemy to fight with. As soon as you notice that your mind has strayed and you're starting to think this or that, then simply let go of the thought. And how do you let go of the thought? You don't keep your attention on the thought anymore. You allow that to be there by itself.

Now, every time mind's attention moves away from your object of meditation, there's a tension and tightness that arises in your body, mostly in your head. Relax. Now, you want to put a little smile on your lips. And then return to feeling of loving-kindness and make another wish for your own happiness. If your mind wanders away fifty times during the sitting and fifty times you notice that, let it be, relax, smile, come back to your object of meditation. That IS a good meditation. It's an ACTIVE meditation to be sure. But, it IS a good meditation. Every time you recognize that your mind is distracted and you let go, relax, smile and come back to your object of meditation, you're improving your observation power of how mind's attention gets distracted. You're improving your mindfulness all the time.

TT: 5:00

When you're sitting in meditation, please do NOT move your body. Don't wiggle your toes, don't wiggle your fingers, don't scratch, don't rub, don't change your body posture, don't rock back and forth. Sit as still as he is. You can move as much as he does. [Referring to Buddha statue] While you're sitting like this there can be some sensations that arise in your body. A want to cough, a little tickle in your throat, a want to sneeze, heat, vibration, sometimes even pain can arise. Now the job of the meditator is to watch how mind's attention moves. When a sensation arises the first thing you'll notice is you start thinking about that sensation, about that itch or that cough, and how you don't want it to be there and how you want it to go away. Every thought about a sensation causes the sensation to

get bigger and more intense. So, the first thing we need to do is let go of the thought and relax the tightness caused by mind's attention going to that thought. Now you'll see there's a tight mental fist wrapped around that feeling. You really don't like that feeling and you really want it to go away. That is aversion. Now, the whole point of learning loving-kindness meditation is learning how to lovingly accept whatever arises in the present moment. So when you see that tight mental fist wrapped around your mind, then ALLOW the space for that sensation to be there. In your mind you have to say, "It's OK for that sensation to be there." It HAS to be OK because that's the truth, isn't it? When a sensation arises, it's there. You can't fight with the truth. Any time you try to fight with the truth, any time you try to control the truth, any time you try to make the truth be the way you want it to be, you're fighting with the dhamma. And that is the cause of suffering and pain.

So what to do? Simply allow the space for that sensation to be there without any resistance in your mind to it. Now relax the tension and tightness caused by your mind going to that, and relax. Smile. Come back to your object of meditation: the feeling of loving-kindness and the wish for your own happiness. Now the nature of these kinds of sensations is they don't go away right away. You're going to be bouncing back and forth a little bit. But, this sensation when it arises and distracts your mind, is your teacher. It is teaching you how mind's attention actually moves and how it works. The whole point of the meditation is learning how to watch this process and let it go as soon as you can. And relax into it.

I know that there are some meditation techniques where they say: "When you get a sensation, put your attention right in the middle of that sensation, and see its true nature." Well you might see its true nature but you don't see the tension and tightness caused in your head because of the aversion to that feeling. This is not that kind of practice. We practice, and that little brochure there will explain it more, what's called the 6Rs. You recognize when your mind is distracted. You release the distraction, you relax. You re-smile. You return to your object of meditation and you repeat, staying with your object of meditation. Every time you see your mind is distracted, use

the 6Rs and you'll start seeing that you can let go of distractions more easily without becoming involved in the story about. And that helps to let go of the suffering quite a bit.

TT: 10:44

Now, one of two things will happen with this sensation. Either it will go away, or it won't. That's profound, isn't it? If it doesn't go away your mind starts to get more and more a sense of balance with it, and with that balance you'll start to notice that it doesn't even pull your attention to it anymore. So if that is the case, don't direct your mind to it, just stay with your object of meditation; it'll fade away by itself. Now sometimes you feel that tickle in your throat and you feel like you want to cough, but you don't want to disturb anybody around you, so you have this aversion to disturbing; and all the muscles start tightening around it and the fastest way to cough is to get involved with that. So, the first thing you want to do is recognize those tight muscles in your neck and relax. Just let that tension go. And if your body needs to cough, let it cough by itself; it's OK.

Now this kind of meditation is not a one-pointed kind of meditation. With one-pointed concentration, many people are disturbed by the tiniest little sound. Somebody getting up and walking, or closing the door, that sort of thing. And it's really a distraction for those people. But with this meditation, nothing is a distraction unless you make it a distraction. A sound arises, it's just a sound, right? It's not good, it's not bad, it just is there for a moment, it changes, it disappears. Allow the space for your attention; if it goes to that sensation, or that sound, let it be, relax, smile and come back. It's just another object to let go of. It's just another kind of distraction to let go of.

As you continue on, you're going to want to keep your meditation going all of the time. There's no time when you're NOT meditating, that's what we want to work towards. While you're getting up, watch what your mind is doing, use the 6Rs and relax into it; smile. Now this is a smiling meditation. And by that I mean EVERYBODY, you need to smile. And not just a little bit--all the time. Smile while you're eating, smile while you go to the bathroom, smile doing every kind of

task that you have to do. When you see you're not smiling, you can't criticize yourself, just start again. OK?

TT: 14:14

OK, the first ten minutes of every sitting I want you to spend sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself. The rest of the time I want you to send loving and kind thoughts to a spiritual friend. A spiritual friend is someone of the same sex, and they are alive, not a family member to start off with. You can do that with family members later. A spiritual friend is someone, when you think of them and their good qualities, you really like them. You really do wish them well. So, you're sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself: "May I be peaceful and calm." FEEL that peace and calm. "As I feel this peace and calm, I wish this feeling for you. May you be peaceful and calm." Now you can make any kind of wish you want that seems appropriate for you at the time. It has to be a positive wish, because you want to feel that wish first before you can send it to your friend. Now when I say send it to your friend, what I mean is, you take your spiritual friend and you put them right in the middle of that warm glowing feeling, and you surround them with your heart. And you give them a nice soft heart hug. And you wish them well, and you put that feeling into your heart so you know that they're feeling that. You don't have to wonder where they are and what direction to send it to, they're in your heart.

While you're sitting, I want everyone to smile. Smile in your mind, smile with your eyes even though your eyes are closed. That lets an awful lot of tension out of your face and off of your eyes that you didn't even notice that you had. A little smile with the lips, and a smile in your heart. Anytime you see you're not smiling, you can't criticize yourself. All you do is start over again. This is a process of "do it again." And there's going to be times that you're going to forget, and that's OK. But as soon as you remember, start again. And if I see anybody not smiling, I'll come around and make you smile. That's my job. Now the reason I stress smiling so much is because it helps your mind to be light. Corners of your mouth are real important. When the corners of your mouth go up, so does your

mental state. When the corners of your mouth go down, so does your mental state. So, the more you can keep that smile, the lighter your mind becomes. The lighter your mind becomes, the quicker you're able to notice when your mind gets distracted and starts to be pulled down. So your mindfulness becomes much sharper, and you're able to recognize these things more quickly. Joy IS one of the enlightenment factors. The more we can have joy in our practice, the more clarity we have.

Now, as I said, it doesn't matter how many distractions there are. As soon as you notice there's a distraction, just simply let go, relax, smile into it, and come back to your meditation, come back to your spiritual friend. The first ten minutes of every sitting is towards yourself, the rest of the time is to your spiritual friend.

TT: 19:11

Now, when you are done with your sitting, and some people can sit for forty-five minutes, some people sit thirty minutes, some people sit an hour, it's not any set thing that everybody gets up and starts walking and then stops and then comes back, it's not like that. Because you have your own rhythm. But don't break your own rhythm, stay with your rhythm. When your meditation is good, continue with the meditation. When it's not so good, at thirty minutes, get up and do your walking. Now when you're doing your walking you want to stay with your spiritual friend. Don't put your attention on your feet. Walk at a normal pace. At first the walking is going to be somewhat difficult because you're not used to it, and you'll start thinking about this and that. But that's OK. as soon as you notice it just gently let it be and relax and come back to your spiritual friend. When you're doing your walking meditation, please don't be looking around. Keep your eyes, oh, two or three meters in front of you, and, just a light gaze--that stops you from falling in holes and things like that. When your walking is good, walk longer. Now what your walking is for is to help get the circulation going in your body. So walk at a normal pace. Don't walk really slow. You don't get a lot of circulation when you're walking slow.

One of the things that can happen with the meditation if your energy starts to go down, and people come and they simply think, "Oh this is really great, I hit something, this is really wonderful," and they come and they talk to me and they say, "You know, I got this blank spot and I have no idea what happened while I was sitting with that blank spot." And my answer to that is: "Sloth and torpor That's what you were experiencing. It's no special big deal. It's because your body energy is too low. So you gotta get up and you have to walk for longer."

Now, when you're doing your walking meditation, you can walk as long as an hour but please don't walk any longer than that. An hour is about as long as you want to walk. Because, if you walk any longer, your body starts to get tired.

Stay with your object of meditation, don't let your mind ho-hum around. When you're sitting in meditation and you let your mind just kind of take off and not pay attention to your object of meditation, that's the first part of sloth and torpor. And then your mind dulls out, and then you start getting a little bit dreamy, and then your back starts slumping, and before long your bobbing up and down like one of those lizards that bob their heads. When that happens, two things you need to do: One, pay more attention to your object of meditation—take more interest in your friend and really sincerely like them. And sincerely do wish them well. And, sit a little bit straighter than normal. Now when you're sitting in meditation, I want your back nicely straight without tension in it. When you have sloth and torpor arising, you can sit a little bit straighter, not so it causes a lot of pain but just a little bit straighter, and then when you see that you're starting to slump a little bit, you'll catch that more quickly and you'll be able to let go of the sloth and torpor without really getting caught by it.

Now there's other remedies for the sloth and torpor when it comes. When you do your walking meditation, pick a place that's, oh, fifty feet or so. Walk back and forth. Now when you have sloth and torpor in your sitting, you get up and you start your walking meditation. You walk the length and then you stop but you don't turn around. Walk

backwards. You have to start paying more attention when you walk backwards. And then you get to the end of that, then stop and then walk forwards, staying with your spiritual friend all of the time. That helps pick up your energy; you come in and you start doing your sitting and you see that your sitting is much better.

TT: 24:58

So, it doesn't matter what you're doing during the day, whether you're eating, whether you're taking a shower, whether you're washing your hands, whether you're going to the bathroom, whether you're doing your daily activities, whether you're doing your work period, stay with the loving-kindness and stay with your spiritual friend. At every sitting, ten minutes to yourself, then the rest of the time is to your spiritual friend. Your progress in this meditation will be amazing to you. You'll go deeper faster than you ever thought possible. That's a promise! The catch is, you gotta practice only the instructions I'm giving you. Don't play with other meditations at ALL during this retreat. If you do, it will slow down your progress or even stop your progress. So, you want to stay with the instructions as closely as you can, and you will see in a short period of time that you're understanding how your mind works more clearly. You're understanding how everything starts to happen.

Now the whole point of the Buddhist meditation is learning how mind's attention moves. It doesn't have anything to do with getting so deep in your meditation that you lose your body and forget everything else and you just stay with your object of meditation. You're not learning when you do that. It's OK to have distractions. Actually, it's pretty good to have distractions, as odd as that sounds. And I'll talk more about that tomorrow. So, I want to emphasize that this is going to be a noble silent retreat. When you break for your tea period it's not time to gab. It's time to get the tea, go sit by yourself, and drink the tea. Keep your meditation going all the time. The more you can keep your meditation going all of the time, the faster your progress is. And I LOVE to see people have fast progress. OK? And it IS very important to smile.

Now this is a lot different instructions than some of you might have practiced before. The key to the success of this meditation is the Relax step. Now, I'll explain this a LOT more during the retreat but I'll give you a little taste of it right now. Craving always manifests as tension and tightness in your mind and in your body. It ALWAYS manifests that way. EVERY Time mind's attention moves from one thing to another, there is tension and tightness. So you have to RELAX that tension and tightness.

Now the tension and tightness mostly is in your head but occasionally it will be in different parts of your body. You'll feel tense and tight in your neck when you have a cough or a sneeze or something like that. You can feel tense and tight in your stomach sometimes and you need to relax that. But ALWAYS relax the tension and tightness in your head.

TT: 29:34

Now there's two parts of your brain, and they are surrounded by a membrane. Every time mind's attention moves, it causes that membrane to contract just a little bit. Now this is subtle stuff. I'm not talking about big gross tightness. I'm talking about a little teeny tightness. But when you relax, you'll feel like your brain expands a little bit. It's like a flower opening up. And then you'll see right after that, there's no thought. There's no distraction. There's only this mind that's very clear and alert, and you bring that attention back to your object of meditation. So letting go of that tension and tightness, that subtle tightness, is the KEY to going deeper in your meditation than you ever dreamed possible. Because you're continually experiencing the third Noble Truth. You're continually experiencing the cessation of suffering. What's the cause of suffering? Craving. Let go of the craving, that's the cessation of suffering.

OK, so, does anybody have any questions about anything? Yes?

S: ~

BV: You don't tell yourself, you just notice that there's tightness there

and relax it. It's like, make a fist and squeeze tight. OK, let it go. How did you do that? You did it by recognizing that there was tight muscles and you relaxed those muscles.

It gets easier. At first it sounds kind of complicated and difficult. But, as you start noticing it and you start feeling that tightness in your brain and it starts going "ahh" and you go "Oh, OK."

Now one of the mistakes that a lot of people make is they say, "Well, I relaxed and the tightness didn't go away, so I kept relaxing, relaxing, relaxing, relaxing." No, no, no, no. Don't do that. Relax one time. Smile, come back to your object of meditation. Your mind will get pulled away again because that craving is still there. Then do it again, as many times as it takes, and then you'll feel the letting go. You'll feel the relief of that tension. OK? Yes?

S: What if you don't feel like smiling?

BV: I don't care.

S: OK so you just ~ smile on your face no matter what?

BV: Yes you do. It doesn't matter whether you feel like it or not. The tests that are showing about smiling, they say, even an imitation smile, your mind doesn't know the difference between a real smile and a fake smile. It thinks that you're smiling so it becomes uplifted. Yeah?

S: I have a question about the spiritual friend. I'm trying to settle on one. There's one person I met about three years ago, who I correspond with all the time, ~ don't have a good visual image of him.

BV: Doesn't matter so much. You feel comfortable with him, you want to send him loving and kind thoughts? You can use him. OK? Now you want to try to see your spiritual friend, but some people don't visualize very well. They don't see things in pictures. They see things in words. And sometimes it's just, the name of that person can

bring that visual image into their mind. Don't fight to try to make a picture come up. If your mind doesn't tend towards pictures, that's fine. It doesn't matter. You know that you have the Eightfold Path. And the second part of the Eightfold Path, they always call it Right Thought, I call it Harmonious Imaging. You bring an image of your friend into your mind, but that image can just be a feeling of them, or it can be a memory of something they said that made your mind very happy. So you can use that as your image. OK? And use the same spiritual friend ALL the time.

TT: 34:45

Now, one of the things that happens with people on retreat, is they start sitting, and then they feel a little uncomfortable, and they change their posture, and then continue sitting. Please don't do that. If you feel uncomfortable, get up and start moving. The walking meditation is still the meditation. EVERYTHING is the meditation. There is no part of your whole existence that ISN'T the meditation. So don't look at sitting as, "This is my sitting practice and then there's the rest of life." No. No, that's not right. Every part of your life is part of the meditation. When you're sitting, that's your quiet time, to be sure. But most of your life is not quiet, right? Most of your life you have other things that you're doing. You have to be able to take your meditation and your observation of how mind's attention moves, you have to be able to take that observation with you into your daily life. Because, hindrances arise whether you're sitting or not, right? Sometimes you get mad, sometimes you get sad, sometimes you get restless, sometimes you get anxious. Whatever the catch of the day is, you have to be able to recognize it, and see how your mind handles it. And start softening into that, and relaxing into that, so you can carry your meditation with you all the time.

So, if you just start sitting on the floor and you rearrange your sitting cushion, don't do that. Because, what happens is your energy starts to stagnate. You've already broken your sitting, and you've started to lose your mindfulness, lose your observation. And then you want to get it back. But you don't have as much energy now. So, instead of just changing your posture, get up and walk for fifteen minutes. It's

still the meditation. That helps pick up your energy so that when you come back and you sit, your sitting is going to be better. It doesn't matter what you're doing. Again, keep your meditation going. OK? Anybody else have a question?

Now, before you go to sleep, what I want you to do is make a determination. A determination is a strong wish, that you wake up in the morning with a smiling, happy mind. OK? Easy, right? Wake up smiling? Piece of cake. And then, keep it going. OK? Wake up with a smile and keep the smile going. I don't care, you gotta brush your teeth, you gotta smile anyway, right? Put the smile in your mind. Put the smile in your heart. Keep that going. Stay with your spiritual friend. Now, after a few days I might tell some of you that you can drop sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself and you can just stay with your spiritual friend all the time. But, let me do that. Let me decide when it's time for you to do that. OK?

TT: 39:15

Now this kind of meditation, after you start going a little bit deep you will be able to sleep very nicely. But there can be some peculiar dreams that arise. If you start to have dreams that are rather strange, you can radiate loving-kindness in the dream. And wish happiness to everybody in the dream. And that dream will change, and you'll start having a very pleasant dream. OK? Also, try to make a determination on exactly the time you wake up. You want to wake up at 4:58 and 24 seconds, and try to wake up at exactly that time. That's a practice that, it's not an easy one, you're going to miss it until you get used to doing it. But it is very helpful later on in your meditation, being able to have these kind of determinations will be very helpful. OK? So, please don't go to bed before 10 o'clock. Also, if you wake up in the middle of the night, instead of kind of grumbling and rolling over and trying to go back to sleep, sit in the bed, stay nice and warm, do your practice. Radiate your loving-kindness then. And then when you feel like laying down, then lay down and go to sleep again. OK?

OK, let's share some merit then.

May suffering ones, be suffering free
And the fear struck, fearless be
May the grieving shed all grief
And may all beings find relief.
May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.
May beings inhabiting space and earth
Devas and nagas of mighty power
Share this merit of ours.
May they long protect the Lord Buddha's dispensation.
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

Transcript prepared by Uma Sarason
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