

Orientation For the Joshua Tree 5 Retreat
Dhamma Talk presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi 6th March 2010

BV: So, I'm happy to see all of you. And one of the things that I want to stress with this retreat is that you have fun doing it. I want you to practice smiling all the time. I don't care what you're doing, I don't care if you're going to the bathroom or taking a shower, I want you to smile. I've been called a sneaky monk because I don't really tell people why I want you to smile very often. And I want you to smile for a couple of reasons. The more you smile the better your mindfulness becomes. Okay?

Now the whole thing with the Buddha's teaching is to have an uplifted mind all the time. And that's what the Buddha was really interested in. The more you smile and have fun and laugh with yourself for being serious about things, the easier it is to have the perspective so that you don't get caught by the hindrances for as long a period of time.

Now, the hindrances, there's five of them:

1. Greedy mind – I like it. I want it.
2. Aversion mind – I don't like it. I don't want it.
3. Sleepiness-Dullness.
4. Restlessness-Anxiety.
5. Doubt.

Now, when I start talking about hindrances, quite often I don't tell you which hindrances I'm talking about. I just say that it's a distraction. Anything that distracts your mind away from your object of meditation, you have to learn how to practice 6Rs:

Recognize that your mind is distracted.

Release the distraction. That means don't keep your attention on whatever has pulled your mind away. Now...

Relax tightness and tension in your mind. And when you relax tension in your mind, you relax tension in your body. Now you...

Re-smile because you've lost your smile when you get caught up in things. Then you...

Return to your object of meditation. And you...

Repeat staying with your object of meditation.

Simple, right? It's simple but sometimes not easy. Yeah?

ST: What is an object of meditation?

BV: I'll get to that in just a moment.

Now, what I generally have people do is practice loving-kindness meditation rather than the breathing meditation. And I have people practicing the loving-kindness meditation because almost everybody starts with the breathing meditation, and they have bad habits, and it's hard to break those habits. So, the easiest way to do that is to change your meditation so that you're starting out right at the ground floor, and that is with the loving-kindness meditation. The loving-kindness meditation is actually more than just loving-kindness. Eventually, it starts working into all of the Brahmavihāras. That is: compassion, joy and equanimity along with the loving-kindness.

So, we start out by practicing loving-kindness. The first ten minutes of every sitting, you radiate loving-kindness to yourself. Now, what I'm going to be teaching you is - it might be a little bit different if you've been practicing loving-kindness with other methods - because what I want you to do is: make a wish for yourself and feel the wish. Now, you could make a wish for yourself to be happy. What does it feel like to be happy? Do you know? You make a wish that you feel peaceful and calm. You make a wish that you feel very clear and bright. You can make up your wish; make it wholesome, but feel the wish and take that feeling and put it into your heart, and surround yourself with that feeling.

Now, you're going to have a lot of distracting thoughts at first. Your mind is not going to be very settled. That's okay, doesn't matter. I know that there are some traditions that they talk about: "Well, just clear your mind." Well, I know some people that have worked for two years to clear their mind, so they don't have any thoughts coming in, but thoughts are not your enemy. Thoughts are just thoughts, and it's okay to have thoughts. But you want to recognize that your mind is thinking: let that thought go, that means don't keep your attention on it. Relax, smile, come back to your object of meditation, and stay with your object of meditation for as long as you can.

Now, if your mind wanders thirty times or fifty times in your sitting period, and you notice it - and you let it be, and you relax, and you smile, and come back to your object of meditation - that is a good sitting. A not good

sitting is noticing that you're thinking of something, and it's so important that you have to keep thinking it over and over again. Now you're not really meditating anymore. Keep it light; don't force the meditation; don't snap your mind around; just simply notice it: "Ah, there it goes again. Okay." Let it be, relax, smile, come back; that's all. Every time you do that, your mindfulness improves a little bit. It's just like putting coins in a bank. After a while the bank starts getting filled up with the coins.

Don't fight anything, don't resist anything, allow everything to be there. When something arises, I don't care if it's a pain in your knee, or a pain in your back, or it's a persistent thought; allow it to be there. The truth is, when it arises, it's there. That's the truth, that's the Dhamma of the present moment, and that means it has to be alright because that's the truth; it's there. Now, you allow it to be there, you relax, smile, come back to your object of meditation.

So, the first ten minutes of every sitting, I want you to just send loving and kind thoughts to yourself. Feel that happy feeling, feel joy, feel clarity, feel peace and calm. Whatever wish you make for yourself, feel that. Put that feeling in your heart and radiate that feeling to yourself. After ten minutes, then you start sending loving and kind thoughts to a spiritual friend, and I'll get into that in a little bit.

Now, while you're sitting, I want you to sit with your back nicely straight, not rigid, but nicely straight, so it doesn't cause pain when you sit. Don't move: don't move your toes, don't move your fingers, don't scratch, don't rub, don't change your posture, don't rock back and forth; sit still. And while you're doing that, you can feel... sometimes there'll be an itch, or a want to cough, or sneeze, or just thoughts keep running through; that's fine. Sometimes pain can arise. Don't move, sit very still. You can move as much as he does. Okay? That's why he's here to remind you how much you can move.

Now, what happens when you get a sensation that arises in the body, like a want to cough, the first thing that happens is you start to think about all the reasons why you don't want that feeling to be there: "I wish it would stop. I wish it would go away. Why does it have to bother me now?" Now, the first thing you want to do is recognize that you're thinking, and let go of that thought, and relax a little bit. Now you notice there's a tight mental fist wrapped around that feeling: "I don't want to cough. I don't want to disturb anybody else." Notice the tight muscles in your throat, and relax. Then notice the tight muscle in your head.

BV: Around your brain there is a membrane called the meninges, and every time your mind gets distracted, it contracts a little bit, and there's tension and tightness in your head. So, after you let go of the tight muscles here, relax the tension and tightness in your head. It's not an easy thing to recognize at first, but as you start to go a little bit deeper, you'll be able to recognize it fairly easily. When you let it go, you'll feel like an expansion happens in your head. It's like the tension just lets go and it feels more open. And you'll notice right after you do that, that there's no thoughts, there's no distraction: your mind is clear, your mind is bright, your mind is pure. Now you bring that mind back to your object of meditation. And then your mind gets distracted by this 'want to cough' again. So, you do the same thing again. Now, if you're going to cough, don't fight it. Let your body be on automatic; doesn't matter.

A sound is only a sound. So, if your mind gets distracted by a sound, you treat it in the same way. You let it be there, you relax, you smile, you come back. It doesn't matter how many times your mind gets distracted. Every time your mind gets distracted, you treat it in the same way. You use the 6Rs. The 6Rs are one of the keys to the meditation. And at first you'll feel like repeating those 6Rs in your head, but actually the 6Rs are a kind of flow: it's recognizing ... releasing ... relaxing ... smiling ... coming back. And you do it that way. Make it a flow. You don't have to stop after each step. Okay?

And the more you smile during your meditation, the faster you'll understand what I'm talking about. That's why I said: "I want you to have fun on this retreat." Why? When you have fun, you learn fast. When you have fun doing something, like when you were in school and you had a subject that you really liked, you learned it very quickly because you were having fun learning it. Have fun with this meditation. Don't get serious. Smile into everything, and when your mind is being really heavy, and it decides that there's something that you should really be serious about, then you laugh with yourself. Just kind of chuckle and go: "Boy, my mind's really crazy right now!" You know it's okay to be crazy? We're all crazy, and it's okay, it's fun! Have fun with it! How does your mind feel now? See?

Anytime you have repeat thoughts, you have an attachment. An attachment is not good, bad or indifferent, it's just an attachment. How do you let go of the attachment? You: recognize... release ... relax ... smile ... come back, stay with your object of meditation as long as you can remember to.

The function of mindfulness is to remember. To remember what? To remember to smile and have fun. So, anytime you see you're getting serious about something, well, what do we need to do with that?

Now, the relax step is very, very important because the relax step is how to let go of craving. Craving always manifests as tension and tightness in your mind and in your body. That's how you can recognize it. When you relax, then your mind becomes pure. Why? Because you're not identifying with those thoughts and feelings, you're seeing them the way they are, they're just thoughts and feelings; no biggie. So, it's really important that you use the relax step, but sometimes people get over enthusiastic and they want to relax ... relax ... relax ... relax ... relax, because the tension didn't go away the first time. Now, just relax one time. Follow all of the 6Rs every time you're distracted. So, there's some tension still. Okay, fine. Your mind will go back to that distraction - do it again ... and do it again ... and do it again ... and do it again ... and do it again, until it finally lets go. This is how you purify your mind, by letting go of craving.

Now, this is something that's quite unusual in the Buddhist world, to have somebody come up and tell you: "This is how you recognize craving. This is what craving is." And you don't have to fight with the craving, you don't have to control it, you just have to let it be - and relax. The craving will fade away by itself. As it fades away then you start going deeper in your meditation, and you start staying with your object of meditation for longer periods of time.

Mindfulness is your observation power, it's not your controlling power, it's only your observation; being able to recognize when your mind gets distracted. As you begin to stay with your object of meditation for a little longer period of time, you'll start noticing more quickly when your mind gets distracted, and you'll let go a little bit more easily. This is a very natural process of unfolding, and you are your own teachers. I'm not your teacher, I'm a guide. I'll keep you on the path, but you're teaching yourself. And this is something that's quite unusual because most people think that you come to a retreat to have the teacher tell you what to do. I'll tell you what to do, practice your 6Rs. Stay with that.

Now, a spiritual friend is a person of the same sex. They are alive, and don't use a member of your family to start off with. A spiritual friend is someone, when you think of them, and their good qualities, you really like them. You have a lot of respect for that person. You sincerely do wish them well. So, you pick a spiritual friend and you stay with that same spiritual friend all the time. Now, when you're practicing sending loving

and kind thoughts to your spiritual friend, you want to picture them in your mind's eye. Some people can picture them like they were a photograph, and they can see that person very easily. Other people, they're not visual like that. You can feel them smiling. You want to see them smiling and happy. If you visualize, sometimes it's like it's a long ways away, sometimes it's cloudy, sometimes it's fuzzy, sometimes it just won't come up. That's okay.

The most important part of the meditation is the radiation of the loving-kindness. The next most important part of the meditation is making a wish, feeling that wish, taking your spiritual friend, putting them in your heart, and surrounding them with that feeling. When you see your spiritual friend in your mind's eye, you want to see them smiling and happy, and that can help remind you to be smiling and happy.

This is a smiling meditation. You've already heard me say that. She says I'll repeat things three times, that's not true. I repeat them hundreds of times, sometimes all on the same talk. Ha Ha! When you smile, you want to smile with your mind. You want to smile with your eyes, even though your eyes are closed. You'll find out that there's tension and tightness, and you smile with your eyes, and that lets go of tension. You want to put a little Buddha smile on your lips, and a smile in your heart. Okay?

So, when you're meditating and you're staying with your spiritual friend, the first day or so you're going to start noticing that you're kind of slipping off your spiritual friend a little bit, and your mind starts ho-humming around. And then it gets a little bit dreamy, and then it gets real dreamy, and then your posture starts to slump, and before long... Why does that happen? Now, that's called sloth and torpor if you've wondered about that. That happens because you're not being sincere enough with staying with your spiritual friend. Take more interest in your spiritual friend, and that will help overcome the "sleepies".

Also, when you get sloth and torpor, what happens is you'll notice that you've been like this for a little while, and you go: "Okay! Now I'm going to stay with the object... May they be happy ... may they be happy ... may they be happy... Oh, I wonder how long this is going to last. Oh, I am starting to sleep again." It's too much energy at one time, too much effort, trying to force it, and this is not a forced meditation. So, if you see that you're a little bit sleepy and you're having trouble staying with your spiritual friend, I want you to sit for thirty minutes; that's the minimum. Okay? Now, after thirty minutes, if you're sleepy, you can get up and you can do your walking meditation, which I'll get into in just a minute. Or,

when you're sitting, sit just a little bit straighter, not enough to cause you pain, but a little bit straighter. And then when your back starts slumping like that, you'll notice it and then you can come back to your spiritual friend much more easily. Okay?

Now, your biggest hindrance is going to be restlessness. That means every thought that distracts your mind away from what you're doing. So, you better get to be friendly with this guy because he's around until you become an arahat. Now, the Buddha said very clearly in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta that in seven days you can become an arahat. So, you never know when it's going to happen. Okay?

It's always kind of comical when I give an interview to somebody, they'll come in, I say: "Well, how's your meditation going?" "Oh, my meditation is horrible. My mind is running all over the place. I just, oh, it's so active and I'm thinking about this and I'm thinking about that." And my next question is: "Are you able to notice it? Are you able to recognize it? Are you able to practice your 6Rs with it?" "Well, yeah." Excellent meditation! But then sometimes you'll come in and you'll be all mellowed out because you had some candy. You had some good meditation. "Oh, I just stayed on the object of meditation and that was just great." And I go: "Oh, okay, go on. Everything's fine." Isn't that right? Ha ha.

See, your active meditation - and you're using the 6Rs - is your working meditation. That's when you're rolling up your sleeves and you're really doing the work. And you're improving your mindfulness, and you're starting to see how this process works more easily. Now, a lot of people, if you ask them when they go to a retreat: "Why are you doing the meditation? What's the point?" "Well, so I can become peaceful and calm." That's not the point of the Buddha's meditation. The point of the Buddha's meditation is, so that you can learn to see how mind's attention moves from one thing to another. And you see that as a process that's impersonal. And before long you'll start to see how this process works. And you'll be teaching yourself this process.

So meditation is - it's great to be peaceful and calm - but I want your understanding of how this process works. I don't care if you're sitting, or you're walking, or you're eating, or you're taking a shower, or you're going to the toilet; keep your meditation going. Keep watching how mind's attention moves away. Let it be, use your 6Rs, come back. That way you're teaching yourself what this is all about. And you are teaching yourself - as I said: "I can't teach you."

Now, a lot of people have an idea that the hindrances are the enemy and you're supposed to fight with them, and some people fight with them a lot, and they cause themselves a lot of suffering. "I don't want this to be here. I don't like this. I want it to stop." "Who wants it to be different than it is?" "Well, I do." "Who has an attachment?" "Well, maybe I do." "Oh, so you're causing your own pain? Is that what we're getting to here?" Do you see? You cause your own pain, you cause your own suffering because of that attachment. So, what do we do with attachments? We 6R the attachments.

Now, when a real big hindrance comes up, and the first time it comes up and you get caught for a period of time; it might be a minute, two minutes, three minutes, five minutes, whatever. But as soon as you recognize: "Oh, there I am. I'm caught by this one", you can't criticize yourself. All you do is use the 6Rs and come back. Now, the next time your mind goes away because of that attachment, you'll start to be more familiar with how the process is working. And after you become familiar with this distraction for a while, then you'll see: "Right before my mind got really taken away, there was this little thing that happened." So, you 6R and you come back, and you get distracted again, but this time you notice that little thing and you 6R right then. You're teaching yourself how this process works. As you become familiar with that, then the period of time that you're distracted starts to become less and less, and you start staying on your object of meditation for longer periods of time.

The hindrances are a very necessary part of this practice. They're very necessary because the hindrances are showing you where your attachments are. That's why they're hindrances because: "This is mine. This is who I am. This is my concept. This is my idea. This is the way I think things should be. I ... I ... I ... I ... I." But the truth is, everything that arises - you didn't ask sadness to arise, you didn't say: "You know, I haven't had any sadness for a long time. I might as well have some now." It comes up because conditions are right for that to come up. You don't have any control over it. You allow it to be, you relax, you smile, you come back to your object of meditation. You might bounce back and forth for a whole sitting with the same hindrance; it doesn't matter. You can't criticize yourself when you forget. Start over again. This is a process of - what was that, Woody Allen: "Play it again, Sam". This is a process of play it again. Do it again, do it again. You'll start to see where your attachments are and how easily you can let go of these things that have been causing you pain. Allow, don't resist anything, don't push anything. Just soften your mind, allow it to be there, and smile.

So, what I want you to do is... when your sitting is good and you can stay with your object of meditation fairly well, sit longer. Okay? You'll want to sit longer. You know, the half an hour is up and you go: "Oh no, I don't want to get up now. I want to stay here." Okay, fine, stay there, but don't sit any less than thirty minutes. Okay? And sometimes that thirty minutes can seem like it's three or four hours when your mind is really active, and there's resisting things, and you're all caught up. Other times it'll seem like it's five minutes and you go, "I don't want to stop now. I want to keep going." Fine, do that. And then you get up, when you feel like it's time to get up, and you go out and do your walking meditation.

Now, when you're doing your walking meditation, walk at a normal pace. You're using your walking meditation for exercise. Sometimes, I tell people I want them to walk fast, especially if they've been sitting for a longer period of time. Sometimes people sit for two hours or three hours. They need to get the circulation going again. So, you walk a little bit faster, but you stay with your spiritual friend all the time. Okay? Now, the walking is going to be somewhat difficult to start off with because you're not used to walking around staying with the spiritual friend, and your mind likes to think about this and that. You can't criticize; you don't get angry because your mind isn't doing what you want it to. You just go, "Okay, we'll 6R that and come back to my spiritual friend again." That's all. Now, walk no less than fifteen minutes. When you're walking, walk with your eyes down, not looking around. If you're walking with your eyes looking around, there goes your mind, and you can be lost for a long period of time without even recognizing. So, keep your eyes down and stay with your spiritual friend as much as you can, and just recognize that the walking is going to be a little bit more difficult. But, after you get used to it, you'll feel like walking more than fifteen minutes; fine. Walk more than fifteen minutes. Walk up to 45 minutes.

Now, one of the things that you can do that will help the sleepiness - the sloth and torpor that I was talking about. Pick a spot where you walk about thirty feet and then stop. Don't turn around. Walk backwards, and then stop ... and then walk forward, and then stop ... and then walk backwards, staying with your spiritual friend all the time. This helps pick up your energy, so that your next sitting will be easier. You won't have the sloth and torpor quite so much. It's amazing how well this works.

So, after walking, don't expect the next sitting to be like the one that you just got up from. "Oh, I had a great sitting. It was an hour and a half and everything, my mind was so peaceful and calm. I'll do that again." And then what happens? It doesn't happen that way to start off with, and then

you start thinking: "Well, maybe if I put a little bit more energy into it, maybe if I put a little bit more energy into it, I'll be able to get back to that place that I was before." And your mind starts to get more restless and more active. Why? Because you're putting in too much effort, you're putting in too much energy, you're trying to make things happen the way you want them to happen. Things are going to happen the way they happen. Don't try to force anything, don't try to push, don't try to make your meditation be better. If you have an active meditation when you sit, fine... 6R, smile, come back, have fun with it. "Well, it's not as good as it was." Okay, so? Who said it was supposed to be? Right? "Well, I want it... oh, there I go again."

So, this meditation is about allowing whatever is going to happen in the present moment to be there by itself; 6R, come back to your object of meditation. It's never going to be the same. It's always going to be changing, it's always going to be different, and you can't control it. You can't make it be the way you want it to. If you do, you put up too much energy into it and now you have all of this suffering from the restlessness. But the hindrances, quite often don't come up just one at a time. It's like: 'beat the kid when he's down'. So, the restlessness comes up and: "I don't like that. I don't want it to be like that." So, you have aversion and restlessness to work with. How lucky can you get? When you see that restlessness arises, the wish you make for yourself is feeling peaceful and calm; feel that. Now, restlessness can be really tough. You feel like jumping out of your skin. You feel like you have to move: "Can't stand it." And there can be all kinds of different pains that arise in your body: "Well, if I just shift a little bit that'll make it better. Oh, what's one of the rules? Don't move." Watch how mind moves. Okay?

Now, one of the things that seems to happen on retreats - and I tell people about it over and over again, but they still do it, and I tell them not to - is they think sitting is more important than walking. So, they'll be sitting in meditation and then they'll go: "Well, this sitting is really good. I'll just do this. Now, I'll just sit for longer." And what happens is, your body energy starts to go down, and when your body energy starts to go down, you'll hit some places that you'll think: "Oh, I've really got a good meditation now. It's really something. I just had a period of five or six minutes where it just like somebody took an eraser and erased everything that could happen in five or six minutes. This is great meditation!" And you come running to me and you tell me about this, and I look at it and I go: "You're just getting caught by your sloth and torpor. You have to walk more!" It's not any spiritual attainment, I promise. The walking is very

necessary. If you feel like you have to change your posture - after thirty minutes - then get up and walk. It's every bit as important as sitting.

Now, everybody is going to have a job. I think you already talked about that, but that doesn't mean it's time to just let your mind ho-hum around, and do the job, and get it over with so I can go meditate. That's the time for you to learn how to do a job while you're meditating, while you're watching what your mind is doing. So, you can let go of that distraction, come back to what you're doing, smile, have fun doing it. There's nothing to accomplish, there's just doing. Okay?

Now, every day at 5:25, I want everybody here, 5:25AM.

BV: We used to say 5:30, and then it was 5:35, and then it gets to be 5:40 because one person doesn't come, and we're not going to start the meditation until everybody gets here. So, I want you here a little bit before 5:30, so we can start at 5:30. We'll sit in meditation and you can do your walking if you want to walk after a half an hour, go outside and stay with your meditation and walk, come back in, you can sit until seven o'clock, and then that's breakfast time.

BV: Okay. After breakfast, you'll have time to do your personal things; brush your teeth, whatever. And then there's a work period for one hour. After that then it's walking and sitting here, in the meditation hall, until eleven o'clock. At eleven o'clock, the bell will be rung and we'll have lunch. After lunch, you'll have a period of time until one o'clock that you can lay down and take rest if you want. You can sleep, whatever you feel like; it's up to you. If you feel like going for a walk, that can be restful too; it's up to you. Be here at one o'clock. And then there's walking and sitting until 5:30PM, and at 5:30 you can have some tea.

How many people here have physical problems and need to take some kind of food if they have medicine? Okay. I'll talk to you... Okay. At six o'clock, please be here. After the Dhamma talk, it's not time to chitchat, it's time to do more meditation. Now, after the Dhamma talk, it's good to go out and do some walking because you're sitting here for an hour, hour and a half, sometimes two. I get long winded, so sometimes it's a little bit longer than that. But get up, do your walking meditation, come back in. Don't go to your room and say: "Well, that's enough meditation for the day. I'm going to lay down and go to sleep." Stay in here until ten o'clock, please. And then at ten o'clock, go to your room, lay down, take rest 'til five o'clock in the morning. That's seven hours.

Do you see how it... anybody that's done any of the retreats that I've... Vipassanā retreats. When I went to Mahasi Centre, I had to go to bed at eleven o'clock, get up at three o'clock, and it was meditation for the rest of the day. I'm giving you seven hours, plus an hour after lunch! You see how... this is a walk in the park! Right? So, you're not going to be run down, you're not going to be overtired. If you do get overtired, come and tell me and we'll work something out. I don't want you to be sleepy all the time.

Now, right before you lay down, starting to relax, right before you go to sleep, make two determinations. One, that you're going to wake up at a particular time: "I'm going to wake up at 4:59 in the morning", and try to hit that. The next determination is that you make a determination that you wake up with a smile. Okay? You wake up with a smile on your face; keep it going. Do that every night. Now, these kind of determinations - although it's just like you're just starting out, they don't seem so important - they get important later on. I had a student in Missouri that I started teaching her about determinations and how to gain mastery in going in and out of jhāna. And working with determinations, now, helps set you up so that I can teach you mastery in the future. So, it's real important that you start doing that. Okay?

Whatever kind of distraction you have, learn to use the 6Rs. Learn to see where your attachment to that is. What are hindrances when they arise? They're something that happen because of past actions. They arise in the present moment. What you do with what arises in the present moment dictates what's going to happen in the future. If you resist the present moment, if you fight with it, if you try to control it, if you try to force it to be the way you want it to be, you can look forward to more and more suffering. Or you can 6R it, and eventually that hindrance will start to fade away. And when it fades away, first thing that happens is you will feel great relief, and right after that you will feel joy arising. And the joy is going to make you smile whether you want to or not. I mean this is good stuff. Okay? You're going to feel like smiling. The joy will be there for a little while, and then you'll feel very tranquil, and you'll feel very comfortable in your mind and in your body.

Now, what I just described to you is the first jhāna. Jhāna is a Pali word that means 'a level of understanding'. When you get into the first jhāna, you're beginning to understand how mind is working, and all of these different levels of jhāna are different levels of your understanding. And that's one of the things that makes the meditation real fun because you

feel like you're progressing, you feel like: "I'm starting to get this. I'm starting to understand it."

So, the more you can remember to use the 6Rs, the more you can allow whatever arises to be there by itself, without getting involved in your thinking about, the easier the meditation becomes. That's a promise. The more you resist or fall back into your old habits of meditation: "Well, I'll try. I used to do this for twenty years. I think I'll try that again." Now, that stops your meditation. That stops your progress, and then we have to start digging around to figure out what you're doing, so that we can get you back on the path that has progress in it. It's real important to just follow these directions without adding anything or subtracting anything. Just follow the 6Rs. Smile. Okay?

"But I don't feel like smiling." I don't care... Why? Because the corners of your mouth are incredibly important. When the corners of your mouth go up, so does your mental state. What's the point of doing the meditation? To have an uplifted mind, so you can be happy more of the time, and you can start recognizing when you cause yourself suffering, and you can let that go so you can be happier. So, if I see you're not smiling... have fun with this meditation. Don't get serious. Anytime you get serious, there is an attachment. There is the belief that: "I am this. I am that", and then there gets to be the want to control.

See, we're made up of five different things. You have a physical body. There is feeling: feeling is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, doesn't have anything to do with emotion. It's just a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling, neither-painful-nor-pleasant.

You have perception: perception is a part of the mind that names things. This is a cup. Perception is a part of the mind that recognized that.

You have thoughts, and you have consciousness.

What happens is, a painful feeling arises, and then you try to control the feeling with your thoughts. And the more you try to control your feeling with your thoughts, the bigger and more intense the feeling becomes, and the more thoughts you try to put into it to control it, and that makes you suffer.

So, the first thing you have to do - it doesn't matter whether it's a pain in the body or in the mind - is recognize: "This is how this process works". First thing you do, let go of the thoughts and relax. Let go of that tight

mental fist around the feeling, and allow that painful feeling to be there by itself. It's only a feeling. It's not even yours, you didn't ask it to come up. Let the feeling be there, relax, smile, come back to your object of meditation. Now, depending on your attachment to it, you might have to work with that for a little while. But like I told you, the hindrances come up and they are your teacher. They are showing you exactly where your attachment is. So, what do you do? Let it be, relax, smile, and come back. Does it again? Okay, let it be, relax, smile, come back.

Now, another thing that I'm finding out that people are doing, and this is that they're trying to use the 6Rs too much. So, a thought comes up and they don't... it doesn't pull their attention away, but they put their attention on the thought and then try to 6R it, and they can't get quite done before another thought comes up. So, they're trying to: 6R ... 6R ... 6R ... 6R ... 6R. Only if your mind gets pulled away, otherwise ignore it. Okay? So, there's a thought there: "It's not pulling my attention to it. Let it be." Stay with your object of meditation. Don't try too hard. Almost everybody that comes - especially if they've done a retreat with anybody else - they come and they start practicing, and they try too hard: "Well, it can't be that easy." It is. Believe me, this is easy. All you got to do is smile. All you got to do is 6R and come back to your object of meditation, without putting too much effort into it. "Well, my mind keeps getting distracted." Okay, so? That means you have a working meditation. Good! That's helping your mind, your mindfulness to get stronger so you can see how the process works more easily.

Okay. So, does anybody have any questions? Okay.

ST: The first one is, if we're not experiencing sloth and torpor, do you still want us to walk and then walk backwards?

BV: Only when you have the sloth and torpor. That helps to pick up your energy.

ST: The second question is, the first ten minutes is loving-kindness to self?

BV: Yes.

ST: And then it's loving-kindness to a spiritual friend, and stay with them?

BV: To a spiritual friend, same spiritual friend... stay with the same spiritual friend the rest of the time. Then when you come and...

ST: Does the time being a whole week? The rest of the time...

BV: I'll tell you when to quit. But, every time you come to sit, the first ten minutes to yourself, the rest of the time with your spiritual friend. That's when you're doing your walking, when you're doing your daily activities...

ST: So, we're staying with the spiritual friend.

BV: Staying with the spiritual friend...

ST: The whole time?

BV: The whole time, until you come and sit, and then the first ten minutes for yourself.

ST: And we're making a wish for our spiritual friend just as we were doing for ourselves.

BV: Yes, and feel the wish. That's really, really important.

ST: I have just a comment. I'm sitting here thinking... I sat here a year ago, and I heard these instructions and I thought: "This is just too simple. It can't be this simple." And so, it is! It is that simple, it is that easy. And I'm a kind of a go-for-the-gold kind of guy and...

BV: That gets in your way.

ST: That is, it doesn't work...

BV: It doesn't work.

BV: There is a running joke between a student and I about kicking a tree. But one day he wrote to me about a hindrance that he had on the email. And what I try to do is come up with something that's so absurd that it's going to make him laugh. So, he was telling me about how much this hindrance hurt, and he was really getting tired of it, and he wanted it to stop. And I said: "Well, really get into the pain. I want you to experience the pain completely. As a matter of fact, I want you to take your shoes off and go out to the biggest tree you can find, and kick it as hard as you can. That way you'll really have some pain!" And as soon as I said that, that made him start laughing and the hindrance dissolved. He saw how absurd it was!

Now, the laughing, it sounds really bizarre. I mean, how many meditation teachers have you ever run across that told you to laugh, and told you to have fun, and told you to smile? Well, what does the laughing do? The laughing makes you go from: "I'm mad and I don't like this" to "It's only anger. That's easy to let go of. I don't need that." It helps change your perspective. It's real important because the perspective is everything.

What this meditation will teach you is how everything that arises is just part of a process, and it's not your process, it's just a process. So, why take it personally? Every time you take it personally, it hurts because: "I'm there and I want to control it. I want it to be different that it is." Well, get rid of the "I" and there goes the pain. It's really an amazing thing.

Craving is not particularly strong, but it is particularly persistent. And it comes up in all kinds of things. And you'll be able to start recognizing the tension and tightness in your mind, and in your body. And when you start letting go of that, you're experiencing a mundane - it means "worldly" - kind of Nibbāna. What is Nibbāna? 'Ni'- is a negative, 'bana is' fire. So, when you experience 'no fire' - no craving - you're experiencing the cessation of craving. And that's where your mind becomes pure, that's where your mind becomes clear, that's where you let go of all of your attachments.

BV: And there's a sutta called the Fire Sutta, and the Buddha talked about: "Everything is burning." What is it burning with? Craving. So, when you let go of the craving, is there any more burning? Now your mind's pure. See how simple it is? But remember that it is in a deeply ingrained thing that's going to keep coming up over and over and over again. And as it does, it's helping you to improve your mindfulness, so you can recognize it, and you can let it go more easily that way.

When I was in Germany this time, I was reading a sutta and it started talking about lust, hatred, and delusion, and it dawned on me: lust, hatred, and delusion - "I like it", "I don't like it", "I". That's craving! That's another way of saying: "This is craving." So, what to do? 6R, that's simple. Okay? Anybody else? Yes?

ST: I just want to say that 6R tool is just great! Because it can be applied at the grossest levels of mind, and frustration, and anger, and identity, and everything - throughout the most, most subtle experiences of mind that take place. And so it becomes just a wonderful way of working with the things that are taking place. It can't be overstated.

BV: See, I repeat myself how many times? Now, the thing with the 6Rs is, it will take you to Nibbāna. Do it so often that it will become an automatic, and that means when something just starts to come up, your mind recognizes it, and you can start 6Ring right then and let it go. And it's going to be somewhat difficult at first. You're not used to it, but that's okay. It's a learning process. You're teaching mind, you're teaching yourself, you're teaching yourself where your attachments are, and you're teaching yourself how to let go of those attachments, so that you can have a pure mind and a happy mind all the time. Easy, right? No! Simple, yes, not easy... because of our attachments.

We start thinking that some of our concepts are really the most important things in the world and this is the way it's supposed to be, and concepts are part of clinging. Now, every thought that you have that arises is a concept. What's a concept? This is a chair, right? Where is it? Where is the chair? Is it the legs? Is it the seat? Is it the back? Is it the arms? Where's the chair? The chair is a concept made up of a lot of little things put together to make this the concept.

ST: It obstructs the reality.

BV: Oh yes. It obstructs the reality. There's no getting around that at all because that's part of clinging.

ST: It's always a lie.

BV: Well, the craving is the first part of that. That leads to the concepts, and always those concepts involve "me": "This is who "I" am." The start of "me" is the craving: "I like this. I don't like that." Then it's tension, and then all of the reasons why you like it or don't like start popping up in your mind. Those are all the concepts, the beliefs, the opinions, the ideas. So, when you use the 6Rs, now you're getting exactly in the present moment without any colored lenses. No concepts, no opinions, only this right now. And this is perfect. Okay? This will become clearer as the week goes by, I promise.

Another thing is when I'm giving a Dhamma talk, if I say something that you don't understand, don't hesitate to ask a question. There's no such a thing as a stupid question. There is no such a thing. If you don't understand what I'm saying, I want to say it in a way that will be clear, so that your meditation can be good. That's more important than sitting and not questioning.

ST: I have a question. Your spiritual friend has to be a Human?

BV: Yes, absolutely. Why? - This is not a bad question.

ST: Can that be all beings.

BV: No.

SK: Not yet.

BV: This is a gradual training, and there's going to be times that you're going to have: "Stay with the same spiritual friend, I'm bored. I want something else to happen." Well, good. Continue on, go through that.

SK: It's part of the process.

BV: But it has to be a human being that's alive, and the reason is: that's how the meditation develops. It doesn't work when you're doing it with an animal. This is a training, and as you go deeper in the training, I will show you other things. And eventually you will get to radiate loving-kindness to all beings, and beyond. But this is called "Breaking Down The Barriers", and this is what we do first.

As long as you follow the directions; that's the key. Don't add anything, don't subtract anything, right now. That doesn't mean always, but it just means for right now because this is your training period. Okay?

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 Buddha's dispensation.
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

Proofed by CF 25th April 2012
Review by DJ