

2016_12_31_1_NYrR_LMC.mp4

working with experience as it unfolds, shamatha instructions for posture and breath, working with distractions

[00:09:47] First of all, good morning to all of you. And welcome to your retreat. Today's little mini-retreat is unusual in a number of ways. One is that it's the last day of the year. Which in one sense, really doesn't mean anything. Kind of an arbitrary marker on the earth's movement around the sun. Nonetheless... skillful people make use of what they have. So we can mark this as an ending point of one year and the almost beginning of another year. In our tradition, this is what we sometimes call a Bardo. The Bardo is a place that's in between two other places. ... So in another sense, we're always in a Bardo. Always in between two places. What just happened and what's about to happen. ... And the circumstances of our lives are changed by the way in which we navigate that space between what just was and what is about to be. So again, it's strictly a cultural issue in one sense... the end of one year and the beginning of another. But again, skillful people make use of what they have. So this is what we have.

[00:14:44] I'll do my best to remind us at the beginning of those breaks that our intention is to observe silence on the break in order to optimize the retreat experience and enhance the benefit. It's a rare opportunity, really, to sit with a group of people, some of whom you know and some of whom you don't know. But nonetheless, it can, and usually does, feel like a very safe environment... especially since we're not speaking. So do your best to maintain that aspect of this morning's practice sessions and on the breaks.

[00:17:24] It's usual on our short retreats that we have some kind of a consistent theme to the sessions. It helps to bring our focus... in, regularly during the practice. ... One of the things that's very difficult to do, I think it would be fair to say in most instances, impossible... during our ordinary activities in this life, is to pay attention to our own mind. To pay attention to our experiences as they unfold. We can't find the time. We can't find the space. And then on top of that, we didn't do it enough to be able to do it in the spaces that *are* available. And so bringing this year to a close... good closings are the basis of good openings.

[00:19:05] So we will close this year by making a special effort to provide ourselves the time to pay attention. To pay attention to our experiences as they unfold... including our distractions. Did you know that if you pay attention to your distractions, they are not distractions. [laughter] They are only distractions when you didn't invite them and didn't notice them. As soon as you pay attention, they are the ground of practice and realization.

[00:20:04] So this morning and today, this afternoon and so on... every opportunity you get, even just for one second... notice what you're feeling, what you're thinking. What images are passing through your mind? And do that... with no judgment whatsoever. As if you were lying on your back in the grass on a warm day, watching the clouds go by. You would not judge those clouds. It wouldn't occur to you. So I'd like to put a challenge in front of you. See if you can watch your own experiences in that way... like clouds going by in the sky. Different shapes, sizes. Some of them appear like wild animals and others just like a cloud Give yourself the space to enjoy all of them without any judgment. Knowing that there is not a single one which will abide for more than a few moments In this way, we become intimate. Without attachment and aversion... we become intimate with ourselves.

[00:22:28] So as a basis of this practice, we will begin our day by turning our minds away from all of our troubles, all of our attachments. We turn our mind to refuge... in the teachings of the Buddha. And of the Buddha itself, that is our own inherently pure awakened mind. And in the community of practitioners, including all the great beings... currently in this world, currently in our memories. ... We rely upon the teachings they left behind, for those who are no longer here. And for those who are, we rely upon their continued inspiration. ... Joyfully. So we'll begin by reciting the short refuge prayer along with the aspiration that we might attain *deep* realization of our own pure nature. And that we might attain that... in order to become an effective benefactor... of all beings.

sangha [00:24:51] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:26:48] This calm abiding practice then... can be done in many ways. Whatever way you're familiar with... whichever method you're drawn to, of course, use that. And if you are bereft of a method, then try the following. Begin first by noticing your body. Where you're sitting. It's good to have your body erect... in what we might just call roughly... good posture. So you establish that good posture by kind of moving your body around a little bit and just noticing... that it finds its own right place. And all of that takes a little bit of effort. When you have done that, then relax. Without slouching. But also without any more than the absolute minimum effort to maintain a vertical position. ...

[00:29:16] When you are comfortable and relaxed, then... bring your awareness to the movement of your breath. ... Follow your breath as you inhale. Follow the experience... of the air coming in. A little expansion of part of your body. And then you follow the breath as you exhale. Now, as we know, this process runs just fine automatically. It does not require our awareness. If it did, we'd all be dead. [quiet laughter] Since we're not all dead, then it *must* be automatic. In this practice, the very best approach is... let it just be... as it ordinarily is. And I'll admit, letting anything 'just be' for sentient beings is nearly impossible. What to speak of our breath. And yet almost all the time, we just let it be. We don't notice that we're letting it be, because the moment we notice that... we control it. We would like to just notice it. See the breath coming and going. Experience it rather than being the ones behind the wheel. We are designed... to allow the breath to move on its own. Which is what we almost always do. Except... when we notice it.

[00:31:53] So when you notice it and begin to control the breath, we call that a distraction. In the context of meditation, we would like to be free of distraction. So when you notice that you have been distracted... just notice the distraction. Like you would notice one of those clouds floating overhead. It's so easy, actually. ... Treat the distractions like a cloud. Even if the distraction is anger... doesn't matter. It will soon pass. If the distraction is attachment... filled with desire... that too will pass. ... If you can develop the skill of just noticing... in a stable way, your experiences as they arise and fall... you will naturally become adept at meditation. And you will be far less plagued by hopes and fears. And your meditation will mature naturally.

silence [00:33:54] *period of meditation*

sangha [00:54:23] *dedicating the merit*