

**GODWIN SAMARARATNE**

**THE GENTLE WAY  
OF  
BUDDHIST MEDITATION**

(A RE-PRESENTATION OF GODWIN'S  
RETREAT TALKS IN HONG KONG, 1997)

EDITED BY  
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## PREFACE

We will always be tremendously grateful to Leung Yuk-ching, Paul Baran, and Godwin's friends in Hong Kong who published the first transcriptions of his retreat talks on the Internet shortly before his passing away in March 2000. For the next 3 years they were the only readily available record of Godwin's teaching, and proved to be a most valuable resource for those who treasured Godwin's special approach to meditation, or those who wished to become acquainted with his teaching.

However, having now edited two sets of talks from Godwin's retreats in Germany, I felt the need to revisit these Hong Kong talks and seek to put them into a coherent and consistent shape, to be more readable for those coming fresh to Godwin's teaching.

The first set of talks from Hong Kong, given at the Chi Lin Nunnery needed only minor re-editing to correct the grammar, remove unnecessary repetitions, and ensure the smooth flow of the written word and clarity in what Godwin was seeking to express.

The second set of talks was given at a one-day retreat in the Nunnery. I have liberally rearranged the material from the morning and afternoon sessions so that the guided meditations are followed by the questions and answers pertaining to the relevant meditation. I hope this makes the material flow more logically and coherently from one topic to the next. The Dhamma talk in the evening has been only slightly re-edited along the lines outlined above.

The third set of talks and discussions are from a seven-day meditation retreat at Fa Yim Kok. Besides the normal re-editing I have employed in this series, I found that the discussions in particular required substantial work to remove irrelevancies which did not add anything to our understanding; I have also occasionally rewritten some phrases and sentences to clarify the point Godwin was trying to make.

I would like to express my sincere thanks once again to all those involved in bringing out the original transcription of Godwin's Dhamma teachings in Hong Kong. Thanks are also due to Anandajoti Bhikkhu, webmaster of [www.godwin-home-page.net](http://www.godwin-home-page.net), and also to Bhante S. Dhammika, Susan Harmer, Valerie Lauw, and Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society in Singapore for all their help in preparing this book. I hope this re-presentation of Godwin's teachings will continue to inspire all who read them.

Jeanne Mynett  
June 2004

# Remembering Godwin Samararatne

BASED ON A TALK GIVEN AT THE NILAMBE MEDITATION CENTRE  
ON THE 4TH ANNIVERSARY OF GODWIN'S PASSING AWAY

BY

**BHANTE. S. DHAMMIKA**

Godwin Samararatne was born on the 6th of September 1932 in Kandy, Sri Lanka. His father was the chief clerk of a tea estate at Hantane in the hills above Kandy and his mother was a simple up-country housewife. He had three brothers and four sisters. A younger sister died prematurely and an older brother died in a car accident on the day of his wedding. His three surviving sisters were Dorothy, Matilde and Lakshmi and Godwin was the youngest of the two surviving brothers, Felix and Hector. The family lived in a modest house on the Peradeniya Road just a short walk from the heart of Kandy. Everyone agrees that Godwin showed an interest in Buddhism from his earliest time, due mainly to the piety of his mother. He always accompanied her to the temple on Poya days and would sit listening to the sermons rather than play games as the other children did. Once he turned up at home with two brinjals which he had surreptitiously picked from someone's garden. His mother went back with him to the house where he had got the vegetables and made him return them.

During his High School years Godwin's best friend was Siri Gunawardana who later ordained as Venerable Sivali and became a well-known and respected meditation teacher. Godwin's interest in meditation was such that during the school holidays he went to the Kanduboda Meditation Centre several times and later got his mother to go too. He was an able but average student and after finishing his education got a job at the Kegalle Public Library in 1956. Even then his gentle, kindly nature was evident. On one occasion the night-watchman of the library, asked him for permission to spend the night inside the library as he had nowhere else to sleep. Feeling sorry for him, Godwin gave it. But when he came to work the next day, the man was gone, as were many library books as well. Godwin had to replace the missing books out of his own salary. Later Godwin became Chief Librarian in the D.S. Senanayaka Library in Kandy where he worked until his early retirement in 1979.

Godwin was about 5 foot 10 inches tall, of average build and with a dark complexion. His hair was straight and black, turning gray and then silvery-white when he got older. He had slightly hunched shoulders which became a little more so as he aged. One of his mannerisms was to run his hand over the hair as if to flatten it. Another mannerism was to hold his right elbow with his left hand and put his right hand up to his cheek. He would sometimes remain like this for hours. At other times he would cross his arms in front of him as if giving himself a hug. Very often when talking to people, listening to them or just sitting quietly, he would close his eyes. But by far Godwin's most noticeable physical feature was his beautiful smile, a smile which would often break into a giggle or a laugh. Godwin had almost no interest in his appearance other than that he be presentable and clean. Whether at home, at the meditation centre or traveling overseas, he always wore simple, plain clothes which he had often not even bothered to iron.

When I was staying in Hong Kong in 1996, I invited him to stop off there after one of his tours before returning to Sri Lanka. I had spoken to my friends in the Colony about him and they were anxious to hear him teach. About fifteen of them accompanied me to the airport to welcome Godwin. He emerged from the arrival lounge dressed as usual in his nondescript clothes, wearing an old pair of sandals and carrying a rather tattered bag. I noticed my friends' faces drop. 'Is that him?' one of them whispered to me, a doubtful look on his face. Clearly, they were not impressed. But of course it wasn't long before they warmed to him and developed a deep appreciation for him. Godwin needed no fancy props, grandiose titles or public relations techniques to impress people. One only needed to spend a little time in his company to become aware of his very special qualities.

The three people who had the most influence on Godwin's spiritual development were the German monk Ven. Nyanaponika, the famous Buddhist academic and philosopher K. N. Jayatillake and the Indian thinker J. Krishnamurti. Although interested in meditation from an early age Godwin found it difficult to find people who could explain it to him in terms he could understand. In the early 1960's he had begun going to the fledgling Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy to help Ven. Nyanaponika and the then general secretary Mr. Richard Abhayasekera. He would help out around the office, greet visitors and afterwards talk with Ven. Nyanaponika about meditation and psychology. In time he developed the highest regard for Ven. Nyanaponika and always recommended his book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* and *The Power of Mindfulness* as one of the best books on meditation.

Around this time he also met and became friends with Prof. Jayatillake, author of the ground-breaking work *The Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. He would often visit the professor at his home to talk about Buddhist philosophy, and in particular, its relation with Western philosophy. It was also Prof. Jayatilleke who first interested Godwin in parapsychology. Godwin once said to me: 'I learned to think from K.N (Jayatillake), Ven. Nyanaponika encouraged me to read the suttas, and Krishnamurti's writings made sense of it all.'

It was Krishnamurti's radical and unstructured approach to spirituality that appealed most to Godwin. He sometimes described it as 'Dhamma without the Buddhism'. He was deeply influenced in particular by Krishnamurti's idea of 'choiceless awareness' and of having no opinions, no self-image and no expectations. But despite his great admiration for Krishnamurti, when the great man came to Sri Lanka in 1980 Godwin did not go to Colombo to attend his talks. I asked him why he was not going and he replied that he was familiar with Krishnamurti's teachings, that seeing him would add nothing to that and it was therefore not necessary to go. Krishnamurti was well-known for sometimes scolding his audience and saying that if they really understood him they wouldn't keep coming to hear him speak. I think it is true to say that Godwin was one of those people who really did understand Krishnamurti.

Except for the few times he went to Kandaboda in his youth Godwin never really meditated in the formal sense of sitting crossed-legged and practicing a particular technique. He was not a meditator in the conventional sense, rather he just seemed to have become effortlessly meditative. From an early age, encouraged by what he learned from Ven. Nyanaponika, Krishnamurti and the suttas, a spontaneous awareness led him to becoming naturally mindful and serene. Likewise, the very palpable warmth and compassion that people felt in his presence were not a result of practicing meditation on loving-kindness in the conventional way, it just seemed to arise from something innately good within him.

I once asked Godwin how he got the way he was and he said, 'I don't really know, Bhante, it just happened. I must have meditated a lot in my last life.' Then he let out one of his characteristic giggles. On another occasion I asked him if he was ever interested in women and he told me that he did in fact once have a girl friend. 'What happened?' I enquired. He replied, 'I was in my early twenties. In those days boys and girls could only meet in secret. We would agree to meet at a particular place and sometimes she would turn up and sometimes she wouldn't. When she was late or when she didn't come I used to notice how painful I felt and so I just stopped going to meet her and so she gave up on me.'

When I first met Godwin in 1977 he was still living with his mother and sister and her family on the Peradeniya Road. He shared a small room with his young nephew Palitha. The room was cluttered and everything was covered with the dust thrown up by the busy road outside the window. Shelves covered two walls right up to the ceiling and these were stacked with books, photocopies of magazine articles and off-prints of papers from various academic journals.

If the state of the room did not necessarily reflect Godwin's mind then the contents of his reading material certainly did. The range was wide but several subjects predominated – psychology, parapsychology, anthropology, sociology and Buddhism. Godwin's bed too was usually covered with books, newspaper cuttings and journals. Anyone who came to visit him would be invited to sit on the edge of his bed and talk. During the discussion he would sometimes begin rummaging through the mess on his bed or go the shelves, pull out a book and show a passage from it to the visitor or give it to them to take and read. I often borrowed some of his books and although I always returned them, I can never remember him asking me if I had done so.

Godwin had accumulated his huge unruly library from all the overseas friends he had made through the years. One of the first of these was Prof. Ian Stevenson, the famous parapsychologist from the University of Virginia. He first came to Sri Lanka in 1968 to study cases of children who could remember their former lives. During Stevenson's stay he was helped by Francis Story and V. F. Gunaratna, both good friends of Godwin's. On his return in 1970 Francis Story introduced Stevenson to Godwin who from then on became the professor's interpreter, friend and indispensable research assistant. Whenever Godwin heard of a child with past life memories, he would collect the data and make detailed reports for Stevenson.

In 1977 the professor invited Godwin to Virginia to help with his research. As a result of this association, Godwin gradually came to be known by many of the sociologists and anthropologists who came to Sri Lanka to study. There were few who did not benefit from his translation skills, his understanding of Buddhist doctrine and his wide knowledge of Sri Lankan customs and traditions, and Godwin for his part was always happy to help.

By the early 1970's, hardly a week would go by without him receiving a package from the United States, the UK or Germany, with a book or a monograph either inscribed to him or acknowledging his contribution to it. Godwin's copy of Ian Stevenson's *Children Who Remember Their Previous Lives* is inscribed, 'For Godwin with many thanks for all your contributions to this work, from Ian Stevenson, January 15, 1988'. His copy of J. S. Kruger's *Metatheism – Early Buddhism and Traditional Christian Theism* is inscribed by the author, 'To my teacher and friend Godwin with affection and gratitude'. There were dozens of such books in his library.

Although Godwin read widely and enjoyed talking with or listening to academics, he was anything but bookish or academic himself. He had no academic training and was interested in such things only to the degree that they shed light on the human condition. As soon as a discussion he was participating in or a book he was reading became theoretical or over-speculative he would lose interest.

In about 1977 Godwin got to know Dr. L. Rodrigo who worked in the Psychiatric Ward of the Kandy General Hospital. The doctor was interested in the therapeutic applications of meditation and asked Godwin if he would be interested in seeing some of his patients. People often talked to Godwin about their problems sensing that he was a sympathetic listener and a skillful counselor, but Dr. Rodrigo's offer gave him the opportunity to work more systematically with people. He enjoyed this work enormously, not only because it introduced him to the diversity and complexity of human suffering but also because he liked nothing more than helping people in distress.

Soon a steady stream of people came to see him. On many occasions he invited me to sit and listen as he talked with these people. It was fascinating and deeply moving to watch him work. You could almost see the compassion welling up in Godwin as these people unburdened themselves to him. He nearly always listened with his eyes closed. If they broke into tears, he would open his eyes and take them by the hand or gently pat them on the back. Not surprisingly, many people felt better by just spending some time with him.

Using ideas he had read about in the Buddha's discourses, he gradually evolved ways of helping people with mental problems. His approach was based on these concepts: befriending the person so that they could speak openly and freely about their problem – reassuring them that their problem was solvable – encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves – calming them with breathing meditation – teaching them ways to deal with the symptoms – getting them to do meditation on loving-kindness.

Apart from this informal help, Godwin also initiated several projects around Kandy to assist people in a more sustained manner. The first and most successful of these was the Visitors Program he set up for the Cancer Home. He organized people to provide terminal patients at the home with food, toiletries and other basic necessities. His role in this project was to offer patients counseling and in particular to teach them, through meditation, to deal with pain and the fear of death.

I accompanied Godwin on his weekly visits for about two years and I noticed that sympathetic smiling presence was often enough to make people feel better. On one occasion we stopped to talk to a woman who had a large tumor in her mouth. So bad was the stench of her breath as she spoke that I had to discreetly turn aside. Godwin, on the other hand, sat talking with and listened to her, seemingly unaffected by the smell.

On another occasion a very poor old Tamil woman pleaded with us for some money so she could buy a tin of powdered milk. Godwin took some money from his pocket and gave it to her. After we had finished in the wards, we walked out to the bus stop. As we stood waiting for the bus Godwin said to me, 'Bhante, have you got any money?' In those days I never used money and I replied, 'You know I have none. Where is the money you had?' 'I gave it all to that women' he said and then giggled. We had to walk all the way back to town. It was typical of Godwin that when moved by compassion he would give without the slightest thought of himself. Of course I know that the Buddhist scriptures speak of 'giving without

holding anything back' but Godwin is the only person I have ever met who was able to do this quite naturally and unselfconsciously.

After the students' uprising in 1971 in which many young monks had been involved, the Peradeniya University authorities closed down the University monastery. However, by the late 70's, they decided to reestablish a Buddhist 'presence' on the campus. Consequently the old Engineers' bungalow was given over to be used as a Buddhist centre.

As it happened, very few students were interested in religious activities at that time and the centre was largely unused. However, a few lecturers from the University, specifically Prof. Mrs. Lily de Silva and Prof. W.C. Vitnatchchi began meeting there once a week, mainly to discuss suttas. Gradually a few outsiders began to attend as well and by 1977 a regular group had formed. Those in the group were Godwin, Mrs. de Silva, Vitnatchchi, Mr. Ratnakara, Pat Jayatillake and Dr. Parakrama Fernando. It was here that I first met Godwin.

The group met twice a week. On Thursdays we would read a sutta and then discuss it. Being a scholar of Pali, Prof. Mrs. de Silva would make comments on technical terms. Parakrama would point out any philosophical implications in it, while Godwin would suggest things that could have practical applications. Discussions would sometimes get heated or would drift off onto other subjects. I noticed that whenever this happened Godwin would cross his arms, close his eyes and become quiet. On Friday nights we would meet, do silent meditation for an hour and then have a discussion over a cup of tea or coffee. Again Godwin's contributions to these discussions were always pertinent and sometimes startlingly profound.

Eventually we all become friends and decided to call our little group Veluvana after the bamboo grove in India where the Buddha sometimes used to stay. As there was no monk at the centre, I was invited to take up residence and became the informal organizer of the group's activities. Various scholars visiting the University would be invited to address us or participate in our discussions, some of the more distinguished being Bishop Robinson, the famous 'Honest to God' prelate, the Sanskrit scholar Richard Gombrich from Cambridge, Walpola Rahula and Prof. David Kalupahana from the University of Hawaii.

In early 1979 a prosperous Kandy businessman, Mr. Alahakoon, and his wife began coming regularly to our Friday night meditations. When the University gave notice that we would have to move out of the bungalow so it could be used as the University Staff Club, Mr. Alahakoon announced that he would donate some land from his tea-estate for the establishment of a meditation centre and pay for the construction of some buildings. Thus our small group evolved into what eventually became the Nilambe Meditation Centre. Godwin left his job as Librarian in Kandy in 1979, at first to be the caretaker at the new Center but later becoming the resident teacher.

The inaugural meditation course at Nilambe was taught by the popular American meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein and, having attracted about seventy local and overseas participants, was judged a success. But after the course, when everyone including Joseph Goldstein went home, it suddenly occurred to us that we now had a Meditation Centre but no meditation teacher!

In the end I was talked into leading courses during the first ten days of every month while Godwin managed the Center, although within a year he took over as the teacher. In the beginning, like me, he really had no idea how to structure and conduct a meditation course.

During meditation sessions he would sit, as usual, slouched against the wall, holding his right elbow with his left hand and his right hand on his cheek. 'Godwin!' I chided him, 'You have to sit up straight or you cannot expect the meditators to do so.' But despite the fact that he did not have the look of a conventional teacher, word soon spread that there was something very special about him.

Initially, people came to Nilambe mainly to learn meditation but in time they came because of Godwin. By the mid-1980's he became so well-known that he started to receive invitations to teach in Switzerland, Germany, the U.K. and later in South Africa, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. He taught meditation to all sorts of groups, including Christian priests and pastors, and Chinese Mahayana Buddhists. Throughout the 1990's increasing numbers of both foreigners and Sri Lankans were coming to the expanding Nilambe Meditation Centre.

In all the years I knew Godwin I cannot remember ever hearing him say anything negative about anyone or ever showing the slightest trace of annoyance, anger or disapproval. I don't think this was because he was trying to be 'nice' or because he was blind to people's flaws – he could be uncannily perceptive about people. Rather it was because other peoples' negativity simply didn't affect him, even if he was on the receiving end of it. Nor can I ever remember him being impatient, depressed, angry or worried.

He was very close to his mother, but when she died on the 22nd July 1977, he sobbed for about half an hour and then returned to his usual serene self. During the funeral and the seventh day merit-making ceremony his other siblings either cried or were at least teary-eyed, but he was utterly calm and collected.

If Godwin had a fault it was that he was perhaps overly anxious to avoid any type of unpleasantness with anyone. When a meditator at Nilambe became disruptive or refused to follow the schedule despite being repeatedly asked to do so, Godwin would put off the task of talking to them for as long as he possibly could. There were a few times when his failure to be firm with people caused him or others considerable inconvenience. I recall that a rather unpleasant man used to come and see him at his home, ostensibly for counseling. In fact, all the man did was complain angrily for several hours about the numerous people he didn't like. Every Thursday he would wait for Godwin to come home from work and every Thursday Godwin would sit and endure the man's tirades. Sometimes he even avoided going home if he knew the man would be there. Only after several months did he finally tell the man that he couldn't help him and that he should not come anymore.

Another interesting aspect of Godwin's character was that despite having a profound understanding of the human psyche and being usually a good judge of character, he could be remarkably naive about people, particularly if they were trying to deceive him. Being good-hearted and completely straightforward himself, he could not always see that others were not necessarily like that too. On occasion this caused him to make some bad judgments.

Godwin had been suffering from a liver disease for some time which left him progressively weaker and more and more tired, Although he knew this was a life-threatening condition, he continued with his commitments all over the world. When he returned after a three-month trip to South Africa in February 2000, his ankles were swollen and his stomach was slightly bloated. He was staying with his good friends Harilal and Visakha Wickramaratne and they took him to a specialist who recommended some medication. However, Godwin

thought that seeing this specialist might upset his long-time family doctor and so he insisted on going to see him as well. This second doctor recommended a very different medicine.

Two days later at about three in the morning Harilal heard a noise in Godwin's room and went in to see what the problem was. He found Godwin lying incapacitated on his bed. I had returned from India that very morning and, on being told that Godwin had been admitted to hospital, rushed up to Kandy. He looked tired and drawn but otherwise was his usual cheerful, smiling self. I didn't know it then but this would be the last time I would see him. Later he lapsed into unconsciousness and remained in a coma in the Intensive Care Unit for 48 hours. He eventually regained consciousness, and, after being discharged from the hospital, returned to the Wickramaratne's home where they did their best to let him rest despite the many people who wanted to visit him.

While in hospital he had said to Visakha Wickramaratne, 'I'm going to give up teaching. I've done a lot for others, now I think I should do something for myself.' About two weeks later he collapsed into a coma again and was taken to Peradeniya Hospital. After two days Visakha received a call from Upul Gamage telling her that she should come to the hospital quickly. When she arrived the two of them went to the ward where Godwin was but he had died just a few minutes before. I received a call from them to come to the hospital immediately and arrived some twenty minutes later. When I saw Felix, Upul and Visakha, their faces white and with tears in their eyes, I knew what had happened. Godwin had died at 9.30 a.m. on the 22nd of March, 2000.

In Sri Lanka, the body of the deceased is usually kept for two or three days so that family and friends can pay their respects. However, Godwin had specified much earlier that his funeral be conducted as soon as possible after his death. Accordingly, he was cremated the day after his death. Although only one small notice of the funeral appeared in the paper that very day, word had spread throughout Kandy and over six hundred people flocked to Mahayawa Cemetery.

When I arrived at the funeral, Godwin's brother Felix approached me and asked how we should proceed. I was not expecting to be asked to conduct the service, but after thinking for a moment I suggested that for a man who loved silence as much as Godwin did, it might be appropriate if we all just observed a fifteen-minute silence. Felix agreed and an announcement to that effect was made. We closed our eyes, bowed our heads and silently remembered this person who had given all of us so much.

A few minutes later a man suddenly came out of the crowd and began a long-winded farrago at the top of his voice. As this unknown speaker droned on, his finger raised in the air, I was too sad to feel annoyed but I was finding his loud voice an unpleasant intrusion. The faces of many others in the crowd showed a similar feeling. Quite suddenly I remembered how patient and understanding Godwin had been with human folly and how he often saw the funny side of it. I imagined him looking down on all of us, watching this intruder rambling on and then saying, 'Bhante, do you think he's doing that mindfully?' and then giggling. That thought lifted my sadness a little. Eventually, someone grabbed the man by the arm and whispered to him to stop, which he did. When the fifteen minutes were up Godwin's brothers and nephews lifted the coffin, slid it into the crematorium and closed the door. We all chanted the Metta Sutta as a final tribute to our beloved teacher and friend and then one by one left. A few days later Visakha Wickramaratne took Godwin's ashes and tipped them into the quietly flowing waters of the Mahaweli River.

## REMEMBERING GODWIN SAMARARATNE

It has been four years since Godwin died and yet hardly a week goes past without me thinking about him. I am sure that at least one or two of my better qualities are due to his gentle admonishments and his example. Godwin showed me by his person that it really is possible to transcend the narrow confines of ego, negative emotions, petty ambitions and fears and become a truly joyful, loving person. To me, he was living proof that the Buddha's Dhamma does work. I am now 55 years old and looking back on my life, I can say, without the slightest hesitation, that I owe more to Godwin Samararatne than I do to anyone else, and that he was the wisest and kindest person I have ever had the privilege to know.

# INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

(6 TALKS)

DAY 1, 6TH OCTOBER 1997:

## WHY WE SHOULD MEDITATE

**GODWIN:** I'm happy to see some familiar faces, some old friends, and I'm also very happy to see so many new faces. What I propose to do now is to give a talk on why we should meditate and then we can have a discussion. After the discussion we can meditate for some time, and then we will end the session with chanting: Pali chanting and Chinese chanting.

So the question is why should we meditate? What is the importance of meditation? Why is it emphasised so much in the Buddha's teaching? So these are some of the questions that I'm going to explore in my talk.

The word meditation translates the Pali word *bhavana* which means cultivating the mind, developing the mind, mental culture. So the whole emphasis is on the mind. When you read the Buddhist texts you are so amazed at the Buddha's profound and deep statements about the human mind. It is amazing that he should have made these statements 2,600 years ago. In fact, modern psychologists and psychotherapists are also deeply inspired by the Buddha's statements on the human mind.

### KNOWING, SHAPING, & FREEING THE MIND

The idea of meditation has been expressed by a writer in these terms: knowing the mind, shaping the mind, and freeing the mind. I would like to repeat the words: Meditation is knowing the mind, shaping the mind, and freeing the mind. So knowing the mind is understanding how the mind is working. If we do not know our mind we are really just like machines. Therefore it is extremely important to know and to understand how our minds work.

And when we know the mind, then we can shape the mind. Shaping the mind is developing mastery over the mind. If we do not develop mastery over the mind what happens is that we become a slave to our own mind. So when we become slaves to our mind then thoughts and emotions control us and that results in more and more suffering. Therefore it is very important to learn to shape the mind, and when you learn to shape the mind then you can achieve a mind that is free. So the importance of meditation is learning to achieve a mind that is free, a mind that is happy, a mind that is peaceful, a mind that has loving-kindness.

### ACHIEVING A COMPLETELY HEALTHY MIND

It is interesting to see the things we do to keep our body healthy. We feed our body, we keep the body clean, when the body becomes sick we go to the doctor and get medicine to cure the illnesses. We do so many things to keep the body healthy. An interesting question is: what do we do to keep our mind healthy? Have you given thought to this very important question? We have to be clear about what makes our mind sick, what makes our mind

unhealthy. What are the symptoms of the human sicknesses of the mind? So meditation is learning about them and achieving a mind that is completely healthy.

We can consider some emotions as contributing to the illnesses of the human mind. I would like to mention some of these emotions, and I'm sure everyone here can relate to them: anxiety, stress, fear, insecurity, and sadness. I can draw up a long list, which I think we can all relate to. Sometimes we don't realise that they make our mind sick. If we do not know that they can create our sickness we can continue to have that sickness without finding a solution to it. In one of my talks I will be speaking about emotions and I will present to you how meditation helps us to work with emotions. When I speak about emotions I will be interested to hear from you what emotions really bother you in this country. So I will be presenting some practical ways of working with these unpleasant emotions and then finding a way to be free from these emotions.

### **TASTE & EXPERIENCE BUDDHISM**

Another very important aspect of meditation is that meditation helps us to experience with full awareness things that arise. There are some who know very well what the Buddha taught, so they are very knowledgeable about Buddhism but they have not experienced directly anything from the Buddha's teaching because they have not meditated. They are like people who know all about meals but they have hardly tasted the food from the meals. So meditation helps us to taste; and when you have tasted it you achieve a kind of appetite for the freedom of the mind. When you taste it, you really see for yourself how we can free ourselves.

### **BECOME COMPLETELY SELF-RELIANT**

Related to this is another point, that meditation helps us to become completely self-reliant. When you meditate you realise that you have to take responsibility for what is happening in your mind. Sometimes I define meditation in my own words as finding the medicine for the sickness we have created ourselves. So as we create the sickness ourselves we have to find the medicine. When you are sick, if you want to heal yourself you cannot tell others to take the medicine.

The Buddha emphasised this point very much: to be self-reliant, to rely on one's own efforts. The Buddha said: self-effort is the best effort. And when we develop self-effort, when we become self-reliant, then what happens is we learn to become completely self-confident about ourselves. When we have this self-confidence then when we see for ourselves that the medicine is helping then that gives us more confidence in the medicine and it also helps us to develop faith and confidence in the person who discovered the medicine.

So in my talk so far I have been telling you about some benefits and some aspects of meditation. And I have been trying to tell you about the importance of meditation. I have been trying to answer the question: why should we meditate? So now I would like to pause and then if there are any questions about what I have been saying we can discuss them. So please ask questions. When I teach meditation to children I tell them sometimes that meditation is asking questions and finding the answers ourselves. Asking questions like: Why do we get angry? How is stress created? So to raise such questions and then to find an answer — meditation can be seen as a process of trial and error. Therefore I would like you to ask some questions and then we might try to find the answers to them.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *After we have done evening meditation and I go to bed, I find some vibration in my head, just like someone hitting my head. What is happening? Why does this happen?*

**GODWIN:** When we meditate many things happen in our mind and body, sometimes very unusual and strange things. But what is important, what we are learning in meditation, is that whatever is happening in our mind and body, just to know it is happening. And also learning to accept these things, learning not to react to them. There are different stages in meditation so you may be experiencing certain stages. Finding a reason may not necessarily be helpful but rather, as I often say, learn to make friends with these experiences, to see them as learning experiences and not to see them as problems and difficulties.

So what I would like to suggest is that whatever happens when you are meditating, though it can be an unpleasant experience sometimes, just to know it, that it's just a sensation and just to say okay to it, make friends with it, and then it will pass. So I would like you to continue to practice and maybe on Sunday when we have a day's programme we can see whether it will happen then or not.

**RETREATANT:** *I find your point on teaching children how to meditate very interesting. I want to learn something more about teaching children meditation. Firstly I want to ask: how do children accept the concept of meditation and how do they practice meditation? And the second question is: you just mentioned the way to learn meditation is to learn to ask questions and to answer them. When we ask ourselves questions, what are we going to do then?*

**GODWIN:** So the first question is about teaching meditation to children. It is very interesting that trying to teach meditation to children has enabled me to learn from them because they have very simple, uncomplicated minds. It is interesting for me to see the difference between trying to teach meditation to children and to adults. In a way, meditation can be seen as developing a child-like mind and learning to see things as if for the first time, learning to be curious about things and being very honest and genuine about ourselves. So I really enjoy being with children and trying to teach them meditation.

To answer your question, I never tell them that it is meditation. I ask them: now would you like to play with your breath? As you know, children love playing so I suggest: Let's play with our breath. So I tell them: Now please see this as a good game. The game is: Can you be aware of your breath from moment to moment? And sometimes I tell them to play hide-and-seek. Sometimes you are with the breath and sometimes you are not with the breath. So let us play the game for 10 to 15 minutes and see what happens. And it is so inspiring for me to see how completely still they sit during those 10 to 15 minutes, how they seem to be enjoying it, with very happy, smiling, friendly faces. When I see adults meditating, I see different expressions on their faces! And what inspires me most is when I ask them: Do you have any questions, do you have any problems, and do you have any difficulties? Most of the time they say: No! It's an interesting question to find out as adults what we have done to our minds. It's a very serious question that we should explore. In fact it is really connected to meditation, related to meditation.

So this was the first question and the second question was about — what was it?

**RETREATANT:** *After we have asked ourselves questions, what do we do?*

**GODWIN:** Good question. Take the case of Siddhattha who became the Buddha. Do you know the questions that came to his mind? Very simple questions: Why do people die? Why do people get old? Why do people become sick? Why do people become monks and nuns? So by finding an answer to these simple questions that he asked, he ended up by becoming the Buddha!

I will give another example: Newton, the scientist. Do you know the simple question that enabled him to discover a very profound scientific theory? Why do apples fall? Simple question, but it ended in his making a very profound, very important scientific discovery. Someone has said that a genius is one who still has the curiosity of a child. We all have this beautiful capacity as children, but as adults we have lost this questioning aspect in us. So in relation to meditation you can ask questions like: Why do I get angry? When you ask that question, and when you try to find an answer, what is the answer you discover? I would like to hear the answer from you.

**RETREATANT:** *My friend makes me angry.*

**GODWIN:** It's always the other person! So the point is my friend is not behaving in the way I want my friend to behave. So you see from this simple question you discover the problem is not with my friend but with me having an expectation of how my friend should be. So as I said earlier about meditation, then you learn to take responsibility for your anger, and you stop blaming others and start taking responsibility. And that's how a change, a transformation can take place in ourselves from the single question: why do I get angry? I'm happy you are asking questions, so I hope there will be more questions.

**RETREATANT:** *I am calm right now, but when my kids get poor marks in school I get angry although I love my children.*

**GODWIN:** I like such practical questions. I think all parents can relate to that question. I know certainly that this happens in Sri Lanka also. So how does meditation help in such a situation? One thing you said is that you are now feeling calm, so one point to remember is that we should not expect to be always calm. We can learn from a mind that is calm. We can also learn from a mind that is not calm. If you expect to be always calm, when you are not calm you suffer as a result, as happened in your case. You are angry with yourself. You are disappointed with yourself. You give yourself a minus. So I would suggest that in the situation that you described, when you get angry just know that you are angry. Tomorrow I will be speaking about something related to this: the importance of the practice of awareness or mindfulness – a very important aspect of meditation.

So the first suggestion I would like to offer is just to be aware of the anger, because if you are aware of the anger and just stay with the anger perhaps you will not express that anger in a violent way. Just being aware of the anger and not expressing it enables us to develop some sort of control, mastery over our anger. So this is the first point.

The second suggestion is that simply by being with the anger, after some time you may recover from it. And when you recover from that anger you can ask the question: Why did I get angry with my son? I love him so much, and here I am getting angry with him; perhaps I'm making him angry too. So when you explore this question you realise the problem is that you have an expectation of how your son should perform in class. These are reasonable expectations for parents to have, but it's another matter to find out how far that expectation is realistic. How far is my son capable of meeting my expectations? Shouldn't I find out from

my son why he is not doing well in class? This is something very important, because with more and more meditation we learn to try to understand the other person's behaviour and try to see things from the perspective of the other person rather than to project our own expectations onto others.

So if you can talk to your son in a very friendly, gentle, understanding way: My dear son, what are the difficulties you have in class? This is something very important which the Buddha emphasised, to have a spiritual friendship with everyone that you relate to. It is very important for parents to have this kind of friendly relationship with children so that the child is in a position to talk to the parents honestly, in a friendly way, about the difficulties the child is having. I feel this is extremely important. I know in Sri Lanka some children are completely alone, there is no one that they can look to because they are afraid to talk honestly to their parents, they are afraid to talk about their difficulties to their teachers, so they are completely lost.

It is really sad when children are unable to confide when they are in difficult situations. So I would like to stress that it is very important in such situations to make a connection with the child and then try to understand what the child is going through, and this would be something very helpful and meaningful, rather than getting angry.

I think there is time for one more question.

**RETREATANT:** *We have thoughts, we have desires, and we have suffering. Is it true that by meditating you can stop having these thoughts, desires, and suffering?*

**GODWIN:** It's not so easy. It's interesting you mentioned thoughts. I feel that it is the most important area in the human mind because from the time we wake up to the time that we go to sleep, what happens? There are thoughts continuously going through our mind. I think everyone here can relate to that. Here while I'm talking you have your own thoughts going through your mind. I often raise this question: what are you thinking about from morning to night? Can anyone suggest an answer? What are we thinking about from morning to night, without ever stopping? So you see the importance of asking simple questions. What do we think about?

**RETREATANT:** *Most of the time we think of ourselves – I and mine – all the time.*

**GODWIN:** Absolutely right; even when we are thinking of others the thoughts are always related to ourselves. Isn't that interesting? And the next question is in relation to ourselves and others: What do we do with our thoughts? What we are doing is we make judgements. And the simple way I describe this is that we give plusses and we give minuses. When you remember some good thing you have done, you feel happy – big plus! When you remember some wrong things you have done, some mistake that you have done, some bad things you have done – big minus! And we do the same in relation to the others. The bad things, the wrong things the others have done, we give them minuses. Good things others have done, we give them plusses.

So isn't it interesting? From morning to night we become teachers giving plusses and minuses to ourselves? I know some people who live in a hell they have created, and in that hell only minuses exist. They have thoughts only about their mistakes, their shortcomings. And in relation to others we have similar thoughts, so by that we can create a hell; we can really feel sad and live in depression. So this is how we create our own suffering with our thoughts.

You will realise there is a connection between thoughts and emotions. An interesting question to find out is: what comes first, the thought or emotion? Have you discovered the answer? Do you see the importance of meditation? Anyway, I will be discussing these things as we go along.

Going back to the question, what we can do is what I will be talking about tomorrow – the importance of awareness. With awareness, just to observe the thoughts that are going through our mind and just to realise how we are using thoughts destructively, which creates suffering for ourselves and suffering for others. And also we can use thoughts creatively, which I will be talking about later on. And the question you asked about desires, there again we can see a relationship, a connection between thoughts and desires. As I said, this is the importance of meditation. This is why the Buddha made such important, very profound statements about how the mind is working, and through understanding that by using awareness you will see how we create our own suffering, our own problems. Through that realisation we can free ourselves from suffering and problems – this is what meditation is about. So we will be discussing these very important issues as we go along in the next few days.

Anyway I'm very happy that you asked some very good questions and now I would suggest you take a small break. You can go out, and come back when we ring the bell, and then we can meditate. So I suggest, please make an effort to be silent and also please make an effort to be mindful. Just to walk slowly and just to know what is happening when you are walking. And as we have discussed about thoughts, just to know what thoughts you are having in your mind, be alert, be attentive. So during the next 5 minutes please also let us learn just to watch, just to discover what is happening in our mind and body from moment to moment, and when you hear the gong please come back slowly and in silence. Thank you very much.

[Break] – [Guided meditation] – [Chanting]

Thank you very much for the beautiful chanting. So tomorrow's talk will be about the practice of mindfulness, and after the talk we will distribute a book which is based on the practice of mindfulness. So I would like to suggest that tomorrow during the day, please make an effort just to know what is happening in your mind and body from moment to moment as far as possible. Just try to know the thoughts that you will be having during the day tomorrow. And please see how we give pluses and minuses to ourselves and others, and see the connection between thoughts and emotions. I would also like to suggest that you make an effort to be friendly, to be gentle, to be kind towards your mind and body. If you practise these things what I will be presenting tomorrow will make sense in your own experience.

So once again I would like to thank you very much for asking questions and then responding to my suggestions. I'm looking forward very much to meeting you tomorrow also.

May you all be well, may you all be happy, may you all be peaceful, and may you be free of suffering. And when you go to sleep, may you sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully.

## DAY 2 TALK, 7TH OCTOBER 1997:

# The Importance of Awareness

**GODWIN:** I would like to welcome you once again. Like yesterday, I'll be giving a talk and after that we'll have a discussion; then we'll be meditating, and we will end with some chanting.

The subject of today's talk, as you know, is the importance of the practice of mindfulness, which is something very important for the practice of meditation. I am very happy to see some of you reading the little booklet we are bringing out today on the Satipatthana Sutta which deals with the practice of mindfulness. It is also very nice to see some of you meditating.

### ABSENCE OF MINDFULNESS OR AWARENESS

Yesterday I suggested you make an effort to do some practice of mindfulness so that what I'm going to say will make some sense in your own experience. If we do not practise mindfulness or awareness what will happen to us is that we will become more and more like machines. We will be doing things mechanically, habitually, repetitively, automatically. In this modern world there is such a lot of technology and machines that I think human beings are becoming more and more machine-like, like automatons. By doing this we are forgetting the real art of living.

And what is very unfortunate is that while human beings are becoming more and more like machines they are also losing a sense of the importance of feelings. So when human beings don't experience the very important aspect of feelings in themselves then they cannot feel love for themselves, they cannot feel love for others, they cannot feel warmth for themselves, warmth for others. Perhaps that explains why there is such a lot of violence in the modern world. So we become more and more violent towards ourselves, and more and more violent towards others. All this is related to an absence of awareness, to not knowing what is happening in our mind and body. So this is the first point I want to make about the importance of mindfulness or awareness.

### EXPERIENCE THE PRESENT MOMENT

Another very important aspect of mindfulness is that it helps us to experience the present moment, the here and the now. It is funny to think that most of the time during the day we either live in the past, thinking about what has happened, or we live in the future, dwelling on what is going to happen. But the past and the future are not real – only the present is real. So it shows that human beings, because of their lack of awareness, are living in an unreal world which does not correspond to reality.

To make this clearer let me give an example of what is happening now. Physically you may be present here, you may even see me, but mentally you may be somewhere else completely. So to be completely present, to know what I'm saying, you have to be here and now, in the present. Otherwise, as I said, physically you'll be present but mentally you'll be elsewhere. A meditation master described his practice as: When I eat, I eat; when I walk, I walk; when I

sleep, I sleep. The words sound very simple but it means that he was most of the time being present with what he was doing.

An interesting question arises: what did he mean when he said when he sleeps, he sleeps? One interpretation of this is that even when we are asleep, with the dreams that we see we are in a way half awake. So we don't really experience deep sleep. However, for most of us when we are awake during the day, what happens? We are half-asleep! This is what we call living! So if you really want to start living you have to develop this very important quality of being present, of being alert, of being awake. That is why the Buddha is called the Fully Awakened One. The whole practice of meditation and practice of mindfulness is a way of awakening our mind, awakening the Buddha-nature in us. And when we awaken the Buddha-nature within, the quality of living becomes so different.

Now please realise that being in the present doesn't mean that we don't have to use thoughts about the past and the future. Sometimes we have to plan about the future. If you did not plan about the future, you would not have come here. And if you forget the past you will not be able to go back to your home! So what is important for us is, through awareness, to see for ourselves how we are using the past and the future.

Psychologists say that sometimes depression and sadness are due to the way we are relating to the past, and that anxiety is due to the way we are relating to the future. So with awareness, we need to understand how to use the past and the future consciously and deliberately, and then at other times we need to be present in the here and now.

### **USE AWARENESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

Related to that is something which I'm going to emphasise very much and I consider very important. It is to use awareness in everyday life. Even with small things like brushing our teeth, combing our hair, drinking and eating. As I said earlier, we have become so used to doing these things we are like machines. So if you can really learn to practise awareness, mindfulness, in everyday life then meditation becomes a way of life.

I live in a lay meditation centre in Sri Lanka. What we emphasise in our centre is how to integrate daily life, your ordinary life, with meditation. Otherwise what happens is that daily life is one thing, meditation is another. So if you are really serious about the practice meditation has to be a way of living. When you read the text that we are distributing today, the text which outlines the practice of awareness, you'll see that the Buddha is telling us to be mindful of most of the things that happen to us during the day.

You'll be surprised to read that the Buddha said that even when we are in the toilet, be mindful, be aware, and be conscious of what is happening in the toilet. I call this the toilet meditation! Sometimes when I visit some rich homes and when I go to their toilets I see lots of books, magazines and things like that in the toilet. So I would suggest that next time when you are in your toilet you'll experience such a difference if you can just be conscious, just be present while you are in the toilet.

Another very important aspect is eating. We work such a lot in order to eat, but do we really eat consciously? Is your awareness present while you are eating? Are you conscious of what you are tasting? Are you conscious of what you are chewing? Now chewing is a very important aspect. If you can make an effort to consciously chew your food you'll realise a difference when you are eating.

So when you consider all this you'll realise that meditation is related to ordinary things, not extraordinary things, not special things. Some people have the wrong idea that meditation is about having some special experience, some extraordinary experience. But when you consider some of the meditation techniques, they are ordinary things, simple things like being aware of the breath, being conscious of walking, being aware of eating. So meditation is doing the simple, practical, ordinary things in life consciously, and then these ordinary things become extraordinary. If you can learn to do these ordinary things with awareness, then you'll realise that even with ordinary things you can do them as if for the first time.

When you look at others can you see them as if you are seeing them for the first time? Can you relate to yourself as if you are relating to yourself for the first time, without past images, without past judgements about yourself and others? Can you see a tree or flower or Buddha image as if for the first time? Please try that and you'll find that the quality of seeing is so different, it becomes so alive, it becomes so fresh, it becomes so innocent.

There is a very important collection of sayings of the Buddha called the *Dhammapada*. In that book it is said that if you are not aware, if you are not mindful, if you are not awake, you are like people who are dead. So being like a dead person and being like a machine are much the same thing.

### EXPLORE UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES

Another very important aspect of awareness is learning to explore, investigate with awareness our unpleasant experiences. There is a beautiful simile which I like in one of the Buddhist texts. It compares awareness to a surgeon who is about to operate. So the surgeon has to find out where to operate, where the wound is. To find that out, he has to investigate. So once he has investigated into what the problem is, then with the surgeon's knife he cuts it out, he heals it. So what the simile is saying is that with awareness we can find out, we can explore, we can investigate, we can discover the problem, and then with wisdom we can work with the problem that we have discovered.

In everyday life we have problems like anger, anxiety, fears, sadness, guilt – all of these things really create suffering for us. As with the surgeon's investigation, we can find out, we can learn, we can discover, we can explore, we can experiment with such problems. And then when you explore them you'll realise that you yourself are creating the problem. And when you see that you can use wisdom to free yourself from the problem. You can use wisdom to understand what is happening in your mind and body. Through this understanding you can bring about a change, or continue working with the problems, investigating them, exploring them. The unpleasant experience itself becomes an object of meditation.

So also please realise that meditation is not always about having pleasant, positive experiences. Actually unpleasant experiences do not create any problems for us unless we identify ourselves with them. The real challenge we have is learning how to work with these unpleasant experiences, how to work with physical pain, how to work with mental pain. This is much more important than simply experiencing pleasant, positive experiences.

I'll be giving a separate talk on emotions, so when I speak about them I might try to speak about emotions in this culture. What are the emotions that bother you? What are the emotions that create suffering for you? So I'll be presenting tools, presenting ways and means of working with these emotions using meditation.

I'm afraid I have to stop now. So I've touched on some important aspects of mindfulness and awareness. Like yesterday I would like to hear your questions, especially practical questions relating to your life.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *When we notice an emotion arising, like anger, who exactly is observing this anger?*

**GODWIN:** This is the beautiful thing about this quality of awareness. With this quality of awareness we can know: Ah, now I am angry, and now I have fear, and now there is no fear. So this was the point I was trying to make. If you do not have awareness you don't know what is happening in your mind. And then by this knowing we can understand and develop wisdom and develop mastery over what is happening in our mind.

The question you want answered is about who is observing the anger. This itself is a very important area to inquire into. An inquiry like this can be a very powerful technique. When we are angry, when we have fear, when we have doubts, ask the question: who is experiencing this? And when you really inquire into it deeply you'll realise that there is no one apart from what you are experiencing. Then you'll realise that these states of mind arise and pass away due to certain conditions; but we have a sense of ownership and say: this is *my* anger, *my* fear, *my* joy, *my* sadness. So this questioning: who? helps us to realise that there is no owner of the emotion, but just conditions arising and conditions passing away. This is the deepest aspect of the Buddha's teaching.

**RETREATANT:** *When we see our own children doing something wrong we get angry, but if we see other people's children doing something wrong we won't get angry, and the same applies to our wife or husband. So is it correct to say that we should get angry at everything wrong that we see, or what attitude should we take to handle the situation?*

**GODWIN:** Very good question. Because you realise that you are angry only when *your* child behaves in a particular way, or only when *your* wife behaves in a particular way, but others' children can behave in any way they like. You have had a very important realisation. And the important realisation is, as I said earlier, that the people with whom we identify ourselves, people whom we think we own, they should behave in one way and other people can behave in any other way. So we can even carry the point further. When your son becomes sick you become sad. When the neighbour's son becomes sick: no problem. When your mother dies, sadness. When your friend's mother dies, no problem. Aren't we funny?

So when you inquire into this: why am I doing this? – then you'll realise that you have this sense of *ownership*. This is *mine*, it belongs to *me*. And for what belongs to me only acceptable things should happen in regard to them; for others anything can happen, there is no problem! So the real practice, the really deep practice is: can we see everything as far as possible without a sense of ownership? Can we relate to suffering in whatever form it arises? It can be with your son, it can be with the neighbour's son, it can be with anyone. This is real loving-kindness.

I'll be speaking on loving-kindness later, and on that day we'll be distributing a very important book on loving-kindness. In that book it is said that the best way, the most noble way, is to be like a mother having affection towards her only child. If we can relate to everyone in this way, wouldn't that be a beautiful way to live? There is a beautiful phrase in

this connection: boundless compassion, compassion which has no boundaries, which has no divisions.

Slowly, gently, gradually, this is what we have to develop, developing the qualities of the heart. I'll be speaking more about this when we are talking about loving-kindness, which is something I emphasise very much. As I said earlier, human beings now are losing these qualities of the heart. So it is very important for us to know this and make an effort to open our hearts to ourselves, to open our hearts to others.

**RETREATANT:** *During my meditation sometimes I get a little confused. It seems that I'm watching my thoughts or my own mind and am aware of what I'm thinking. Now can you tell us is this the right direction: should we watch with our mind what our mind is working on?*

**GODWIN:** As I said earlier, you can say it is mindfulness or awareness that helps us, or you can say it is the mind watching the mind; but what is important is not the particular way to understand it, but the practical watching, the practical observing, the practical mindfulness, that is more important than the theoretical question: is it the mind watching or is it the awareness watching? What is important is to develop this quality of alertness, of vigilance, of being awake, of knowing what is happening, this is what is important. So after the discussion we'll be trying to practise this.

**RETREATANT:** *You said earlier that we do things mechanically. I can observe that I am a machine, but I don't want to be a machine. For example, breakfast: I have the same breakfast every day and I know I'm like a machine. How can we not behave like a machine although we observe the fact that we are acting like a machine?*

**GODWIN:** I'm happy you have asked that question. It is a very important, practical question: how to start the day with breakfast? So I'll give some practical suggestions: how to relate to such a situation without being like a machine. I know with breakfast that you have very little time. But even with little time, please try tomorrow when you eat breakfast how far you can practise these things:

When you see the food on the table – it can be fruits, it can be bread, it can be anything – spend a few minutes just trying to see it as if for the first time. Look at the fruits and the bread very closely and note the different aspects of what you see at that time.

Another very beautiful practice in traditional Buddhist countries is before we eat to feel grateful for those who have prepared the meal, or to feel grateful that I'm able to eat my breakfast. There are people in this world who do not have any breakfast in the morning. So feel grateful. As you know, machines cannot feel grateful!

The third suggestion is please make an effort tomorrow when you eat your breakfast to take your time and consciously chew your food, eating very slowly and consciously. There is a saying among the Red Indian Americans that they drink their food, which means that they chew their food until it becomes liquid. And you'll realise that when you chew your food slowly and consciously you don't require so much food; this is a very important discovery you might make.

Another very important point the Buddha has told meditators about eating is to avoid two extremes. Do you know what the two extremes are? One extreme is eating too much, and the other extreme is eating too little. So how to know you are eating the right quantity? Very interesting question. How do we know it? By listening to the body while eating. If you are

listening to music while you are eating, you'll not be able to listen to your stomach. I like this phrase very much: listening to your body, listening to yourself, listening to your thoughts, and listening to your emotions.

So if you can eat your breakfast in this way it's a wonderful beginning to the day, and then during the day you can have this kind of awareness as far as possible, maybe not the whole time, but to have moments of awareness. But if you can have moment-to-moment awareness, that is even more excellent. Then during the day, as I have said, you'll be living not as machines but as human beings.

One last suggestion is that at the end of the day it is a very good practice to take your mind backwards and find out how you spent the day. Find out the moments when you were conscious, when you were aware and the moments when you were like a machine. And just find out how many times you were angry, and also find out the times when you were not angry, this is very important. When you do this kind of reviewing sometimes you'll be surprised what a good person you have been. And this kind of reflection, this kind of reviewing can bring about a self-transformation in a very natural way because you learn to see more and more inwards rather than outwards.

So now we have to stop our discussion. Now what I would like to suggest is to take a small break and during this break you can go to the toilet, or you can do some walking or whatever, but as we did yesterday, and as we were discussing mindfulness, please find out in this break how far you can be conscious, how far you can be mindful of what is happening in your mind and body. To do this exercise you have to be completely silent. So with a silent mind, please make an effort to get an idea of what mindfulness is; and then when you come back I will give a guided meditation in the practice of mindfulness, so this would be a kind of preparation for the meditation. Thank you very much. I will ring the bell in a few minutes, then please come back. Continue to have this awareness, mindfulness.

## GUIDED MEDITATION

To begin with, we try to feel happy. Feeling happy that you came here at 7:30 to listen to a talk and that now you are practising meditation. So let us spend some time now just feeling happy with ourselves, that we have this opportunity to learn to meditate.

Feeling happy that you are trying to develop this quality of mindfulness, awareness, of being awake. Let us now feel grateful that we have got this opportunity to meditate.

Feeling grateful is a very important spiritual quality that you may develop.

Can we feel grateful that we can sit completely still? And can you become conscious, aware that your body is sitting completely still, completely relaxed?

Let us now experience what it is to be in the present. Can you be with the peace and stillness in this room? Can you feel it now? Not thinking about the past, not thinking about the future but feeling the peace in this room now.

The past is gone, we cannot change the past. The future has yet to come. So let us experience the joy of the present moment.

If thoughts about the past and thoughts about the future arise in your mind, gently let go of them and come back to the present moment, the here and the now.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF AWARENESS

With awareness you are learning to let go of your thoughts, you are learning to control your thoughts, you are learning to develop mastery over your thoughts by learning to just let go of them, and then to come back to the present moment.

Just feeling, just knowing the stillness, the peace in this room.

Maybe it is so quiet you don't even hear any sounds.

Now please open your eyes consciously and mindfully. And as you change your posture, please do it slowly, consciously, and mindfully. Please do not think that the meditation is over.

Let us now do some chanting. The chanting can also be a meditation. Using the chant to experience the present moment. Also there will be some pauses between the chants: just feel the stillness, the space that the chanting creates in your mind.

So first there will be Pali chanting, and then there will be Chinese chanting.

[Chanting]

## DAY 3 TALK, 8TH OCTOBER 1997:

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DHAMMA

**GODWIN:** Most people believe that material things are important, that happiness lies in material things. In fact, the more material things you get, the more dissatisfied you are; and the more dissatisfied you are, the more material things you want to get! Buddha has given a very powerful simile to describe this condition. He compared it to a dog with a bone. So the dog won't let go of the bone and is just holding on to it, and is still hungry and still dissatisfied, and still suffers from fear of losing that bone.

Related to this serious problem of materialism is another aspect, another manifestation of this, called consumerism. It's a real challenge for people to live in consumer societies and yet not be affected by the consumerism around them. Consumerism has many aspects, but I see two dangerous aspects in consumerism. One is that people are not clear about what they actually need and what is just their greed. According to the Dhamma we need certain things: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine — they are called the four requisites. The four necessary things are things that human beings really need. So there's a place for material things, but then when they become our goals and when we are confused between greed and need, this is where they can lead to dissatisfaction and suffering.

Another dangerous aspect of consumerism is that the society that you live in starts manipulating you, and the danger is that you don't know that you are being manipulated. So you become like puppets, puppets in the hands of a society that creates desire, creates greed, and this all leads to more and more frustration. So isn't this a sad situation when human beings have the potentiality of becoming free, of becoming enlightened? We have the Buddha-nature in us, but this aspect is not recognised and instead we become victims of the society that we live in.

The simile that has come to my mind about this situation is that though we are grown up we have become dependent on what I call toys. I'm interested to know what toys human beings go after in this culture, in this country. What I mean by toys are external things where you think you will find happiness, joy, and peace. You start acquiring toys, and then you change one toy for another, and your whole life is spent on getting toys and yet still you are dissatisfied. So can I hear from you some of the toys that you are interested in acquiring?

## WE CAN BECOME OUR OWN TOY

**RETREATANT:** *Shopping.*

**RETREATANT:** *Housing.*

**GODWIN:** In a way houses are necessary, but then you are not satisfied with a small house, so the house becomes bigger and bigger, and then that can become a toy and you are still dissatisfied. You have a beautiful new house but you're not happy. Maybe you should move into a bigger house? That can be a problem.

**RETREATANT:** *Computers.*

**GODWIN:** Now that toy has even been introduced to Sri Lanka! Anyway we can draw up a long list of toys. An interesting question is: is meditation also a toy? Is there a relationship between these toys and meditation?

**RETREATANT:** *Yes.*

**GODWIN:** I would suggest that with meditation you become your own toy. This is the importance of the Dhamma. This is the importance of the Buddha's wonderful teaching. When you become your own toy you can be happy, contented, and peaceful with yourself. So the need for external toys, external things drops away because you find the joy and happiness from within.

A very important aspect of this is learning to enjoy your own company. When meditators come to the centre where I live in Sri Lanka, I tell them to spend some time alone and see what happens when they are alone with themselves. It's interesting. Some of the people who come there have never spent any time completely alone with themselves, without any toys. So what happens? They become lonely, they become bored. What does it show about ourselves? We cannot stay with ourselves for more than 10 or 15 minutes and we want to escape from ourselves!

So the importance of the Dhamma is that you realise that, you work through that, and as I said, you learn to be your own best friend. You learn to be self-contained, contented with yourself. Such a person is described in the Dhamma as someone who is at home wherever he is. So such a person can be happy with himself while being alone, and such a person can be happy with others.

## MAKING MISTAKES

I would like to touch on another aspect which shows the importance of the Dhamma. With the practice of the Dhamma in all the situations you face in life, you come to see the Dhamma in any situation. As I said yesterday, even unpleasant experiences will become learning experiences.

I know in this culture that people are afraid to make mistakes because of the emphasis on wanting to be perfect. With this model of perfection, what happens is that when we make a mistake we beat ourselves, we hate ourselves, we lose our self-confidence, and we see ourselves as worthless. In my language, you see only minuses in yourself; and when you see minuses in yourself, you see minuses in others too, so that you can create a hell with only minuses.

So the importance of the Dhamma is that it enables us not to create suffering in this way because of our mistakes, but instead we learn to ask the question: what can I learn from my mistake? What does it indicate about myself? This kind of inquiry has to be done in a very friendly, gentle, understanding way, without giving any minuses. Then our mistakes themselves help us to grow in the spiritual path. Isn't that a beautiful way of living? Learning from your mistakes; and then when you see mistakes in others you also learn to relate to the mistakes of others in an entirely different way. So we learn to appreciate our humanness, not the idea of perfection. Then we learn to appreciate the humanness of others.

So the importance of the teaching is that we see clearly how we create our own suffering, and through that realisation it becomes clear that only we can free ourselves of the suffering

we create ourselves. Then we become self-reliant. Then we learn to have self-confidence that whatever arises: I know how to handle it with the help of the Dhamma. Then you learn to be your own teacher. And as the Buddha said, you learn to be a light unto yourself.

## LIFE BECOMES YOUR TEACHER

One last point on this topic. I have had the good fortune to meet many masters, many gurus, many teachers from many traditions. Do you know which master, which guru has most inspired me? It is life itself. Life is our best teacher. So thanks to the Dhamma, when you realise the importance of the Dhamma, life becomes your teacher. And sometimes life can be a very hard teacher, but it is always a good teacher. It can indicate to us what we are really are.

So now I will stop and if you have any questions, please ask them. In the last few days you have been asking very good, practical questions relating to life, so I hope you will do so today also. I touched on some areas which are related to your life here, so please feel free to ask any questions and let us see how the Dhamma, how the Buddha's teachings can help us to work with these problems.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *I remember in the texts that the Buddha always taught his students to be their own island. Even when he was dying, the last lesson he gave his students was: be your own island. I think this bears a very direct similarity to what you told us. We always have to learn from ourselves.*

**GODWIN:** Yes, and also, as I said, to learn from life. So it means that as you live, if you are really sensitive and open, and if you are really practising the teaching, then you learn how to relate everything that happens to you in life and in relation to others to the teaching. So all these experiences we have in life, they can be used for our spiritual growth.

There's a teacher who said that they are compost! Compost contains things which are not considered useful, which are considered as dirty, and which we throw away. So all this rubbish, if we can collect it, it can be used for the growth of vegetables and fruits. So I would say that what we learn from life, even from our mistakes, can be seen as compost, that it can be used for our own spiritual growth. It's only then that, as the Buddha said, you can be an island to yourself, that you can rely on yourself.

But what is important to note is that if you have the conclusion that you know everything, that is the end of learning. So it is very necessary to have this don't-know mind, whereby we can learn from anything and we can learn from anyone. This is something very important in the Buddha's teaching. Any other questions?

**RETREATANT:** *How can we be our own toy and be satisfied with ourselves, how can we be our own best friends?*

**GODWIN:** It is interesting that for different reasons we become our own enemies – and then we think that the enemy is outside ourselves! So we are trying to find the enemy outside ourselves without realising the biggest enemy is inside ourselves. One aspect of being your enemy is, as I said, seeing only your mistakes, seeing only your shortcomings, seeing only your minuses. This can be a very self-destructive aspect where you become your own worst enemy.

Another aspect related to this point is that when you don't see the good side in yourself you don't see the good things that you have been doing. I meet many good people and they are following the spiritual path, but because of this tendency to be self-destructive they don't see their own worthiness, they don't see their own value, they refuse to see the Buddha-nature in themselves. So when you realise this, that you are your own enemy, then you learn to work on this condition. This is the importance of awareness, which we discussed yesterday. So with awareness you catch yourself, you realise what you are doing to yourself, that you are becoming your own enemy.

And another point is this very beautiful meditation of loving-kindness. I emphasise this meditation very much. It is psychologically very interesting that meditation of loving-kindness begins with oneself. So it shows that we cannot be friendly to others unless we are friendly to ourselves. Meditation on loving-kindness helps us to be our own best friend, it helps us to make a connection with ourselves.

Another thing about meditation on loving-kindness is this: it helps us to forgive ourselves. As I said earlier, to accept our humanness; and when we learn to accept our humanness, then we learn to accept the humanness of others. So it helps us to be friendly with ourselves and friendly to others.

Another aspect of being our own best friend is that we don't realise how we affect ourselves in an unwholesome, unskilful way with our attitudes and behaviour. So when you make this connection with yourself there is a change that takes place, a transformation takes place, so that whatever you do your words and your thoughts will always be related to the skilful, the wholesome, what should be of help to you in your spiritual path. I'll be speaking more about this on Friday, and we will be distributing a very important little booklet on the practice of loving-kindness. Any other question?

**RETREATANT:** *You warned us of the dangers of consumerism and materialism. Obviously this requires a certain renunciation of those things. Could you give us some advice on how to begin the renunciation so it's not all at once and such an overpowering obstacle?*

**GODWIN:** As I said, this is one of the greatest challenges we have: how to live in a materialistic society where there is such consumerism and still not be affected by it. So I'll try to offer some practical suggestions. One suggestion that I would like to offer is that when you see things which you think you need – again this shows the importance of awareness – to catch yourself and to ask the question: do I really need it? And ask the very profound question: Why do I need this? When this obsession comes to possess something we never ask the question: Do I really need it? Why am I needing it? So when you are living in a consumer society and when you raise this question, you realise that it is because others are using these things, and because others are using them you want to be like them. So without your knowledge you get caught in the rat race. So your whole life becomes a competition, competing with others.

Another practical suggestion I would like to offer is to learn to say Yes to some things; and to learn to say No to certain other things. What happens to us is that due to different reasons we have got used to pampering ourselves. Pampering is always saying Yes to whatever the body or the mind wants. So what is important in the practice is both finding out that you're pampering yourself, and then to say No in a very gentle friendly way. It is very important in life, learning to say No to certain things. This is the only way to work with the things that we have become dependent on.

The third suggestion I would like to offer is in a way an indirect one. So with more and more practice, when you have learnt to be your own best friend, when you have made a connection with yourself, then naturally you don't have to make an effort at renunciation. You can live in a consumer society but you are not affected by the environment.

In this connection there is a beautiful Buddhist symbol. The Buddhist symbol is being like a lotus. Where does the lotus grow? In muddy water. Now the lotus flower is able to grow in that muddy water without being affected by the muddy water around it. So this is the importance of the Buddha's teaching, that when you live within society, within that environment, you will be able to steady your way and not be affected by what is happening externally because a shift has been taking place inside you.

I think there is time for one more question.

**RETREATANT:** *I always feel bored when I'm alone. Can you tell us your actual experience of how you enjoy your life alone?*

**GODWIN:** To give a brief answer: When we are alone, when we feel lonely, when we feel bored, what we do when these states of mind arise, is that we give in to them, we try to change them by doing something. So the simple answer is, hereafter when you have loneliness, when you have boredom, don't try to escape from it, go through the loneliness, go through the boredom. Yesterday I said a very important aspect of meditation is learning to go through unpleasant experiences, whether physical or mental. So in the beginning it will be very unpleasant, but this shows the importance of the practice. You have to go through the unpleasant experience and then from loneliness you move on to experience what is aloneness, which is entirely different from loneliness, thereby learning to enjoy your own company.

So thank you very much for asking these very useful, practical questions. Now let us take a small break. Today during the break, I would like to suggest that you reflect. Reflection can be a very important part of meditation. So the reflection I would like to suggest is to reflect on the things that we have discussed today. And in that reflection, to see how what was discussed can be relevant to you, how it might relate to yourself. So I would like to suggest that during the break you use reflection in this way. And then after some time I will ring the bell, and when you can come back I will present a very important meditation.

[Break]

## GUIDED MEDITATION

Please sit in a comfortable position, because it is very important not to move while you are meditating. Have your spine erect but relaxed.

Allow the mind to do what it likes. If thoughts are arising, let any thoughts arise: thoughts about the past, thoughts about the future.

Let us learn to make friends with thoughts, and just know from moment to moment what thoughts are arising in our mind. It is very important to be alert and to be awake from moment to moment for this.

Now, can we allow any emotion to arise, especially emotions we don't like, that we push away, that we repress, that we control? Can we allow such emotions to arise? If they are arising, can we just allow them?

If you are having any unpleasant experiences, can you learn to make friends with them, can you learn to relate to them without a minus?

And if there are no unpleasant emotions, just to know there are no unpleasant emotions.

So thoughts, emotions, sensations – learning to see them just as they are, as in a mirror-like mind. No plus, no minus, just being with whatever is happening. Be alert and awake.

Learning to feel friendly towards our thoughts, learning to feel friendly towards our emotions, learning to be friendly towards sensations, whatever the sensations are.

Now please open your eyes slowly and when you change the posture, please do it with awareness. And please do not think the meditation is over.

Let us now do some chanting. It is very nice that a group of spiritual friends can chant together, so please everyone join in the chanting.

[Chanting]

## **DAY 4 TALK, 9TH OCTOBER 1997:**

# **MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING**

**GODWIN:** I would like to welcome you once again. The talk this evening is about focusing our attention on our in-breath and our out-breath. This is one of the most well-known and popular meditation techniques in all the Buddhist traditions. And it is also said that the Buddha became enlightened with the help of this technique. So let us see why this technique is so important.

### **KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING**

In this meditation the whole emphasis is on developing awareness and developing mindfulness. As we know, breathing takes place automatically. So concerning what is happening automatically, we are trying to develop mindfulness, awareness. And as the whole emphasis is on mindfulness, what is very important for you to remember is that whatever is happening in our mind and body when we are practising this technique, we should learn just to know, just to be mindful, just to be conscious of what is happening.

So when you have thoughts please don't consider them as a disturbance or as a distraction, but rather be aware that you are having thoughts. If you are hearing sounds just know you are hearing sounds. If you are feeling different sensations in the body, whatever sensations you are experiencing, just know that you are experiencing those sensations. So you know these things are happening, you become mindful of these things and then just come back to your breath.

There is no need to have a battle when you are meditating using this technique. I often say that you have enough battles in life, please do not make meditation into another battle! The whole idea of meditation is to experience freedom, to experience joy, to experience lightness, to be free of suffering, but if you make it a battle meditation itself becomes a source of suffering. So please remember this, please realise this, that the whole emphasis of this technique is on just knowing or just being mindful or just being conscious of what is happening, and then to spend more and more time with your breath, without a battle.

### **EXPERIENCE THE PRESENT MOMENT**

Another very important aspect of this technique is that it helps us to experience the present moment, even for a few minutes. Because breathing is always taking place now, it is always happening now, if we are mindful or conscious of breathing even for a few minutes we can experience what it is to be here, what it is to be present. Otherwise most of the time we are lost in either the past or the future and we even don't know whether we are in the past or the future. So there can be lot of confusion, a lot of disorder in our minds but this technique helps us to experience being in the present, even if only for a few moments.

### **SEE OUR BREATH AS OUR FRIEND**

Another important point to remember is that we need to make a connection with our breath, and the way we can make a connection with our breath is to see our breath as our friend. So let us see in what way the breath is our friend. One thing is that he or she is the only friend

who is with us all the time. I don't think we have any other friend who is with us all the time. So breath is the only friend who is with us all the time, always. Another reason is that even when we are sleeping our friend is active. Do you have any friends who will be with you when you are sleeping? But the breath, whether you are sleeping or whether you are not sleeping, it's always with you.

### **OUR FRIEND HELPS US TO RECOVER**

Another reason why he or she is our best friend is, as I said earlier, that it is always helping us to experience the present moment. And the moments you experience the present moment, those moments are moments of freedom. Related to that is that with our friend the breath, whenever you are having an emotion, if at that moment you think of your friend, there is an immediate recovery from that emotion and then you can experience some space because you have come back to the present moment. Please try that.

A friend of mine told me yesterday that when he is waiting at the traffic lights he becomes impatient. I think we can all relate to this situation, especially when you are late for an appointment and you see only the red light. So poor red light! You can be angry at the red light, you can be impatient about the red light, and this can create lots of suffering for you. So I told my friend: the next time you find yourself in such a situation, just relax, spend some time with your breath. So earlier you were hating the red light, but now you can feel grateful for the red light because thanks to the red light, you can be with your friend, the breath!

So I would like to repeat that whenever you are having any unpleasant emotions — it can be stress, it can be anger, it can be fear, it can be anxiety, it can be guilt, any unpleasant emotion that creates our suffering — no sooner than you think of your friend and spend some time with the in-breath and the out-breath, what happens to that emotion? I will tell you a simple reason why we can find relief in such a situation. The simple reason is that when we are having an emotion, what makes it bigger, what makes it worse are our thoughts. So that in such a situation, if you can spend a few minutes with our friend there is no room for thoughts to arise and there is an immediate recovery.

### **OUR FRIEND CAN HELP US WHEN WE DIE**

Another moment, a very important moment when our friend can help us, is at the time we die. In fact in one of the texts it is said that if you learn to practise this technique and if you learn to make a connection with your breath, at the moment you are dying, if you are conscious, immediately your attention can come to the breath. I'm very much interested in the work people do with dying people, helping people to die peacefully. It is interesting that one of the techniques they use is focusing on breathing. So isn't it really valuable: our friend helps us to live peacefully and helps us to die peacefully.

### **FORGET OUR IDENTIFICATION**

Another beautiful aspect of our friend is that when we are with our friend even for a few minutes all our identifications, that we are Chinese, Sri Lankan, German, English, all this is forgotten. In this world there are these different divisions, racial divisions, religious divisions. Some of the problems in the modern world arise because people emphasise these divisions. So when you are with the breath all these identifications drop away and then it is

just the in-breath and the out-breath. So breathing is just breathing; whether it is a Buddhist, whether it is a Christian, whether it is a Hindu — there is just the breath.

### EXPERIENCE CALMNESS & WISDOM

Another aspect is that when we are with the breath we can experience some calm, some space, some stillness in our mind. In Buddhist terms this aspect is described as *samatha*, which is calm, tranquillity, stillness. So it is interesting that this technique has the aspect of experiencing *samatha*, calm, and also it helps us to experience some insight, some wisdom. As I said, it helps us to see thoughts as just thoughts, just to mirror our thoughts; just experiencing sensations, just experiencing sounds, so that we can have this very important insight: learning to see things just as they are.

### HOW THIS TECHNIQUE HELPS US

An interesting question is: does this technique help us in everyday life or does it only help us when we are sitting on a cushion? So I would suggest that whilst sitting, we gain this insight, we develop these skills, we develop awareness, we develop a non-reactive, equanimous mind; and then what is more important is to have such a mind in everyday life.

So what I have tried to do in this talk is to present some points, some aspects about the importance of this technique of being aware of our breathing. Maybe there are more points but I think I have no time left. I would now like to invite any questions about what has been said and any questions about this practice.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *I would like to know what is the difference between the meditation we are learning now and the meditation that is taught by other religions?*

**GODWIN:** It's a very theoretical question, and I always prefer simple, practical questions but still I will respond to that theoretical question. When you say other religions, it can include so many religions. So in religion there is always some emphasis on meditation, there is always an emphasis on making the mind calm and making the mind still. In fact in Christianity there is this beautiful saying: Be still and know that I am God. So that in different religions they may use different techniques but the principle is the same: using those techniques to experience some calmness, some stillness, and some spaciousness.

Another similarity is that in any tradition where there is meditation there has to be an element of awareness, there has to be an element of knowing and understanding what is happening in the mind. So I would suggest that these two aspects are there in any spiritual tradition where there is meditation.

Anything else? I would like some practical questions relating to the technique.

**RETREATANT:** *How can I know what to do with the breathing and how to feel the effects of the breathing?*

**GODWIN:** You don't have to experience the effects of breathing. In fact when I give a guided meditation I will try to suggest what has to be done. What has to be done is something very simple. Just feel what happens when the body is breathing. So using the sensations and the

movements in the body to be conscious, to be aware. I would like to repeat that you don't have to do anything special. It is just being conscious of your in-breath and your out-breath.

**RETREATANT:** *When we are meditating we may feel tired and sleepy. What should we do in that situation?*

**GODWIN:** Very good, practical question. So one suggestion is, just open your eyes. Another is, it is emphasised in the Buddhist texts, to have your spine erect. So if you can have your spine erect then you do not normally feel sleepy or drowsy. Another suggestion is, you are welcome to stand up. So you can try some of these things and see if they work. Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *The first question is, in Chinese we say that we have got only one mind and we cannot use one mind for two things at the same time. And during our daily life we have to attend work and most of the time we are very busy, so how can we deal with our work and make friends with our breathing at the same time?*

*And the second question is, you said earlier that breathing is our best friend and is with us all the time even when we are sleeping, so when we have dreams or when we are in deep sleep how can we take care of our breathing at that time?*

**GODWIN:** I'll start with the last question. What is interesting about our friend is that there are times when we can ignore it. Because when we are dreaming and when we are sleeping, in order to think of our breath we have to have awareness and consciousness. If you are a very advanced meditator you can have some element of awareness while you are sleeping and dreaming, otherwise where is the person who is having awareness when they are sleeping and dreaming? So my response is, this is a situation where you can just leave our friend alone and he or she would not mind it at all.

So the first question was that in everyday life we have to do many different things. Now when we have to do different things, how can we do these different things and still take care of our friend? As I said, to think of your friend you have to stop your work. This is why I said when the traffic lights are red, when you are just doing nothing, just be conscious of your friend, rather than being impatient about the red light. When you are having a particular emotion and when you are bothered by that emotion, at that moment you will not be trying to do different things and so then just come back to the breath.

Now I would like to respond to the question: what we might try to do as meditators when we have to do many different things. So here what happens is that when we have to do various things we might have the idea: I have to do many things but it is possible I might make a mistake. Sometimes this is what creates the tension. As I said yesterday, in cultures where the emphasis is on doing things perfectly, correctly, you always want to do everything perfectly. So I think in such situations, if you can just let go of this idea of perfection this can be helpful. This is one suggestion.

Another interesting point is that although we have to do different things, we can, as you rightly said, do only one thing at a time. So that if we can learn to be conscious of whatever we are doing in any particular situation, then one can develop what is called moment-to-moment awareness in relation to what has to be done.

Maybe one last suggestion which can be very helpful is that when you are working, when you have to do many different things, as I said earlier, what is important is to become

conscious of your state of mind. Are you anxious, are you stressed, are you insecure, or are you relaxed? So it is very important for those of you who are really interested in everyday practice to constantly check out your state of mind. Whether you are working or whether you are not working, try to develop this practice of constant watching, awareness of what is happening in your mind.

So when you have to do different things, after becoming aware of these different things just watch your state of mind. Is it reacting or is it responding? These are two very interesting words: reacting, responding. Responding is doing what is necessary without reacting. Reacting is getting anxious, getting fearful, getting stressed, tense and so on. So as you are still human and as you're still practising it is human that you will start to react in certain situations.

So if you are not able to be conscious at the time you are reacting, at least later on, when there is space, when there is clarity, when you have recovered from that emotion, can you look back and find out: why did I react? Why couldn't I have responded in that situation? Then as I said yesterday, we can learn from our mistakes, we can learn even from our reactions.

So this kind of inquiry has to be done without giving yourself a minus. You do have to do this kind of inquiry in a very friendly, gentle, playful way. And then you can experiment with it: you say, now tomorrow let me go to work and see what happens. Will I react, will I respond? And with any reaction, how long will it last? So you keep an open mind to see what is going to happen. These are very interesting, beautiful aspects of meditation, to see it as experimenting, experimenting with yourself. So when you try an experiment you don't take up a position. Without taking up a position, you're just learning, finding out, exploring. We can experiment, explore, and learn from any situation.

So there's time for one last question please.

**RETREATANT:** *When I am aware of myself being aware of the thoughts, then in that case I cannot concentrate on my meditation, so what can I do?*

**GODWIN:** So the question is, if I understood it correctly, if you are observing the thoughts that is not meditation. If that is not your question, what exactly was the point you didn't understand?

**INTERPRETER:** His question is, when he meditates he is aware of the passing thoughts and at that stage he is okay, he can still concentrate; but when he is aware that he is aware of the passing thoughts then that affects his concentration.

**GODWIN:** So this is another point we have to think about, this word concentration. Those who have been listening to me carefully will notice I have not used the word concentration at all, but rather than concentration the words I use are awareness, mindfulness, just knowing. I purposely avoid the word concentration because this is what is creating the problem, this is what is creating the suffering. So what I would suggest is: if the mind is concentrated, just know that the mind is concentrated; and if the mind is not concentrated, just know the mind is not concentrated. Then what is the problem?

It is very important when we sit for meditation not to have an expectation, an idea, a model of what should happen or what should not happen. In the Zen tradition there is a beautiful word for it, to have a beginner's mind, or a don't-know mind. Expectation is what creates

suffering in our life. When we have expectations and when things do not correspond to our expectations we suffer in life, and this is how suffering is created in meditation too. It is very interesting. So when we meditate without having any expectations we will just try to know what is happening from moment-to-moment.

And it is very important not to give pluses and minuses when we are meditating. So someone is expecting to concentrate and then when you think you are concentrated you give yourself a big plus and hold onto the concentration — that's how tension is created! And when the mind is not concentrated we give a big minus! So in meditation also we are rating ourselves, giving pluses, giving minuses, giving pluses, giving minuses. This is what we are doing in ordinary life, so at least in meditation please learn just to be open to whatever is happening.

So now I would like to suggest that you take a small break and during the break please make an effort to have mindfulness; and when you move around, please make an effort to move slowly and with awareness so that you begin preparing your mind for the meditation.

Please learn to walk slowly.

## GUIDED MEDITATION

**GODWIN:** Sit in a relaxed position. It is very important to sit with a relaxed body. Please realise we are not going to do something special, so you can just relax.

So let us spend some time with the body. Just feel the body. The different sensations, the different movements in your body.

If there are thoughts, just let go of the thoughts and come back to the body. Feeling the body is one thing, thinking about the body is another, please see the difference. Here we are learning to feel the body.

Let us learn to feel friendly and gentle and kind towards our body.

Let us now feel what it is to sit with our body completely still.

Now please allow the body to breathe naturally.

No need to control our breath or to manipulate our breathing, not trying to manipulate our natural breathing.

Let us spend a few minutes just learning to allow the body to do what it likes.

Now just feel what happens in the body when the body is breathing, the different sensations, the different movements in the body when the body is breathing.

Do you feel any sensation in the area of the nostrils? Do you feel any sensation in the area of the chest? Do you feel the rise and the fall of the abdomen?

Experiencing the present moment with the help of the sensations and movements in your body because they are happening now.

## MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

When the body is inhaling you know that the body is inhaling. When the body is exhaling you know that the body is exhaling.

Not thinking about the past, not thinking about the future. Experiencing the joy of the present moment with the help of the in-breath and the out-breath.

Please do not try to stop thoughts or control thoughts.

If thoughts are there, just know you are having thoughts and come back to your friend, the breath.

Just feel relaxed with the breath.

Let us feel friendly and gentle towards our mind and body.

No plusses to what is happening, no minuses to what is happening. Just knowing whatever is happening.

Now open your eyes slowly and when you change your posture do it slowly, consciously. And please don't think that the meditation is over. Just continue to know what is happening in the mind and body from moment-to-moment.

Now let us do some chanting. So when you are chanting, please keep your body still and don't make any other noise because chanting itself is a meditation. Like using the breath to experience the present moment, use the chanting to experience the present moment, and to create space in your mind through the chanting. I would like to suggest not to look at the paper because these are simple words and you will be able to pick up the words.

[Chanting]

**DAY 5 TALK, 10TH OCTOBER 1997:**

## **MEDITATION ON LOVING-KINDNESS**

**GODWIN:** I would like to welcome you once again. As you know, the subject of the talk today is meditation on loving-kindness. The word loving-kindness translates the Pali word *metta*. It is sometimes translated as loving-kindness, or as compassion, and it literally means friendliness.

### **LOVING-KINDNESS BEGINS WITH OURSELVES**

It is psychologically very interesting that the meditation of loving-kindness has to begin with oneself. So it is extremely important to learn to be friendly to oneself. The phrase I would like to use is: learning to be your best friend in a most friendly way. To make this very important connection with oneself; to feel at ease with oneself, feel at home with oneself. So to feel as if you are coming home to yourself.

It is only when we make this connection with ourselves that we can really feel friendly to others. It is only then that we can really open our hearts to others. If we do not make this connection with ourselves, what happens is we start to hate ourselves, we start to dislike ourselves. It becomes a habit to give ourselves minuses. In doing this you learn to become your enemy in a way, and this can create a lot of suffering for yourselves and also suffering for others.

So this is one very important aspect of loving-kindness, learning to be friendly to oneself, learning to open your heart to yourself, and learning to open your heart to others. What I'm going to say you can relate to your own experience. Please make an effort to do that, then my talk will be a meditation in itself.

### **FORGIVENESS & WOUNDS IN OUR HEART**

Another important aspect of loving-kindness is using forgiveness. Human beings carry what I call wounds; wounds created by what you have done to others, and wounds created by what others have done to you. I think everyone here, including myself, can relate to this. What happens with some human beings is that they continue to carry these wounds within themselves. So if you carry these wounds within without healing them you can create suffering for yourself and suffering for others, without knowing that the suffering is in relation to the wounds you are carrying.

They can also affect our body in a number of ways. We can be having certain tensions in different parts of our body. This is related to these wounds, this is related to these repressed emotions. These wounds can also create certain illnesses. Another way they can affect us is that they can disturb our sleep. Do we have fearful dreams, do we get angry in our dreams, or do we cry in our sleep? Then another way they can affect us is that suddenly we can be overcome by emotion and we don't know why. Suddenly we feel like crying; suddenly there is fear; suddenly there is sadness. And we cannot find the reason for it.

Another way they can affect us is that when we die the emotions, the wounds, can come up. It is interesting to find out why they should surface at the time of death. While we are living

we may not look at them, we may repress them, we may push them away, but at the time we die, when our minds and bodies become weak, these wounds can surface.

So it shows that with these unhealed wounds we cannot live peacefully, we cannot sleep peacefully, and we cannot die peacefully. Therefore it is extremely important to learn to heal these wounds. Meditation of loving-kindness can help us to heal these wounds by learning to forgive ourselves and learning to forgive others. Forgive ourselves by realising that we are only human. Forgive others by realising that they are only human too. Also learning to let go of the wounds by realising that they happened in the past. We cannot change the past, so why should we carry the past as a burden to create more and more suffering for ourselves and others in the present?

### **MAKE FRIENDS WITH UNPLEASANT SITUATIONS**

Another very important aspect of loving-kindness is learning to use loving-kindness to relate to unpleasant situations, unpleasant emotions when they are there. When we have unpleasant emotions, when we have physical pain, mental pain, we don't like them, we hate them, we resist them. By doing that we give them more power, more energy. In such situations we can use meditation of loving-kindness to learn to make friends with these unpleasant emotions. One very simple way of making friends with them is by learning to say to yourself: it is okay not to be okay – that is, to say okay to unpleasant situations.

### **SEE THE POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN OURSELVES**

Another aspect of loving-kindness is learning to see the positive elements in ourselves, to see the goodness in ourselves, to see the Buddha-nature in ourselves. One way of being our own enemy is by seeing only our mistakes, seeing only the negative things, only giving minuses to ourselves. So it is extremely important to learn to see the positive elements in ourselves, it is very important to learn to give plusses to ourselves, learning to see our goodness, learning to see the Buddha-nature in ourselves. And when we learn to do this what happens is that we see the positive elements in others too, we learn to give more and more plusses to others, we see more and more the Buddha-nature in others – and then you will come to a stage where you won't see a difference between yourself and others.

### **BE KIND TO OTHERS**

Another very important aspect of loving-kindness is learning to do kind things, learning to do compassionate things for others. When you develop more and more loving-kindness within yourselves, then naturally your actions, your speech, your words are related to this positive aspect of loving-kindness. And when you learn to be friendly to others, when you learn to be kind to others, when you learn to feel for others, this can also give lots of joy and happiness because when you see others being happy because of your own actions this can bring lots of joy, lots of lightness to yourself.

### **DON'T ALLOW OTHERS TO EXPLOIT YOU**

But having loving-kindness is not about allowing others to exploit you, allowing others to do what they like to you. It is very important to learn that there are times when you have to assert yourselves, when you have to learn to be firm with others. In this connection I would like to relate a story that I like very much and after relating the story I will end my talk.

The story is about a cobra who was practising loving-kindness. So there was this cobra in a forest practising loving-kindness, saying: May all beings be well, may all beings be happy, may all beings be free of suffering. There was an old woman who could not see properly. She was collecting firewood, and when she saw the cobra she thought it was a rope. She used the rope to bundle the firewood she had collected. As the cobra was practising loving-kindness, the cobra allowed the old woman to do this. The old woman carried the bundle of firewood home. Then after some difficulty the cobra escaped with lots of pain, with lots of wounds on its body.

Then the cobra went to meet his meditation master, and the cobra told the master: See what has happened; I adopt the practice of loving-kindness, but see the wounds, see the pain that I'm experiencing in my body! So the master very calmly, very gently told the cobra: You have not been practising loving-kindness, you have been practising foolish loving-kindness. You should have just shown by hissing that you are a snake! So it is very important that in everyday life we also learn what the cobra should have learnt.

So now it is time for questions – any questions relating to loving-kindness, especially in everyday life; any difficulties, any problems you have with it.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *Master, if we practise giving ourselves all the plusses, seeing the good side in ourselves all the time, where is the line to be drawn?*

**GODWIN:** When we have got used to giving minuses, when we have got used to seeing the unpleasant elements in us, when we are relating to ourselves as an enemy, how do we work with this situation? This is the important issue. So in such a situation just to realise: I'm only giving minuses to myself; aren't there good things that I've done? So we are learning to see the good things, factually, objectively, without, of course, being conceited about it, but simply as a fact. So we learn to see the goodness, we learn to see the positive side, we learn to see things as they are, as the Buddha said. This is the important thing.

Then, as I said, we learn to see the goodness in others which helps us to appreciate them. Also when you see goodness in others, learning to rejoice in it. So in this way you learn very important spiritual qualities which are helping your practice.

I would like to ask a question, and I ask this whenever I visit a foreign country. Which is easier to do: to forgive oneself or to forgive others? So please reflect on this and give an answer from your heart.

**RETREATANT:** *It's not easy to forgive oneself.*

**GODWIN:** Does everyone agree?

**RETREATANT:** *No.*

(By show of hands, the audience indicated who considered it easier to forgive themselves, and who considered it easier to forgive others).

**GODWIN:** Thank you. What does this indicate? It indicates that those who find it difficult to forgive themselves, are very hard on themselves. So they are too stonehearted towards themselves saying: I don't deserve to be forgiven. And then those who find it difficult to

forgive others, they are being very hard on others. So you see the importance of developing softness, you realise the importance of being gentle, the importance of feeling tender to oneself and to others. When you develop these qualities, naturally you can forgive yourself and you can forgive others.

So as I said, what we have to learn, and I think it is extremely important, is to accept our humanness, to accept that we are imperfect human beings, that we still have shortcomings. In the same way we have to realise that we are living in a world where other people are imperfect, where other people are still only human, so we're bound to see the shortcomings, human frailties, arising in others and in ourselves.

According to the Buddha's teaching there is greed, there is hatred, there is delusion both in us and in other people. So because of greed, hatred, and delusion, we all have shortcomings and make mistakes. Only someone who is completely enlightened will not have these shortcomings; but as long as we are not enlightened we are still only human, we are imperfect. So I feel that it is extremely important to realise this, to accept this and learn to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. Then when you can see things in these terms, as I said, you will be able to forgive yourself and forgive others.

Any other questions?

**RETREATANT:** *Due to the impermanence of life there are all kinds of suffering. What can we do about it?*

**GODWIN:** Actually I would like to discuss only loving-kindness because it is the subject that we are presently discussing. So I will give only a very brief response to the question of impermanence. We suffer from impermanence because we don't accept impermanence, we don't accept change. I will give an example. We are healthy and then because of the law of impermanence or the law of change we become sick. So we suffer because we have the expectation: I should not fall sick. In this way, when we have this resistance to change, to impermanence, there will be suffering. The way out of this is to be open to change, to be open to impermanence, to accept that as a fact of life. So this is again what the Buddha taught: learning to accept things just as they are, and not as they should or should not be.

**RETREATANT:** *You said we should learn to love ourselves as a friend, but when we see the bad thoughts or bad desires in us how can we love this friend when this friend is so bad? Isn't that like covering up for ourselves in a way?*

**GODWIN:** Very good question. We will take a couple of practical examples. Take the example of anger, when we get angry, what happens? We are angry about our anger. We start sometimes hating ourselves because we are getting angry, and then we suffer from guilt because we have got angry. Because of this anger and because you are relating to it in this way you can suffer for days.

So in using loving-kindness you relate to the anger in an entirely different way. Rather than beating yourself, rather than giving yourself a minus, rather than suffering and feeling guilty, in a very friendly, gentle way, as I have been saying so often, you'll find out: How did I get angry? So then we can learn from that anger, we can use that anger for our spiritual growth. This is what I mean by being friendly. The way I'm suggesting helps us to work with the anger in an entirely different way rather than giving in to it. It's not really pampering ourselves, but it is learning to work with the anger in a different way, in a more effective way, rather than suffering too much as a result of that anger.

And another point is, when you are friendly to yourself and when you are open to yourself you will also realise when you're not angry, which is also very important. So then we come to a stage that when we are angry we know what to do with the anger, and when we are not angry we know we are not angry.

Any other questions?

**RETREATANT:** *Learning to practise forgiveness is easier to say than to do, especially when it comes to people who are close to you like parents, very good friends, brothers and sisters. It is very difficult to forgive them. When it comes to friends who are not so close to you, not so friendly, then it's easier to forgive them. What can we do?*

**GODWIN:** Very interesting question, which I think all of us can relate to. It is interesting actually to reflect why people to whom we are close can create such wounds. The simple reason is that because they are close to us, maybe friends or relations, then we have an image, an expectation about how they should behave.

A good simile to understand this is that first we put them on a pedestal by saying he's my best friend. So then my best friend should behave in a certain way. Or we think: She's my mother and therefore she should behave in this way, so you see the demands we are making on people because they are close to us and, poor people, they fall from the pedestal that we have put them on. And when they fall from the pedestal we don't realise that we are the persons who put them on the pedestal in the first place, and we get disappointed, we suffer. And a person can carry these wounds throughout their life. So you should really see what happens to you because of the ideas you have about how others should behave. To put the same thing another way, we forget that they are also human.

There is time for one last question.

**RETREATANT:** *Do you mean we should not have any expectations of others, or should we not be attached to people?*

**GODWIN:** I think it is natural that we have expectations, but what we forget is how far are our expectations realistic? How far are you prepared to meet up with your expectations about yourself? How far can others meet up with your expectations? How realistic are your expectations? This is what one has to be clear about. I know some people who are very idealistic: very idealistic about themselves, very idealistic about others, and so they live in a very idealistic world. This idealistic world that they have created is one thing and what they are experiencing is another thing. So as long as we hold onto this idealistic world, hold onto this perfect world, we are bound to create wounds in relation to our own behaviour and in relation to the behaviour of others.

According to the Buddha, until and unless we are enlightened we are all crazy. Crazy in the sense that we can't see things as they are. The problem with us is we take this crazy world seriously. And also I would like to give a reminder of a very interesting saying in Tibetan Buddhism: Enlightened people behave like ordinary people, while ordinary people try to behave like enlightened people!

I'm very happy that you asked very good, practical questions on loving-kindness. So now we will take a small break and after the break we will be having a meditation on loving-kindness. So during the break I would suggest to please use a few minutes just to learn to be friendly to yourself.

## GUIDED MEDITATION:

Learn to open your heart like opening a flower.

Can you feel yourself as your best friend?

Can you really feel it, feel it in every part of your body, your whole being?

Feeling yourself as your best friend, can you really say these words with some feeling: May I be well and happy.

Really wishing for yourself that you will be well physically and mentally.

May I be happy. Feel happy that you are learning to do meditation of loving-kindness.

May I be peaceful. Can you really feel the peace and the stillness in this room?

Feel this peace in every part of the body.

Let us now look at our wounds. Look at the wounds in relation to what you have done to others. Try to forgive yourself by feeling that you are your best friend, by accepting that you are still only human. And those who do not have such wounds, feel happy that you do not have such wounds.

You can feel the area around your heart and say to yourself: I forgive myself, I forgive myself.

Those who have wounds in relation to what others have done to them, think of them and forgive them. Those who don't have such wounds, feel happy that you don't have such wounds.

I forgive you: may you be well, may you be happy, may you be free of suffering.

Can we really say these words from our heart?

As we are leaving our wounds behind may we experience more joy, more lightness, more friendliness.

I understand this is a day for remembering the ancestors, so let us think of our ancestors and especially our parents, whether they are alive or whether they are dead.

Can we live with thoughts of loving-kindness to our parents?

Can we feel grateful to our parents?

Let us do some chanting. I'm happy that the chanting is improving every day, both the Pali chanting and the Chinese chanting.

[Chanting]

**DAY 6 TALK, 11TH OCTOBER 1997:**  
**MEDITATION AND EMOTIONS**

**GODWIN:** I would like to once again welcome you. The subject of today's talk is emotions. What may be described as unpleasant emotions which create our suffering. We can consider some such emotions: anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, and feelings of guilt, jealousy. I think everyone here can relate to these emotions. I think no one here has not really experienced them. And I think everywhere in the world people go through these emotions that I mentioned.

It is actually these emotions which create our suffering, which create conflict in us. So it is very important to find out how meditation helps us to work with these emotions. So I hope to present some tools for you to work with them. Some of these tools you might have heard me mentioning before.

**BE OPEN TO UNPLEASANT EMOTIONS**

So what is the first tool? The first tool is very difficult in a way, as I have said a few times before: it is learning to be open to these unpleasant emotions. It is a very strong conditioning not to like them, to hate them, to dislike them and so on, because they are unpleasant when we experience them. So it is very important to learn to be open to them, to learn to be friendly towards them. We have to learn to do this gradually, gently, tenderly in our practice.

**LEARNING ABOUT EMOTIONS**

The next tool is learning to explore, investigate, discover, and make an effort to learn about these emotions. Because we don't like them, because we hate them, we never make an effort to learn about them, to discover about them. We can learn a great deal about these emotions. One thing that we can learn is to see the connection between thoughts and emotions. So we see how emotions are created, and when we understand and see how emotions are created to a great extent we can work with them, handle them. And when we are prepared to learn about them, discover about them, then we learn to be open to them.

**INVITE UNPLEASANT EMOTIONS**

Another interesting tool related to this is that when we don't have these emotions we can invite them and allow them to come. It is very interesting that when we invite them they don't come. Because when we fear them, when we don't like them, we give them more power and more energy. So when we are open, when we invite them, the power and energy we have given is taken away. Maybe today when we are meditating we will invite the monsters that we don't like.

**ABSENCE OF UNPLEASANT EMOTIONS**

Another very important tool is that when these unpleasant emotions are not there, to know that they are not there. When we don't like them what happens is we are afraid of them, and

by being afraid of them, when they are absent we hardly know that they are absent. So by knowing when they are absent we learn to be more and more positive.

To give a practical example, when we have a toothache we really suffer from the toothache, but when we don't have a toothache do we ever say: Wow! I don't have a toothache today? Even when we don't have a toothache we think maybe it will come tomorrow! So it is too good to believe that the monsters can be absent. So I would like to emphasise this tool very much, that when these unpleasant emotions are not there just to know that they are not there. Maybe now you are not having these unpleasant emotions, so please know that they are not there now.

### **UNPLEASANT EMOTIONS DON'T BELONG TO US**

Another very deep tool is to realise that these emotions don't really belong to us. We have a sense of ownership even with these emotions. So when there is anger you think it is *my* anger. When there is fear you think it is *my* fear. As you know, what we think of as mine, what we think we own, we don't like to let go of.

This point is presented in the Dhamma in a very interesting way, which is learning to relate to these emotions as our visitors, as our guests. So we have to be a very friendly, good host and then we can really learn from the visitors who come. We should realise that these visitors come and they stay and they go away. So when they come we must say: Welcome, please come, it's nice to have you here, how long will you be staying? It will be interesting to see how long you are going to stay. And when they leave you say: Goodbye, you're welcome to come again. Isn't it a beautiful way of relating to our visitors? So there is a kind of playfulness, light-heartedness, joy, if you can relate to these emotions in this way.

### **EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS WITHOUT WORDS**

Maybe one more tool is that when we experience these emotions we have given them labels. Sometimes we are conditioned by the labels themselves. So a very interesting tool is when these emotions come, to relate to them, to experience them without the label. Take away the label and see what you are actually experiencing. So that by giving a label we relate to it from the past, but when we take away the label we are really experiencing it from moment-to-moment. We are really being present with the emotion.

### **SUMMARY OF TOOLS**

So let me go over the tools that I presented. The first one is learning to be open to these unpleasant emotions. The next one is to make an effort to learn about them, to experiment about them. Another tool is that when they are not there, to invite them. Another is that when they are absent just to know that they are absent. Another is to relate to them without a sense of ownership, just to see them as visitors who come and go. And another is to take away the label and really see what actually you are experiencing.

### **DEVELOP SELF-CONFIDENCE**

Now what is important is that when you have discovered these tools and when you know that they work you develop a lot of self-confidence about handling these emotions. The biggest problem is that we don't have self-confidence, and when we don't have self-confidence in a way we are already defeated, we have already become victims. So when you

have self-confidence then you become open to them, then you come to a stage where whether these emotions are there or not there makes no difference.

### SEE EMOTIONS JUST AS THEY ARE

Now what happens is that when we have pleasant states of mind, pleasant emotions, we like them, we give them a big plus. And then we try to hold onto them, and when we cannot succeed then again there is suffering. And when there are unpleasant emotions, as I said, we don't like them, so we give them a minus. So can we relate to these states of mind without a plus, without a minus, just learning to see them just as they are?

Now if you have any questions please ask them, especially practical questions relating to the tools and maybe your own experience in working with them.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *When there is an emotion which appears in the mind there is generally not much problem, we can deal with it with the tools that you have just told us about. However, if there are big wounds in our heart, when these wounds come out, when great emotions develop, then naturally we react to them and we become nervous and sad. So are there any other tools we can make use of in order to deal with this sort of big emotion as opposed to general emotions?*

**GODWIN:** Can you give an example of what you have in mind?

**RETREATANT:** *It could be wounds which hurt many years ago or many lifetimes ago. It's just like a rat being pricked by needles.*

**GODWIN:** Yes. When I spoke about loving-kindness yesterday I spent lot of time telling you how to heal these wounds. So I don't like to repeat that but just to remind you that when you have these wounds, if it is wounds in relation to what you have done to others it is just learning to forgive yourself, accepting your humanness, accepting your imperfections. And if it is wounds in relation to what others have done to you it is forgiving them by realising their humanness, their imperfections.

Anything else please?

**RETREATANT:** *Recently something happened to me and I watched my own emotions and it was very funny. It was like some very cold water running through my heart, and it was a very big disappointment at the time, but after observing that I revived quickly. And my question is whether it is true that emotions have more to do with the heart, and thoughts have more to do with the brain?*

**GODWIN:** I think it doesn't matter whether it's in the brain or the heart. These are theoretical questions. We have to be very simple. In using the tools we have to have a very simple, practical, direct approach. This is the beauty of the Buddha's teaching. I would like to repeat these words, it is very simple, very practical, and it is very direct.

Anything else please?

**RETREATANT:** *You said earlier that we should not give labels to emotions. So how do we observe the emotions?*

**GODWIN:** Very good, practical question. I like such questions. Suppose you are experiencing boredom. So you take away the word boredom and find out what you are actually experiencing. Is it a sensation that you are calling boredom? Is it a particular thought that you are considering as boredom? Is it a particular feeling which you have categorised as boredom? So when we can explore like this boredom can become very interesting.

**RETREATANT:** *Master, my question is: all human beings have many bad habits like gambling, womanising, drinking, smoking. How do we handle these bad habits?*

**GODWIN:** Very interesting list. Actually, one of the aspects of meditation is working with habits. What has happened to us is that we have become dependent on these habits. So what happens is that we respond to these habits in a very mechanical way. The urge comes and then we just give in to it. So one suggestion I would like to offer – again this is very important in the practice of awareness – is just to know when these habits arise, to be conscious of them, to be aware of them so at least we can work with the mechanical aspect of these habits.

The second suggestion I would like to offer is to see for yourself how it creates suffering for yourself and how it can create suffering for others; and ask yourself, does it give you joy, lightness and positive spiritual qualities?

The third suggestion is that when you are not experiencing these things, when you have not given in to these habits, just to see the difference when they are absent from your mind. Then you see in your own experience what it does to you when they are present and what it does to you when they are absent. So then they will naturally drop away on their own.

And as I said earlier, it is also very important to develop self-confidence: I know I have these habits but let me make a real effort to work with them. To make a real commitment, dedication, devotion to work with these habits can be something very useful.

And maybe the last suggestion is: it is helpful to associate with spiritual friends, noble friends. It is helpful to share your experiences with them and they can be also very supportive on the spiritual path you are following.

One last thought is: please don't feel guilty, don't feel bad, don't consider yourself as a sinner because you are doing these things. Don't see them as problems but see them as a challenge that you need to work with.

**RETREATANT:** *We shouldn't put labels to our emotions, but if I have anger and I put it down how am I supposed to observe it? If I do not have the emotion how can I observe it?*

**GODWIN:** Supposing we are working with anger. I think anger is a common emotion that we can all relate to. So then when we don't have anger, just to know: Ah, I don't have anger now. You can take your mind backwards and see that the whole of this morning I did not get angry. At the end of the day you might say: Oh, today, the whole day I was free of anger. You'll be surprised what a good person you have been and then you'll feel more and more positive about this.

**RETREATANT:** *With such emotions it's never too late to want revenge. Sometimes you can put it down and forgive but it arises again, so what can you do about it?*

**GODWIN:** Good question. Because again we can relate to such an experience. So I would like to offer some suggestions how to work with such situations. The first suggestion is: don't be surprised. This is the way with emotions, sometimes they don't come, and then sometimes they come. So when they come, please don't be surprised. When emotions go we come to the conclusion: now it is all over. So the problems is with our conclusion that they should not come again.

The second suggestion is when they arise to be aware of them and to use different tools but without giving yourself a minus. This is what is important.

But arising from that question I would like to emphasise something very important, which is that we should not, as I said, come to the conclusion that I will not be having these emotions again, but rather when they come see if you can feel grateful for them, see if you can see them as an opportunity, if you can learn from them. Then, as I said earlier, you come to a state where whether they come or whether they don't come makes no difference. So that is what we should try to aim at rather than reach this conclusion: now they are over.

According to the Buddhist teachings, these things completely stop only when we have become enlightened. So as I said yesterday, we are trying to be enlightened people even before we are enlightened! This brings up a point that I have been emphasising very much in my talks: learning to accept our humanness, learning to accept our imperfections. It is very important in our practice.

No more questions? Are all your questions and problems solved?

**RETREATANT:** *I want to know how to deal with sadness. Sometimes one just can't let it go because you can even feel it in dreams, particularly when relatives pass away.*

**GODWIN:** I don't want to go over the tools again. I would like to repeat that whether it is sadness, whether it is fear, whether it is anxiety, whether it is guilt, it is the same medicine. So about dreams, it shows that the sadness has become fairly deep that it even comes up in a dream. But please remember, please be open to the days when you don't dream about sadness. When the sadness is not there, just to be aware that the sadness is not there.

There might be two types of sadness. One type of sadness is in relation to a particular incident. There may be another type of sadness which is not related to an incident, but you just generally feel sadness. So if it is related to a particular incident, that incident should become an object of meditation. To see clearly that that incident has been created by your expectations of how things should have been.

And if it is just sadness that comes without a reason, what you might try to do is to feel the sensations in the body while you are experiencing the sadness, because with sadness sometimes our thoughts can make it worse. So if you can be with the sensations, this may be helpful.

Another tool, as I have been mentioning a few times, is to come back to your breath because it is happening now. It is interesting that all sadness is in relation to the past. Sadness is in relation to the past and anxiety is in relation to the future. So making a connection with your breath and learning to be in the present helps us to handle the past and the future. By doing that we learn to handle these emotions which are always related to the past and the future. And in conclusion I would like to again mention one of the tools that I referred to earlier: when sadness is not there try to invite sadness and you might find that it will not come.

Time for one last question.

**RETREATANT:** *Your advice is that we should not label emotions with words, and you have already told us that if there is no anger, just to know there is no anger. But when we say there is no anger we are putting words to describe a certain experience, so isn't that contradictory?*

**GODWIN:** Very good question. I like that question. So if you consider the tools, you'll see that sometimes we need to use words, sometimes we don't have to use words. This is why there are a variety of tools, so if one doesn't work you can experiment with the others. What is important is that you have to find out which tools are really helping you. So once you discover the tools that are helping you, you have to use them.

It's interesting that these tools are related to each person individually. We human beings have different conditionings, different personalities. This is why I have been trying to present tools which can cover all types of human beings. So the last point I want to make is that it is very important in the spiritual path, in meditation, for you to experiment, for you to find out for yourself. The Buddha emphasised this very much, to be self-reliant, to be your own teacher, to be a light to yourself.

So now let us take a short break and during the break I would like to suggest that you reflect on some of the tools that I have mentioned and then discover for yourself what emotions are bothering you. It is very important to learn to reflect on such themes. Reflection is thinking about a particular theme, and when you think about it, if other thoughts come you should learn to let go of them and come back to the theme that you are really reflecting on. So I would like you to do this. It doesn't matter whether you are walking or sitting or whatever you are doing, just to learn to develop this important meditation of reflecting. And when you hear the bell please come back.

[Break]

## GUIDED MEDITATION

So let us do a meditation relating to what we have been discussing. Those who have problems with unpleasant emotions, please allow them to arise now.

So if these emotions that we don't like arise, let us see how far we can make friends with them.

Let us see how far we can just allow them, just let them be. Just to relate to them as a visitor who has come.

And if you don't have any unpleasant emotions, just to know that you don't have any unpleasant emotions.

Can we learn to relate to them without giving them a minus?

Can you really say to yourself, it is okay not to feel okay?

Can you feel grateful that this emotion is there so that you can learn to work with it?

Can you now have the self-confidence that if these emotions come again you know how to work with them, you know how to handle them?

Now please open your eyes.

We can do some nice chanting now.

Actually chanting is also a very powerful tool to work with emotions, especially if you can be completely in the present while you are chanting. Please see for yourself how chanting will help you. It will help you to create space in your mind.

[Chanting]

# THE EXPERIENCE OF MEDITATION

(ONE-DAY RETREAT)

## 1: MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE

**GODWIN:** I would like to welcome you to this one-day meditation retreat, and I would like to offer some suggestions about the practice today.

### FEELING HAPPY

The first suggestion I would like to offer is that every one of you should feel happy that you are able to come here. Today is a holiday and after working very hard you should really feel happy about yourself that you have decided to come here. Usually we feel bad about ourselves, but it is very important to feel good about ourselves. So I would like to emphasize this point, just to feel good about yourself that you are able to come here for meditation.

The next suggestion is to try to feel grateful that you are able to come. I know some who wanted to come today but for different reasons they were unable to come. You should feel grateful that you were able to come and that you are here.

### QUALITY OF JUST KNOWING

In meditation a very important aspect is the practice of awareness, mindfulness, just knowing what is happening. So in this one-day meditation we will try to develop this very important quality of just knowing whatever is happening in our mind and body from moment to moment as far as we can. And even if it is unpleasant experience, even if it is something you consider strange, just know that it is happening rather than be worried, thinking: Am I doing it rightly? Is it normal to experience these things? It is not necessary to have such thoughts but just know that this is what I am feeling, this is the sensation I am experiencing.

Another important aspect related to this is to be mindful, to be aware with loving-kindness, just knowing what is happening with friendliness. It can be like a mother who is just watching, observing her only child with friendliness. So let us learn today to watch, to observe, to find out, just to know what is happening in our mind and body like a mother watching her only child, with friendliness, with gentleness, with openness.

### SLOWING DOWN, BEING SILENT & ALONE

Related to mindfulness is another suggestion I would like to offer: let us learn to slow down today. I know in Hong Kong you have to move very fast because the speed of life here is very fast. Today we will make it a point to learn to relax and just do things very slowly. Slowly and also in a very relaxed way.

Another suggestion I would like to offer is the practice of silence. I know it is very difficult for some people to be silent because it is a very strong habit that we have to speak. So today

let us make an effort just to be silent with ourselves and you will see a connection between awareness, mindfulness, and silence. The more aware you are, the more silent you become and when you are silent, mindfulness will come naturally. You'll enjoy the space that silence creates in your mind.

Another aspect of silence is learning to be alone with ourselves. So today please try to be silent and just be alone with yourselves. We have become so dependent on external things. So today we will try just to be friendly with ourselves and see whether we can be in our own company and enjoy our own company. Learning to be our best friend. It is very important to make this connection with ourselves where we see ourselves as the most precious friend we have.

So today there will be some group discussions, and we can discuss the problems or difficulties you may be experiencing. But still it is very important in meditation to be self-reliant, to have our own tools. The Buddha emphasised self-effort is the best effort, and to be self-reliant.

### **DEVELOP SELF-CONFIDENCE**

Another very important suggestion I would like to offer is that we will try to develop self-confidence today. To have the self-confidence that you can handle whatever is arising in your mind and body. In meditation this is very important, to have this self-confidence; just to know what is happening in the mind and the body, and then learning from them, being open to them.

So today we will try to be like children, trying to learn, making discoveries about what is happening in our mind and body. It is very important to have this childlike quality of learning, finding out, being curious about what is happening in our mind and body, which is something we take for granted.

Try to see meditation as a voyage of self-discovery, and if we can have this openness then we can learn from any experience we are having today. As I said, it can be pleasant, it can be unpleasant, but learning to ask the questions: What I can learn from this? What does it show to me? This kind of attitude to meditation is very important.

### **NOTHING SPECIAL**

One last suggestion is: please do not have high expectations that you are going to achieve something very special. Meditation is nothing special. It's just being open to ordinary things. It's nothing extraordinary. Please remember that. Please realise that. This is something beautiful about meditation. So it is not results that we are going to achieve but the practice itself, *that* is the result; knowing what is happening is the result, not what comes after. Please remember this. Maybe in this culture there is a lot of emphasis on being goal-oriented, on achieving results. But in meditation the result is the practice. This is what is very interesting about meditation. The result is just being open, knowing what is happening from moment-to-moment, experiencing every moment.

These are some very practical suggestions I would like to offer you for today. So as you can see from the programme there is yoga, there is walking meditation, there is standing meditation, there is group discussion, and there is chanting – there will be so many things happening today. So let us see everything as part of the practice. Even when we have lunch,

let us learn to make it part of the practice. I will even give instructions on how to eat your lunch with a meditative mind.

### **GUIDED SITTING MEDITATION**

Let us now do our sitting meditation. Those who like to stand and move their bodies before the sitting are free to do that.

Now please sit in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes and spend some time just learning to relax yourself, just to relax your body. Just to feel comfortable with yourself.

Spend some time feeling happy that you are meditating now. Feeling good about what you are trying to learn.

Now what you are going to do in the present meditation is something very, very simple. So until you hear the bell just know from moment-to-moment what you are hearing, the thoughts that you are having, the sensations you are experiencing in the body.

It is something very simple that everyone can do. What is important is to be alert, to be awake, to be present, to be alive from moment-to-moment.

If anyone becomes sleepy and drowsy, open your eyes.

We hear sounds, we have thoughts, we experience sensations, we may be having emotions; just knowing from moment-to-moment all these things that are happening. Making friends with them, learning to say okay to them.

If you are having any unpleasant sensations in the body just be open to them, make friends with them, be aware of them. It's like learning to say okay to the noises that you are hearing.

Do you know each thought that arises and passes away in your mind?

[Bell]

Please open your eyes, and when you change your posture just know you are doing that and feel the different sensations in the body. So please continue to know what is happening in your mind and body from moment-to-moment.

One can meditate in four postures: sitting, standing, walking, lying down. So today we will be trying to practise in three of these postures: sitting, standing, walking.

### **DISCUSSION ON SITTING MEDITATION**

What I would like to discuss with you is what actually happens when you are meditating. Just share your experience and ask questions in relation to your experience while you were meditating.

So can I ask: are there any problems, any questions about sitting meditation? I said just sit and try to know what is happening in your mind and body. So any questions, any difficulties about this?

**RETREATANT:** *While I meditate I have lots of thoughts and some are so obvious you don't need to observe them, but some are delicate, minor ones. Is it necessary to observe these thoughts?*

**GODWIN:** We should try to observe every thought. When I gave instructions for the meditation, I said: Can you be conscious of every thought that arises in your mind? And it is very important to learn to observe thoughts without judging them: this is delicate, this is not delicate, this is good, this is bad. Without judging, without giving pluses and minuses, can we just observe the thoughts as they arise and as they pass away?

**RETREATANT:** *I've been meditating for over a year and I have lots of problems like my body moving, my ankle hurts, and after meditating for a while when I try to get up I have difficulties, but after I walk for a while it is okay. Now my left shoulder hurts. So I'm having all these problems. I want to know if I'm doing the meditation in the right way.*

**GODWIN:** I don't see them as problems. I tried to make it very clear that meditation is just knowing whatever is happening in our mind and body without being concerned: Am I doing it right? Am I doing it wrong? Is it very strange that this should happen? I repeated a number of times: Just to know what is happening, and can you say okay to whatever is happening, especially if it is unpleasant.

Anyway I would like to repeat that it is extremely important to learn to work with unpleasant sensations in whatever forms they arise in the body. Just by knowing them and learning to make friends with them, not to see them as problems: that is the practice, because while meditating if you learn to handle these unpleasant sensations that arise then in everyday life when they arise you know how to handle them. So it is very helpful that these unpleasant sensations arise when you are meditating.

**RETREATANT:** *I was thinking about anxiety. I have had anxiety for some time, but when I try to call it up and look at it, it doesn't come – or not in such a strong form as I used to suffer from. That is the first thing.*

*Another thing is that if someone has had anxiety over a problem and cannot recall the anxiety later, then when the problem crops up again there is no time to practise, to have enough experience to face the problem and examine the anxiety and to get rid of it and to face the problem squarely.*

**GODWIN:** So my answer to the first point: Can there be a problem when you wanted anxiety to come and it didn't come? What's the problem? Isn't it interesting: when we have anxiety it's a problem; and even when we don't have anxiety it's a problem!

**RETREATANT:** *My question is when we have some problem, anxiety for example, and it occurs from time to time, we want to get experience on how to handle it. And when you want experience to practise on it, it doesn't occur as it occurred before so there's no experience to help solve the problem.*

**GODWIN:** I think you were present in the nunnery when I presented the tools on how to work with emotions. So I would like you to go back home, and as I saw you were making notes, please go over the notes and then find out for yourself, experiment with the tools and see how you can work with anxiety.

Anyway, just a brief comment on how to work with these emotions when they come, because I know some of you were not present when I presented these tools on how to work with emotions.

So one thing that we learned today is, whether it is anxiety, whether it is fear, whether it is anger, whether it is physical pain, just learning to know that these things are there. And as I suggested in relation to physical pain, learning to say okay to this anxiety or fear. Learning to feel friendly towards these unpleasant emotions can help us to work with them. So this is one of the tools that I presented, and those of you who are interested in the other tools I presented, maybe you can get a copy of the talk that I gave on emotions and how to work with them.

## GUIDED BREATHING MEDITATION

During this meditation please don't walk out of the room.

I would like you to continue to be aware of your body. You can close your eyes and just feel the different sensations, the different movements in your body.

Learning to feel the body, learning to feel friendly towards the body.

Feel grateful that you have this body and that we can use the body for our practice.

Now just feel what it is to sit in this posture. Can you feel relaxed with this posture?

If you can relax your body, you can relax your mind. Feeling relaxed is not resisting anything in the body and in the mind.

Let us now spend some time with our breath. So please allow your body to breathe naturally. Let the body breathe the way the body likes to breathe.

When the body is exhaling you know that the body is exhaling. When the body is inhaling you know that the body is inhaling. Have your complete and full attention on the in-breath and the out-breath.

It is natural that you will have thoughts. Just know that you are having thoughts. Don't resist them, don't dislike them, but pay more and more attention on the in-breath and the out-breath.

If you are having any unpleasant sensations in the body, please learn to be mindful of them, to be aware of them, learning to make friends with them, learning to say okay to unpleasant sensations.

[Bell]

[Chanting]

## DISCUSSION ON BREATHING MEDITATION

**RETREATANT:** *During the meditation I found my back perspired a lot. I got all wet. The second question is, when I focus on breathing my breathing becomes very quick. When I try to focus on something else then my breathing returns to normal.*

**GODWIN:** The first question about the perspiration in the back, just know that there is perspiration in the back and let it be there. Make friends with that perspiration.

About the second question that when you focus on breathing the breathing becomes fast and when you focus on something else the breathing becomes normal: so I would suggest in the beginning allow the body to breathe naturally, forget about focusing on the breathing but just sit and let the body breathe the way it likes. So please spend some time just learning what is called non-doing, allowing the body to do what it likes in relation to breathing. Don't see it as meditation but just see it as some exercise that you are trying to develop, just non-doing, allowing the body to breathe the way it likes.

There is a meditation master in Sri Lanka who says that when we sit, if we think meditation is something special then we will have special problems! So here we are trying to give special attention to the breath and then the breath behaves in an unusual way, and when you ignore the breath it becomes normal. So don't see meditation and breathing as something special and just be with it. And even when you are outside, when you think you are not meditating, just continue to have a connection with the breath, to continue to be aware of the breath at other times also.

Let me thank you all very much for asking very practical, useful questions and also thank you very much for those who have shared some positive experiences with us. So it is very nice that we can sit here as a group of spiritual friends, just sharing each other's experience. This is something very valuable.

**RETREATANT:** *I want to know if there is any should be or should not be when we meditate. For example, when I'm doing the sitting meditation I can't stop thinking. It seems that when I'm doing the walking meditation the situation is better, but when I'm sitting, when thinking comes up I have a conflict whether to stop it or just allow it.*

**GODWIN:** I'm happy you have raised that question because it is a very common problem.

It is not possible to stop thinking. The more we try to stop thinking the more thoughts we have. That is why when I gave the guided meditation I said: it is natural that thoughts will arise. So as in the first meditation we did, what we are trying to do is to be aware, to be mindful of the thoughts themselves. Thoughts, sounds, sensations, whatever there is in the mind and the body. So in that sort of meditation if you have thoughts there is no need to have a conflict.

Also in the second meditation we did in which we were trying to be aware of our breath, when thoughts come we should be aware, mindful that thoughts are coming, and make friends with them, not to have a conflict, and then come back to the breath. But we can be aware of the breath for a few minutes, then again thoughts will come. This is the nature of the mind, that we don't have much control. So meditation is understanding how our minds work, making friends with our mind and whatever is happening, and training ourselves to slowly, gently come back to the breath.

It is very important even when we are not sitting to continue to be aware and mindful of the thoughts that we are having. Even while relaxing, while eating, we are having thoughts. So whatever we are doing it's a very good practice to be conscious of our thoughts, not only when we are meditating. We can learn a great deal about our thoughts by just watching them, just asking: What are the thoughts that I'm having?

So most thoughts are either about ourselves or about others. And sometimes the thoughts are negative about yourself, negative about others; so it's just to know how we are having negative thoughts about ourselves and others and how when we have such negative

thoughts emotions are created. So these are very important insights to develop by watching thoughts.

Do we have more thoughts about the past? Do we have more thoughts about the future? Why do I have more thoughts about the past? What happens when I think about the future? Do I have anxiety? This is why we have to find out, learn about our thoughts and how the thoughts can create emotions and how they can create suffering. This is a very important aspect of the practice. So it is not only stopping thoughts but understanding, learning, discovering about them.

So any other questions? Any other difficulties?

**RETREATANT:** *I want to talk about a personal experience of mine. Once after I read a sutta I went to meditate for about ten minutes. What happened was that there were lights flashing in my eyes. It was a golden light. Whether I opened my eyes or closed my eyes the light still flashed for more than half an hour. So I was a bit scared of this phenomenon that arose. I did not know whether this phenomenon was normal or abnormal and I would like to know how to handle this phenomenon.*

**GODWIN:** Seeing visions, seeing such things reflects different phases in the practice. Sometimes these visions, these pictures you see are very pleasant, sometimes they are very unpleasant. So as I was saying very often today, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant just know that you are seeing lights, you are having this experience, without thinking: Is it abnormal? Is it normal? If you react in that way you are getting involved with what is happening. So what you need to do is not to get involved but just to know; and as I was saying, just to say okay and then after some time the sensation of lights or whatever will stop.

## YOGA

Now it's time for yoga. So I would like to make a few points about the connection between meditation and yoga. One thing is that when you do yoga you learn to be aware, mindful of your body, you learn to relax your body, you learn to be friendly and kind towards the body, you learn to use yoga exercises to experience the present moment. These are some aspects of yoga in connection with meditation.

So now you can prepare for yoga and I hope during yoga you'll have challenges, difficulties, and, as it was mentioned earlier, I hope you learn to make them the objects of meditation. And hopefully during yoga your body may relax, and then when we do sitting meditation let us sit with that relaxed body and relaxed mind and see what happens. Thank you very much.

If there is anyone who will not be doing yoga, please refrain from speaking. You can do walking meditation somewhere if you like. Or you can sit on a chair somewhere calmly, just observing your mind – what is happening in your mind from moment-to-moment. So please make use of this opportunity if you are not doing yoga. Now the yoga teacher will take over. Thank you.

[Yoga]

## GUIDED WALKING MEDITATION

Now we will do some walking meditation. The idea behind walking meditation is walking consciously. Walk slowly and just be mindful of your walking. When you walk you have to feel the different sensations in the body while you are walking. Thoughts will come but please learn to let go of the thoughts and come back to the present, that is the walking.

So now we have to organise how we can do walking meditation. I would suggest that we can do it in two groups. One group can walk on the stage and the other group can walk here. So the two groups can get into two circles following one after the other. And while you are walking I will try to offer some suggestions about the practice.

Whatever you are doing, please do it slowly, consciously, with mindfulness.

Walk slowly, consciously. Feeling the sensations in your feet. Using walking to experience the present moment.

Keep your hands in front.

Walk slowly so that you can be conscious of all the movements and sensations in your body when you are walking.

Let go of your thoughts and come back to the present with the help of walking. Just walking in a very relaxed way.

Learning to enjoy the simple act of walking.

Please look at the feet of the person in front without looking all around.

When you are lifting your feet know that you are lifting your feet.

Just feel the earth with your feet.

Learning to relax with your walking. Learning to walk consciously.

Can you walk as if you are walking on lotus flowers, gently, tenderly – just being conscious of each step?

[Bell]

Now please stand wherever you are.

Now please stand completely still with your eyes closed.

You can use the sounds to experience the present moment.

Just being in the present with the help of hearing.

Can we hear the sounds very sharply, very clearly, as if for the first time?

[Bell]

## DISCUSSION ABOUT BODILY AWARENESS

I would like to know what happened when you were doing yoga.

**RETREATANT:** *I found some postures are difficult but that didn't really matter because I have done it before. But when I did yoga I found that there was not enough space for everybody, there were too many people in this hall and I realised that anger arose in my mind. For example, when the person next to me stretched his leg too far I would say to myself: Why does he have to stretch so far?*

**GODWIN:** This is why I said that today we have to be open to learn from whatever happens to you. Learning to see everything as part of the practice. So whether you get angry, whether you get annoyed, when you are reacting, just observe that and see how you are creating suffering for yourself from what others are doing. So in that situation the anger is the object of meditation. Then you learn to make that the object of meditation and see how far you can let go of that anger.

And as I was also saying earlier, these are unpleasant experiences we have, physically and mentally, not only when we are doing yoga but in other situations as well. So just knowing them and making friends with them is a very important aspect of the practice. If you can practise in this way anything can be a learning experience, anything can be a meditation. So if you can have that openness, then without getting angry with your neighbour, you feel grateful for this person because he or she is giving you an opportunity to work with anger. The person who is annoying you, irritating you becomes your teacher at that time. It is a beautiful way to live. When I give my talk this evening I will speak about this aspect.

Anything else? Maybe you have another comment about yoga? Another experience about yoga? The yoga master is also here.

**RETREATANT:** *Whether our practice is yoga or breathing, I would like to know when we focus our mind, do we focus on breathing from the lungs or breathing from the abdomen?*

**GODWIN:** I said to allow the body to breathe naturally. So if you try to breathe with some particular part of your body, that is not allowing the body to breathe naturally. It is very important to learn to allow the body to breathe naturally. Then when the body is breathing naturally you're just being conscious of the breathing, that is all. It is like when we are doing walking meditation, we just allow the body to walk and we are just being aware of walking. We don't try to walk in a different way. So in meditation it is very important to learn to be natural, not to interfere with the natural process of what is happening when we are meditating whether it is walking, breathing or whatever.

Anything else, any other questions?

**RETREATANT:** *About 7 or 8 years ago I had minor pains in one particular side of my lungs. This pain has already gone, but this week I came here to meditate and last night I realised that this pain had returned, and this morning I also realised that this pain was there. I would like to know why this pain arose, whether I used the wrong method or posture.*

**GODWIN:** I feel that when you are meditating perhaps you are trying too hard, and maybe you are trying to breathe in a different way. When one tries to breathe in an unusual or different way it may be a strain on the lungs. So it is very important when we are meditating, to learn to meditate in a very relaxed way, not to try too hard. If you try too hard

it can be a strain on the body and also the mind. So in the next meditation please try to sit in a very relaxed way and don't put a strain on any part of the body. Anyway if the pain comes again, stop focusing on breathing and send thoughts of loving-kindness, friendliness, gentleness to the lungs.

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *I would like to relate to the experience of the lady who spoke about the pain in the lungs. I also experienced a similar kind of pain this week, but according to my own experience I tolerated the pain for a few days and today I do not have the pain anymore, so I think that this could be just an old wound and nothing to do with the meditation itself.*

**GODWIN:** Thank you very much for sharing that with us. It brings up a very important point, that when we have unpleasant experiences we should go through these unpleasant experiences, be open to them, and then they may drop away on their own. It's a very valuable experience you have shared, thank you very much.

**RETREATANT:** *When I practise sitting meditation my body moves in all four directions, front and back, left and right. I asked others what to do and they advised me not to pay attention to the movements, so I just continued sitting with the movements. I do not know whether this is right or wrong. That is the first question.*

*And the second question is: when I sit my back is not straight. When I try to make my spine erect the movements intensify, and I do not know what I should do in that situation.*

**GODWIN:** When the body starts moving, as I have been saying, just to know that the body is moving. And I would like to suggest you can also try to control the movements, to see whether you can stop that movement on your own. As I said earlier, these are passing stages in the practice. If you see them as problems you get stuck with them. So to get into the next stage, as was said earlier by another meditator, we should learn to say okay to it, we should learn to feel friendly with those things rather than have the question: Is it right? Is it wrong? Is it normal? Is it abnormal? By doing that we are getting involved and we get stuck. So this is one of the suggestions I would like to make.

And about having your spine erect, it's nice to try to have your spine erect but it should be very relaxed, not tense. So try to find a posture where you feel relaxed and natural with that posture rather than experience tension and discomfort with your posture. So you need to experiment, explore the sitting posture more and more.

**RETREATANT:** *I want to thank you for the different practices and meditation during this week. What I want to know is that you also mentioned in your talk that we should learn from our unpleasant emotions and make them a learning experience – how do we know whether what we have learnt from the unpleasant experience is right or wrong?*

**GODWIN:** Very simple answer: without resisting, if you can say okay and make friends with it, that's it. To put it in other words: when we have unpleasant emotions the normal tendency is to suffer as a result of it, but here by taking them as learning experiences we learn not to suffer and to see them as our teachers and feel grateful for them, because if they do not arise, how can we learn to work with them?

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *This is the first time I've done meditation and sometimes my feet become numb. When that happens should I terminate the meditation immediately or should I continue to meditate? When I meditate I use the traditional method of having my legs crossed, but you mentioned that the posture should be natural. That is the first question. The second question is: how do I know how long I should meditate for? How long is enough?*

**GODWIN:** About the first question, when you feel numb in the body, as I said earlier many times, just to feel that it is numb and learn to say okay to it. And if it becomes unbearable you can just change the posture.

The problem is not with the numbness but with how we relate to it; how we react to the numbness is the problem. So again we should be grateful for the numbness because we learn how not to react to the numbness even when the numbness is there. This is why I say that all these unpleasant experiences are really valuable teachers for us because if you do not feel numb you do not learn how to handle it, how to work with it.

About the second question, actually meditation has to be a way of life. This is what I will be trying to tell you in the talk, that there is no beginning meditation and stopping meditation. Meditation should not be confined to a particular posture, a particular time because from the time that we wake up to the time we go to sleep our mind is moving, we are having thoughts, we are having states of mind. So ideally we should have this constant awareness, constant alertness, constant checking out what is happening in our mind throughout the day. Then as I said, meditation becomes a way of life. Life and meditation are not two things, they are just one.

**RETREATANT:** *You mentioned that we should learn to call up some of our unpleasant emotions and to make friends with them and learn from them. I tried that during the meditation and I focused on anger. So I thought of a person I hate very much and tried to get that angry feeling but I found that that anger did not come. Can we apply this in real life? If I keep on meditating will I be able to apply this in life, and in turn later on will I hate this person less?*

**GODWIN:** Thank you very much for sharing that experience. This is one of the tools I presented when I spoke about emotions. It is extremely interesting that these unpleasant emotions that we don't like, when we invite them they don't come; and when we don't want them to come they come. So this shows the importance of openness, and then with more and more openness and waiting for these emotions to come, they don't come. So I'm very happy that you had this very important insight.

You can use the same principle in relation to thoughts. When we don't want thoughts to come they come, and if you invite them, let any thought come, you'll experience that they don't come. And as you said, with this kind of practice I'm sure that the anger you have towards that person will become less and less.

As I said in relation to meditation on loving-kindness, I would like to suggest you think of that person and try to forgive that person, accepting his humanness, otherwise you're still carrying a wound in relation to what he has done to you. We should learn this very important quality of forgiveness. Forgiveness to oneself and forgiveness to others, because these things have happened in the past; we cannot change the past, so why should we carry the past as a burden, an unnecessary burden which is creating suffering for us?

## GUIDED STANDING MEDITATION

Now let us do some standing meditation for some time.

Please stand slowly, knowing that you are going to stand and observing the intention to stand.

Now just feel what it is to stand. Feel the different sensations, the different movements in your body.

If you are experiencing any unpleasant sensations, painful sensations in the body, just know them and just be open to them, just say okay to them. And if you are experiencing any pleasant sensations in the body, just know that you are having pleasant sensations.

Try to feel every part of your body, the different sensations, the different movements in your body. And learn to feel friendly, gentle and kind to your body.

When thoughts come, learn to let go of them and come back to the body. Use your body to experience the present moment, the here and the now.

Learn to feel the body rather than think about the body; please see the difference. And just feel what it is to stand completely still.

Learn to gently let go of the thinking and come back to your body. To be in the present with the help of your body, with the feelings, the sensations, the different movements. Finding the sensations and the feelings in the body more interesting than your thoughts.

[Bell]

## EATING AS MEDITATION

In a few minutes we will be eating our lunch. So I would like to tell you how eating can be a meditation. Here again, we must make an effort to eat mindfully, to eat consciously, to be in the present as far as possible when we are eating. And please make a conscious effort to chew your food. So slowly, consciously chewing your food.

When you are eating, observe the likes and the dislikes that might have arisen in your mind. Just to know the likes and dislikes when they arise. And when there are no likes and dislikes also to know that there are no likes, no dislikes. All this can be discovered and learned only if you eat in silence.

It is also important to learn to avoid the two extremes. Avoid eating too much or eating too little. For meditation it is very important to know the right quantity of food. And you can only learn the right quantity of food if you can listen to the body while you are eating.

Now when you stand up, don't try to stand quickly — do it slowly. Be aware of all your movements in standing. Observe the intention to stand. And please do conscious walking from here to the place where you are going to eat. So please walk slowly and in complete silence.

We'll be meeting again after one hour for group discussion. So thank you very much.

You can wait patiently for the lunch to arrive. This can be also a very important practice.

[Lunch]

## DISCUSSION ABOUT EATING AS MEDITATION

I would like to know what happened when you were eating your lunch silently and with awareness. What further discoveries did you make?

**RETREATANT:** *While I was having lunch, being mindful and keeping silent, I found lunch tasted especially good and I was very grateful to the people who prepared the food because I did not know we would have lunch provided here so I didn't need to go out and buy my lunch. So that is the first thing.*

And I want to share some of my own experience in meditation. I haven't been meditating for too long, but from my experience different parts of the body ached when I started meditating. And also we may be at different stages, but we should try not to hang onto whatever comes, otherwise we will get stuck.

As for the movements in the body, my own experience is that having practised meditation for a while, if you want your body to move to the left, it moves to the left; and likewise, if you want it to move to the right, it moves to the right. So if you want to stop the movement you can just tell your body to stop the movement by practising in this way.

**GODWIN:** Thank you very much for both points that you have made. The first point is very interesting, that when we eat with mindfulness we can really taste the food. Eating becomes such a special experience. Otherwise we eat like machines, not even knowing what is happening when we are eating. So I am very happy that you mentioned that.

And it's also nice that you mentioned that you felt gratitude, you felt grateful. This is a very important quality that we need to develop. In fact in traditional Buddhist countries, before we eat we spend some time feeling grateful for those who have prepared the food and who have been responsible for cooking the food. So I would like to suggest to everyone here to spend a few minutes, even a few seconds, before you start to eat feeling grateful for those who are responsible for the meal, feeling grateful that you are able to eat.

About the second point, this is exactly what I meant when I said that we should also control the phenomenon of these bodily movements. So it's a very good connection to make with your body, to give it very friendly, gentle orders: Now please stop moving. Sometimes when you give such orders the body might respond to them. So I would suggest sometimes we can allow the body to move and just be aware of it, feel friendly with that, and sometimes we can tell the body: Now you've had enough, so please stop. The body might respond, but for that to happen you should have a very good connection, sensitivity to the body. Thank you very much for those two points.

## GUIDED SITTING MEDITATION

**GODWIN:** Now please allow the mind to do what it likes. So let any thoughts arise, thoughts about the past, thoughts about the future. And let us learn to observe the thoughts without judging them, no plus, no minus, just thoughts arising and thoughts passing away; but please be alert, awake from moment-to-moment.

Learning to make friends with our thoughts. Learning to create space for our thoughts.

For those who have problems with thoughts, please learn that there is nothing wrong with thoughts if you can be aware, if you can know what thoughts are arising and passing away.

In this meditation you don't try to stop thoughts, you don't try to control thoughts, you create space for any thought to arise. What you are learning now is to develop a non-reactive mind in relation to thoughts.

Now let us learn to make friends with the emotions that we don't like. So please allow those emotions that you don't like to arise and see, as with the thoughts, whether you can make friends with them, create space around them, just allow them to be there.

If anyone is feeling sleepy or drowsy, please open your eyes because it is very important to be alert, to be awake.

It is very important for us to learn not to push away, not to control unpleasant emotions, but to allow them to arise and to make friends with them and to create space for them. So let us learn this very important aspect.

Let us now learn to do the same in relation to unpleasant sensation. So allow the unpleasant sensations in the body to arise. What you consider as strange feelings, unusual feelings, what you consider as abnormal sensations, let them arise. It can be in any part of the body.

Can we learn to relate to these sensations without giving a minus? To relate to them as just sensations?

Thoughts, emotions, sensations, learning to see them just as they are. Learning to relate to them without a plus, without a minus.

This is learning to have loving-kindness to our thoughts, to our emotions, to our sensations. Then they don't become problems for us. Then they become our friends. This is what we are trying to do with this meditation.

## **2: HOW TO INTEGRATE MEDITATION WITH DAILY LIFE**

**GODWIN:** Now I'm going to give a talk on how to integrate meditation with daily life. So please listen carefully with your complete attention.

### **MAKE A COMMITMENT**

We have to be clear about our priorities in life. So we have to be clear where the practice of meditation figures in the list of priorities we have in life. If one is really prepared to make a commitment for the practice of meditation, that person will never say I don't have time to meditate. So please be clear on this point.

### **JUST KNOWING WHAT IS HAPPENING**

The second point is, as we have been trying to do today and as I have been emphasising very much, is this very important aspect of just knowing what is happening in your mind and body, otherwise you are becoming more and more like a machine. Machines can function very efficiently but the machine does not know that it is functioning, it has no understanding, no knowledge.

So knowing and understanding how our mind and body work is something we can do in everyday life. The things that we do habitually, mechanically, like brushing our teeth, combing our hair, dressing, all these small acts, little acts, please make an effort to do consciously, to know that you are doing them, to have your complete and full attention on them when you do those things. Whether you are at home, whether you are travelling in a car, whether you are in your place of work, just to know, just to be aware of what is going through your mind and body from moment-to-moment as far as possible. It is the only way to integrate meditation with our daily life.

### **BE CONSCIOUS OF THOUGHTS**

Another aspect that I emphasised here is our thoughts. So during the day just be aware, just be conscious: What are the thoughts that I'm having? Are they about the past? Are they about the future? Are they about me? Are they about others? From the time we wake up to the time we go to sleep we have these continuous thoughts going through the mind, they never stop. So we have to make an effort to learn about these things. By learning about your thoughts you can try to understand the type of person you are, you can gain self-knowledge, self-understanding. This is very important for the meditation.

### **EMOTIONS**

Another problem in everyday life related to this is our emotions, unpleasant emotions that create suffering for us, create conflict for us. So unless we are meditators we really don't know how these emotions are created. What happens to people is that they suffer from these emotions and they don't know why they are suffering, and so they continue to suffer in this world. So if you can understand the mechanism, the relationship, the conditions that create

these emotions, how they are directly related to thoughts, then you can work with them, you make them the objects of meditation.

### **UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES**

Another aspect that I have been emphasising, and it is very important in everyday life, is to find out about, to make what is unpleasant, what is disturbing you, what is bothering you, the object of meditation. You might remember today when we were meditating we heard some big noise outside. At that stage I suggested to you, let us listen to that sound. I suggested we could listen to it as if for the first time; otherwise we will consider it as a noise, we will consider it as a disturbance, we might get angry, we will suffer as a result of that noise outside. So when we learn to make that the object of meditation we can learn from any situation, any experience in life.

The same thing applies to people we have problems with. This is one of the greatest challenges we have in everyday life: relationships. You have to have relationships with people at home, you have to have relationships with people at the place of work. We cannot move away from relationships. So let us take the case of someone in everyday life making your life miserable, creating problems for you, creating suffering for you. An interesting way of relating to such a person is to relate to that person as your teacher, as your guru. So you learn to use that person to observe your own mind, to see your own reactions to that person. Then you realise that the problem is not with that other person but how you are relating to him, how you are reacting to that person.

This is the beauty of the Buddha's teaching. If the suffering is outside, we can never free ourselves from suffering. But because we are creating our own suffering then we can free ourselves of the suffering. Sometimes I define meditation as finding the medicine for the sickness that we create ourselves. So as we create the sickness, we have to discover the medicine.

Once we have discovered that meditation is the medicine, we have to use it, we have to apply it in everyday life. And sometimes as you know medicine can be very unpleasant, it is not always sweet, not always nice, but if you want to cure yourself, even if it is not pleasant you have to take the medicine. So these unpleasant experiences we have, physical pain, mental pain, they are unpleasant, certainly, but as I have been saying, we have to learn from them, they have to be our object of meditation.

### **MATERIALISM & CONSUMERISM**

Another challenge you have in everyday life is materialism, consumerism. When you live in a rich country like this, you cannot separate, you don't know, it's not clear, what you really need and what is simply your greed. The society you live in can create desires in you, needs in you, which are not really necessary.

A very important aspect of meditation in everyday life is learning to lead a simple life. It is something very beautiful to be simple, learning to be simple in our way of living. So when there is an urge or when there is a need to buy things, when you see the things you should ask: Now is this really necessary for me? Why do I really need this? Is it because other people are wearing this or other people are using that or do I really need it? So you need to really ask that question when living in a consumer society.

Then you'll realise your joy, your happiness, your lightness come not from external things, not from goods, not from what you possess, not from what you buy, but from something that comes from within yourself. This is the beauty of meditation. The need for external things drops away because you have become independent of external things. They drop away. And as I said, joy and lightness come from within yourself.

### LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

Another very important meditation, especially when practised in everyday life, is meditation on loving-kindness. So one aspect of loving-kindness is learning to be your own best friend. If you can really make that connection with yourself you'll never do things which are unskilful for you, unwholesome for you, which create your own suffering and suffering for others. And it is only when you are friendly to yourself that you can really be friendly to others. First we have to open our hearts to ourselves, then we can open our hearts to others.

There are many aspects of loving-kindness; in fact I gave a talk on this subject, and on that day we distributed a booklet on loving-kindness, so please read it. But I would like to just mention two aspects of loving-kindness: one is forgiveness and the other is feeling grateful.

So in everyday life we need to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. If we cannot forgive ourselves and forgive others then what happens is that we can be holding on to certain experiences, certain wounds that have been created, and this can create a lot of suffering for ourselves in everyday life.

As we are human we are bound to make mistakes. So when you make mistakes, there is no need to suffer and no need to feel guilty and beat yourself for having made mistakes; rather learn to forgive yourself and learn from these mistakes. And other human beings, as they are also human, as they are also imperfect, they are also bound to make mistakes. So if you cannot forgive other people what happens is that you are holding onto hatred and ill-will, which is very unwholesome for you.

When we develop more and more friendliness to others, more and more friendliness to ourselves, and more and more forgiveness to others and ourselves, then we learn to be kind to others, we learn to have loving-kindness in our relationships with others.

There are so many human beings who are suffering unnecessarily. So when you see human beings suffering you should try to relate to them with gentleness, with kindness, sometimes smiling with them, sometimes doing a kind act which can make such a difference to them and you. And if you can really open up to loving-kindness you'll see so many opportunities in life, in society, where you can act in such a way, and this can generate lots of happiness for you and happiness for others.

Another very important quality I mentioned in relation to loving-kindness is this quality of feeling grateful. Before coming here I spent some time in India and while I was in the place where the Buddha became enlightened I was reflecting on what the Buddha did after his enlightenment. According to the tradition, after he became enlightened he spent 7 days just looking at the tree which gave him shelter. Just reflect on this: Buddha spending 7 days showing his gratitude for a tree. So it shows what a very important quality feeling grateful is.

Do we feel grateful for things? Do we feel grateful for other people? Do you feel grateful that you have discovered the Dhamma, that you have a group of spiritual friends? Do we ever make an effort to develop this quality of feeling grateful? Do we ever feel grateful that we can see? There are people who cannot see. Do you feel grateful that you can hear? There are some people who cannot hear. Do you feel grateful that you are healthy and that you can practise meditation without any problem?

So these are small things, little things, which we take for granted. You should visit very poor countries like India and Sri Lanka and then you might realise that you should feel grateful for some of the things you enjoy in this country. But do we ever think about this? In those countries there are people without food. So shouldn't we feel grateful when we have food to eat?

There is another aspect of feeling grateful: as I said earlier in the discussion, when we have unpleasant experiences we should also feel grateful for them because we can learn from them, they become our teachers.

### **SPIRITUAL FRIENDS**

Another aspect of meditation in everyday life is to have spiritual friends around you. I'm very happy that you have some groups here so that you can go to these groups and can spend some time with others, meditate with them and discuss with them. So feel grateful that you are a group of spiritual friends helping each other.

When you practise in this way in everyday life you can really see the result, you can see that the medicine the Buddha has given us really heals, it really works. Then you have more and more faith, more and more confidence in the medicine. And you have more and more confidence in yourself. Then you really feel grateful for the Buddha who discovered this medicine, and you feel happy that you have discovered it and that you are using it and you are feeling the result.

And what is beautiful about the Buddha's medicine is that it can be applied in any situation in life. It can be applied when you are sick. It can be applied when you encounter death in any way. It can be applied when we are hurt, frustrated, disappointed. It can be applied when we have very serious problems, very serious conflicts.

The only thing is, as I said in the beginning, that one has to be very clear about the practice. Are you really making a commitment to your practice? Have you really made a commitment to take the medicine? I think it is also important that while you are taking the medicine you should also encourage others to take the medicine by just sharing with them – this is what I am doing. Please see for yourselves.

### **DETERMINATION TO TAKE THE MEDICINE**

Some of the suggestions I have been making so far about integrating meditation with daily life, are they too difficult, are they unreasonable, are they not within your reach? Buddha never said anything which normal human beings cannot do. The only thing you have to be sure about is to have a clear understanding of the teachings and to know how to apply them in different situations in life. This is the point that I am emphasising.

I don't think there is any need for me to say anything more. So I would like you to now just spend some time reflecting on some of the things that I have been mentioning. This kind of reflection is also a very important meditation. Just reflect on a particular theme which will help you and which will help others. This helps us to look at ourselves, to find out where we really stand in life. It helps us to find out whether we are really wasting our life.

According to the Buddha's teaching, to get a human birth is something very precious. So are we really making use of the preciousness of human birth? In what way can we use this preciousness? So let us reflect on this very important theme for a few minutes. And in reflecting on that, we can make a determination: Now from today onwards I'm making a real determination to take the medicine and free myself from the suffering that I create myself. And also an aspiration: Let me also get opportunities so that I can share the medicine with others, so by doing that I can make others happy. So let us close our eyes and really reflect on this.

May you continue to use the medicine and free yourself from the sickness that you create yourself.

As this is my last talk, I would like to thank everyone. Firstly, I would like to thank the organisers who have done a very excellent job. I am very impressed with the way they organised things so well, so nicely. We should really feel grateful for the fact that there are organisers who are able to organise things so well. We should also feel grateful for this nunnery for giving us permission to use this place, it's a nice place.

I would also like to thank the interpreters, translators, who did a very difficult job. I had the feeling sometimes they improved what I said! I would also like to thank our yoga master for teaching yoga under such difficult circumstances.

Lastly, I would like to thank those who have been attending the talks and who have been participating in today's meditation day. It makes me really happy to see your interest, your commitment for the Dhamma, for the practice. So I hope, as I was saying, that you continue to have this commitment for the practice.

Let us now do some chanting and end with loving-kindness meditation.

[Chanting]

### **GUIDED LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION**

We'll now end with meditation on loving-kindness.

Please feel the area of your heart. Please spend some time just feeling that area.

Can you feel that your heart is opening up like a flower, feeling gentleness, softness and tenderness?

Can you feel that you are your best friend, can you really feel it in the area of your heart and every part of your body?

As your best friend, can you really forgive yourself for whatever mistakes you have made in the past? If you do not have to forgive yourself, just feel happy that you are not carrying any wound.

As your best friend, can you forgive others for whatever mistakes they have done, letting go of any hatred or ill-will you are carrying in relation to them?

May you all be well. May you all be happy. May you all be peaceful. May all beings be well. May all beings be happy. May all beings be peaceful.

# WORKING WITH MEDITATION

(7-DAY RETREAT TALKS AND DISCUSSIONS)

DAY 1, 13TH OCTOBER 1997

## WHAT WE CAN DO DURING THE RETREAT

**GODWIN:** We should be really happy to have this opportunity to spend some days here with a group of spiritual friends in this very beautiful place. We should also learn to feel grateful that we have the opportunity to do this. So I would like to offer some suggestions for what we can try to do during the next few days.

So what we will be doing is trying to learn to develop certain spiritual qualities, learn to develop certain skills which will help us on the spiritual path.

### EXPERIMENT IN A LIGHT-HEARTED WAY

We will try to experiment with our meditation practice in a very light-hearted way. This is one of the guidelines I like to emphasise. It is learning to see the practice as something we can enjoy, so that we can develop a taste for it. While I say this I would also like to emphasise that we should learn to open ourselves to any unpleasant experiences, physical pain and mental pain. Normally we don't like unpleasant experiences. We don't like to look at the dark side within us. So I would like to suggest that during the next few days we should make an effort, that if they are arising naturally just to allow them to arise, without repressing them, without trying to push them away, without trying to deny them, without feeling bad about them. If they arise, let them arise and learn to make friends with them, seeing them as learning opportunities.

### AWARENESS

Another quality to develop is the practice of awareness, being alert, being awake. Now in this connection I would like to suggest that what we might try to do is to see how far we can have continuity of awareness, moment-to-moment awareness as far as possible. Whether you are in this room or whether you are outside should not make a difference. Then we can learn to see meditation as a part of life. It's a way of living. It's an art of living.

### LOVING-KINDNESS

Another spiritual quality that we need to develop is loving-kindness. Here we are in a beautiful situation where we are with a group of spiritual friends. So how can we relate to each other, how can we develop sensitivity to each other? The Buddha said helping others is helping yourself, helping yourself is helping others. So it is beautiful to develop this quality. While trying to help yourself you are helping others and then eventually you learn to see no difference between yourself and others.

Now I would like to go over the schedule and I will emphasise some other skills, some other qualities that we can develop.

## WAKE UP

As you know we wake up at 4:45 in the morning. So when you wake up, actually your practice should begin then. At home when you wake up it's a different situation from when you are waking up here. To give a practical example, when you go to the toilet there will be someone in the toilet. Now how do you relate to that situation? You can observe your mind and see if you are suffering, or can you see the situation and not suffer due to it? So in relation to such a situation we learn to develop another very important quality, that of patience, learning to wait. And maybe there'll be other situations, other challenges you might have to face when you wake up. So this is what I want to emphasise, to see these challenges, to see these situations as learning experiences. So meditation should begin right here.

## GROUP MEDITATION & BREAKFAST

Then we will be meeting here at 5:00 a.m. for group meditation – that is a beautiful time of the morning to practise meditation.

And then we will have breakfast. Here again eating can be a very important meditation. We have a very good opportunity to develop awareness whilst eating. With awareness we can observe our likes, our dislikes, the judgements we make. And while eating I would like to emphasise awareness of three aspects: chewing, swallowing, and tasting. I would like you to find out at what point you really taste your food. Also let us learn to assess the quantity of food we need, trying to avoid eating too much and trying to avoid eating too little, learning to discover the middle way in relation to eating.

Another quality we can develop tomorrow at breakfast is that while we are eating our food we can practice loving-kindness. Not thinking only of ourselves but being aware of others, seeing in what way we can help others, being open to the needs of others. We can try to develop that quality whenever we are eating together as a group. Isn't that beautiful?

## WORKING MEDITATION

After breakfast we will be doing what is called working meditation. Now working meditation is learning when we do work to do it mindfully, to work consciously, and to have our complete and full attention on what we are doing. And what is important is learning to see work not as something different from meditation.

Another very important aspect of working meditation is learning to develop certain qualities while we are working. Can you see working meditation as developing compassion in action, loving-kindness in action? If you are working in the kitchen, can you see this as work that helps you to develop loving-kindness towards the meditators who will be eating the food? So let me cook with loving-kindness! This can be an attitude that we can develop in working meditation. If you are sweeping the place, feel that you're sweeping the place so it can look very clean and very beautiful so that the other meditators can feel comfortable. Please learn to see working meditation as compassion in action, implementing loving-kindness through your actions.

## **GROUP MEDITATION**

Then we have group meditation. So during group meditation, we will be practising three postures: sitting, standing and walking. And let us see how far we can have continuity of awareness moving from one posture to the other.

## **INDIVIDUAL & OUTDOOR MEDITATION**

Then we have what is called individual and outdoor meditation. So one aspect of individual and outdoor meditation is learning to spend some time alone with ourselves. You have some very beautiful places here so please find one such place where you can be completely alone with yourself. And see when you are alone with yourself how you are relating to yourself. See whether after some time you might feel lonely, or feel bored with yourself. It is very interesting that we cannot spend some time alone with ourselves without suffering from loneliness and boredom. We don't seem to like ourselves! It shows that some of the things we do are an escape from ourselves. So tomorrow let us learn not to escape from ourselves but to be with ourselves, and if we feel lonely, bored, without giving in to it, we learn to go through it. And going through such feelings we will start to make a connection with ourselves where we learn to be our own best friend, we learn to be self-contained within ourselves.

Another aspect is learning to develop a sensitivity to nature. I was very happy when I came here and I saw the moon. I was able to see the stars in the sky. I was able to hear the insects around us. I was able to see some beautiful trees, some beautiful flowers. All these things make me very happy. I think in this modern world we have lost this sensitivity to nature, we have lost the way to commune with nature. So I would suggest that you develop this very important quality, develop a sensitivity to nature and learn to see that actually there is no difference between yourself and nature; learning, as I said, to be a part of nature, seeing things very clearly, very sharply, hearing things sharply and clearly. As we go on, I will be suggesting other things we can do during individual and outdoor meditation.

## **LUNCH, REST & INTERVIEWS**

Then after that we will have lunch. And after lunch there will be a time for a rest. As we will be waking up very early we need to rest, and we should learn to feel friendly to our body. And after rest, we have another session of individual and outdoor meditation. During these two times of individual and outdoor meditation, in the morning and in the afternoon, I would like to meet each of you. So we'll be having a piece of paper somewhere so you can write your name. I would like to meet about four persons in the morning and four persons in the afternoon. So please come and see me and you can discuss with me any difficulties, any problems you have in meditation; and if you have any personal problems I would also like to hear, and then try to use meditation to help you with your problems and difficulties.

## **YOGA**

After that there's yoga. Actually you can see a connection between yoga and meditation. One thing is that with yoga exercises we learn to be aware of the body. It is very important to make a connection with our body, learning to be friendly to our body, learning to be kind to our body. Another important aspect of yoga is learning to relax. When you can learn to relax it will help you very much in meditation, relaxing the mind, relaxing the body. It is

possible that maybe due to the sitting posture or due to other reasons you might have tension, pain, and discomfort in your body, and some of the yoga exercises will help you to work through them. You are fortunate to have a very good yoga teacher to help you here.

### **SNACK AND EVENING ACTIVITIES**

After yoga there is group meditation. And after group meditation there is a snack. I like the word snack, not calling it dinner. Normally I think you are used to dinners, so tomorrow when you have only a snack to eat it will be a very interesting learning experience!

After the snack we will have a short sitting. After the sitting we will have a discussion. After discussion we will do some chanting, and end the day with loving-kindness meditation.

So by 9:00 p.m. we will go to bed, as we have to get up early.

### **PRACTICE OF SILENCE**

Another important thing that we will be developing is the practice of silence. In the Dhamma it is called noble silence. So we are developing the very noble quality of being silent. Talking, speaking is a very strong habit that we have. And you'll also see a connection between silence and awareness. Silence enables us to be with ourselves, be with our mind and body all the time or most of the time.

Now a question arises: How can we be silent and still practise loving-kindness? Here I would like to suggest that we can still relate to other people, connect with other people in silence with loving-kindness. Normally we know only how to communicate with words. So during this retreat we can learn how to communicate with others in silence. One way of doing this is to learn to be aware of the people around you. Another way is to smile at the people around you. So these are ways of making a connection with other people. And then when you look around, when you observe people, you might see opportunities where you can give a helping hand in complete silence. So I would like you to develop this quality of communicating with others without words, in silence, and see whether one can make a deeper connection non-verbally.

### **PRACTICE WITH THE DOOR**

Now another point I would like to make is that there are very interesting doors here. One has to have lots of awareness while opening and closing the doors otherwise you can make a big noise. So this will help us to develop awareness and to learn to develop sensitivity to other people. In a way this is also making a connection with other people. Let me open the door very slowly and close it slowly so others will not be disturbed by what I am doing. You see from this small act of opening the door and closing the door what spiritual qualities we can develop.

In the little booklet that has been translated on loving-kindness, there is a very interesting reference there. The Buddha was addressing a group of monks and the Buddha was telling the monks that if you can practise loving-kindness during the time it takes to snap your fingers, you're worthy of being monks. To snap your fingers takes only a fraction of a second. So it shows that even for a fraction of a second you can really have the feeling of loving-kindness. You can make such a difference when you're doing such acts of loving-kindness, small actions with lots of loving-kindness.

So I would like to pause and if you have any questions, any clarifications you need, you have the opportunity to ask them.

[Questions and answers were not recorded that day]

DAY 2, 14TH OCTOBER 1997

## SHARING ON WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT DAY

**GODWIN:** For the discussion, what we may try to do is to share each other's experience of what happened today.

I feel it is very important to learn to share our experiences very honestly with a group of spiritual friends. Sharing both what we consider to be pleasant experiences and also unpleasant experiences. So it is opening ourselves up to our spiritual friends. Normally we are very nervous, self-conscious to speak about ourselves, thinking that others will judge us, whether we have done the right thing and so on. You should not have fear about it because you are simply sharing your experiences.

So what is your experience with meditation? We started at 5 o'clock. Any questions, any problems, any difficulties about the simple meditation that we practise, just knowing what is happening?

**RETREATANT:** *I was half-awake in this morning's meditation. I just went through it in a hazy way. But for reasons unknown, in the meditation just before this discussion I discovered something: I felt it was different from how I felt this morning. Before, it was like wasting a lot of my energy. I felt exhausted in having to be aware of our body movements and mental activity. It was like waiting for them to appear but they just never appeared. In the session of sitting we have just had, when I felt stillness, then I knew how to use what our teacher told us, how to be aware of how my body works, and knowing it very clearly.*

**GODWIN:** Thank you for sharing that experience. It is nice to hear of your unpleasant experiences in the morning and what can be considered as a pleasant experience in the evening. If you did not have the unpleasant experience, you wouldn't have made this discovery about the pleasant experience in the evening. So it shows that we can learn from unpleasant experiences, we can learn from pleasant experiences. Therefore we should learn to be open to both unpleasant experiences and pleasant experiences.

Would anyone else like to share his or her experience of this morning's meditation?

### TIREDNESS

**RETREATANT:** *When we meditate at home, is it better that we don't choose a time when we are too tired to do meditation? This morning I was too sleepy. I was not strong enough to concentrate.*

**GODWIN:** Whether you are at home or here, I would like to suggest that you try to experiment with meditation when you are tired as well, otherwise it is very easy to say: I feel tired, so I know my meditation won't work, so let me sleep. That's how we pamper ourselves. Always saying Yes to what the body is wanting.

So we need to break that conditioning in a very friendly, gentle, kind way. It means some days to say Yes to the body and some days to say No to the body. So tomorrow morning if you still feel tired you must tell the body: Yesterday I gave in to you, I said Yes, today, I'm going to say No. It is very important to learn to have this kind of dialogue with the body,

with oneself. So learning to say No, and then you come to the hall, you come to meditate and you see what happens.

There is a very interesting dialogue in the Buddhist texts between the Buddha and a monk who was feeling lazy, drowsy, tired when meditating. The Buddha offered some very interesting suggestions on how to work with that condition.

The first suggestion the Buddha offered was: change your posture. So if you are sitting, do some standing meditation, do some walking meditation. And I would like to suggest in that situation to do some fast walking, or to walk backwards, because to walk backwards you have to be very alert and awake. Immediately you start walking backwards you will be awake.

This reminds me of a meditation master in Thailand. He gave this suggestion to meditators. In that centre there was a well, a deep well. So he told his meditators to sit on the edge of the well. So if they were tired and fell in, they would die! Unfortunately there are no wells here!

Another suggestion the Buddha offered, if that did not work, was to rub your earlobes. I would see that as trying to stimulate the body. The Buddha said if that does not work, go out and look at the stars. Maybe the discussion took place in the evening like this when there are stars. I would suggest that as a way of trying to stimulate the mind by something external. If that does not work, try to think of something very inspiring from the Dhamma that will really develop a sense of urgency.

If that does not work, please induce a bright light. Some meditators see a bright light, so maybe this monk was able to see such a bright light, so the Buddha said induce a bright light, and again it could stimulate his mind.

And if that doesn't work, the Buddha said, then go to sleep!

Why did he say go to sleep? Why was the Buddha encouraging that monk to sleep?

**RETREATANT:** *Is it because the body when it gets tired needs to take a rest?*

**GODWIN:** Yes, in a way. This technique, this experimentation will help him to find out whether the tiredness has a psychological reason or a physical reason. So it shows that sometimes – and maybe most of the time – feeling tired is not something physical but it is psychological. So with these different techniques the Buddha was encouraging this monk to find out whether it has a physical reason or a psychological reason. Then if the techniques fail it shows that the tiredness has a physical reason; then we should learn to feel kind to the body.

It is also very interesting that the Buddha encouraged monks and meditators to experiment, to explore, find out for themselves. This is what I am encouraging you to do by observing, by learning to make your own discoveries about your mind and body and how they work. Our mind and body are so close to us, but in a way they are so far away from us because we have not learned, we have not discovered about them, we have not experimented. So this is why in meditation one should see the practice as not for achieving certain states of mind but rather for learning, discovering, exploring. It is a beautiful way to relate to meditation.

## WATCHING THOUGHTS

So after the morning meditation we had tea from 6:00 to 6:30, and I suggested you go out and see things very sharply, see things very clearly. Would anyone like to share some experience in this regard?

**RETREATANT:** *I would like to share some of my viewpoint on what you taught today. I find the meditation technique that you taught today quite useful. You told us to watch the mind just like a mother watching her son. With this kind of mentality I really felt great during the meditation. On my breathing, whatever thought arises, whatever feelings and sensations, I can use the mentality of a mother watching her son, and I feel I can be detached from those thoughts and be calm.*

**GODWIN:** It is important to have that kind of attitude, learning to be friendly and gentle, and then just knowing what is happening. And whatever is happening, again learning to be friendly without resisting it; and as he said, immediately you can find some relief, some release if you have that friendly attitude. So it is resistance which is creating the suffering. It is the same whatever comes, whether internally or even external events. It is when we resist external events that mostly suffering comes. So here is an approach where, without resisting, with friendliness, you just know what is happening. Feeling friendly doesn't mean giving in to what is happening but working with it with friendliness and gentleness, so we ought to see the difference. It is very important to realise that it is not giving in but rather a way of working with it.

From 6:00 to 6:30, while drinking tea, did anyone have any other experiences?

## CLARITY

**RETREATANT:** *At that time, I tried to put your directions into practice by looking at things sharply and clearly, but no matter how hard I tried everything looked the same to me as usual. No sharper, no clearer.*

**GODWIN:** So you should try again tomorrow also. I'll say what I have in mind about seeing things very clearly. Suppose we are looking at a tree. Can we have our complete and full attention on seeing the tree at that moment? And is it possible to see the tree as if for the first time? This is really a very interesting aspect.

Is it possible to see things with less thought or no thought? Because when we see things with our preconceptions, we don't really see anything very clearly. So it means really learning to awaken our senses. We have not made an effort to cultivate this awakening of our senses, the sense of hearing, the sense of seeing. So we have to make a conscious effort sometimes.

I think another aspect we have neglected is the sense of smell. So tomorrow let us all make an effort to awaken our senses, seeing very clearly, hearing things, and also smelling very clearly. There are some white flowers here and these flowers give off a very beautiful scent. So slowly, slowly let us make an effort, let us experiment with it, let us play with it, developing our senses in this way. You can also try with the Buddha image here, just looking at the Buddha image with your complete and full attention, with less thought or no thought.

## DISCUSSION ABOUT YOGA

After that, there was yoga. I'm sure you experienced something when doing yoga.

**RETREATANT:** *This is the first time I've done yoga outside in nature. It is also the first time that I tried to focus my mind on my body when doing yoga and I found it was very peaceful and still.*

**GODWIN:** Anyone else like to share what happened during yoga? Were the postures difficult?

**RETREATANT:** *I found that because I enjoyed the atmosphere I forgot that it was difficult. Actually, it seems to be difficult but I enjoy it, so I didn't judge whether it was difficult or not.*

**GODWIN:** Because you enjoyed it. An interesting point. So when you enjoy something you really do not see whether it is difficult or not. Did you experience physical pain?

**RETREATANT:** Yes.

**GODWIN:** That shows the yoga is working! It shows you have a body and that the body can have pain. It also shows that you should continue with the yoga because you have not practised the exercises enough. Does anybody else want to say something about yoga?

**RETREATANT:** *The postures changed too quickly, so I felt that the exercises were interrupted and not smooth.*

**GODWIN:** So maybe the yoga teacher should take this into consideration. Did anybody else experience the same thing?

**RETREATANT:** *I have practised yoga for quite a while, and when doing yoga you have to do a series of postures, not do the same posture a number of times. I would like to explain this because that is the purpose of yoga. It is a series of postures, so it has to be kept changing.*

**GODWIN:** How did you feel when doing yoga?

**RETREATANT:** *Yoga makes a deep impression on me. Our teacher has made a connection between Buddhism, yoga and meditation. I feel that it is more comfortable to meditate after doing yoga and the mindfulness gets stronger. Yoga is the prelude and meditation is the essence. Apart from benefits to the body and meditation, yoga also makes one healthy and the healthiness comes as a by-product.*

**GODWIN:** Yoga can also be a meditation. The word yoga means union, so it's a union between the mind and body, integration of the mind and body, harmonising the mind and body.

## MEDITATION AND SILENCE

**GODWIN:** Now about silence, how are you relating to silence? Is it disturbing you, is it okay? Any thoughts about silence? Any experiences about silence?

**RETREATANT:** *It is difficult.*

**GODWIN:** The fact that it is difficult shows it is a very strong habit that we have to talk. And you know it is very difficult to stop a strong habit. Some meditators told me that when they

stop talking to others they start talking to themselves. And one meditator told me that when other people were silent she felt they were punishing her! So I think although it is difficult we should still experiment with such situations, and then ideally you realise how space is created by silence.

I think another aspect of talking is perhaps to prevent certain things from arising. Things you have pushed away, repressed, controlled. In some very intense silent retreats some meditators tell me how with the silence they suddenly have memories arising from their childhood which have been completely forgotten. And sometimes some of these memories that come up can be extremely helpful for one to understand one's behaviour.

Just to give an example of an experience one woman had: I would like to share that experience with you. She was in a 10-day retreat when suddenly she remembered that as a 7-year-old girl, she had tried to commit suicide by shooting herself in a dark room. She had completely forgotten this experience, maybe because it was very unpleasant for her. But it was a very helpful memory for her because she was still afraid of the dark. Another thing was that she was very self-destructive. She would take risks with her body, and so on. So then I had a discussion with her and we realised that the suicidal tendency in trying to destroy herself was manifesting itself in different ways.

Another aspect of talking and silence is that when we talk we feel as if we are somebody. So when we are silent we feel as if we are nobody, and we feel uncomfortable with this feeling of being nobody.

Another important aspect of silence is that it helps us to be alone with our mind and body for some time. So silence has some very important and interesting aspects. I certainly agree that it is difficult but certainly it is worthwhile.

There is an interesting story from the Tibetan tradition about a retreat place where one has to practise complete silence for a year and after one year the student can go and speak to the Master but can only say two words. So after one year a student went to the Master and said: More food! So probably for the whole year he had been thinking only of food!

Anyway, these are some thoughts about silence, I would like to suggest that tomorrow there will be times when you have to speak, and when you have to speak you should learn to speak with awareness, what is called right speech. So silence is important, right speech is important.

## **MEDITATION AND RIGHT SPEECH**

There are so many things we can learn from our speech. When we speak to another person, do we really listen to that other person? Can you speak clearly? Can you speak very briefly what you have to say rather than continuing to speak and sometimes confusing yourself and confusing others? How far can we be aware and mindful when we speak? We can learn these skills here.

In everyday life this is one of the greatest problems we have, the way we cause problems because of our speech, especially in relationships: how we can hurt each other with wrong speech. So as I said, silence is important as it has many important aspects, and also right speech is important because that also has many aspects. The Buddha encouraged us to speak gentle words, kind words, helpful words, words which can be healing to others. On the

other hand we can hurt another person with our words, they can be more harmful, they can hurt another person more than something physical.

So the time for discussion is over. I would like to say something about tomorrow. Today there was a lot of time for you to rest, and you realised that you had been tired and you had not been able to sleep well. So I hope today you had a good rest and you will be able to sleep well tonight.

**DAY 3, 15TH OCTOBER 1997**

## **BENEFITS OF LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION**

**GODWIN:** What I propose to do now is to touch on some aspects of loving-kindness. After that, if you have any questions or difficulties about loving-kindness we can discuss them.

I delivered a talk on the same subject at the nunnery. I don't want to repeat the same things I said there. So what I would like to talk about is what is in the text which was translated and given to you. There are some benefits that are mentioned there, the benefits of loving-kindness. I'd like to discuss the implications of those benefits, the practical aspects of the benefits.

### **SLEEP AND WAKE UP PEACEFULLY**

So it is interesting, the first benefit that is mentioned is that you can sleep peacefully. There is a difference between sleeping peacefully and sleeping well. This is related to the second benefit, which is that you wake up peacefully, and that is related to the third benefit where it is said you don't have any nightmares, any unpleasant dreams.

What are these unpleasant dreams we have, these nightmares? I would suggest that they are related to the emotions we are repressing, perhaps related to the wounds that we are holding onto. So with loving-kindness you heal these wounds, then you don't have these nightmares or unpleasant dreams, and then you can sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully.

In Sri Lanka, sometimes I work with people who suffer from insomnia, and the way I try to help them is by the practice of this simple method of loving-kindness before they go to sleep. It has been interesting for me to see that it works most of the time.

### **OTHER PEOPLE LIKE YOU**

Now another benefit that is mentioned is that other human beings like you. Why do human beings like you? Because you are friendly towards them, so naturally when you are friendly to others they are friendly towards you. If you are not friendly to others they will not be friendly to you. So it is a very simple point that when you are friendly to others, others will respond in the same way. I think this is very important because we have a lot of problems and difficulties in relationships due to the way we are relating to other people. So if we can be friendly to ourselves and friendly to others this can generate a lot of joy, a lot of happiness.

### **NON-HUMAN BEINGS ALSO LIKE YOU**

Another interesting benefit that is mentioned is that non-human beings also like you. What are these non-human beings? One can interpret this in different ways, but perhaps we can include animals, perhaps we can include plants and trees. We can include non-human beings who may be here in this world but which we cannot see. I think it is a fact that animals can really feel your loving-kindness and they can respond in the same way. I was saying the other day that we have monks in Sri Lanka who meditate in deep forests where

there are wild animals, where there are animals who can harm you, but it is interesting how the monks get on with these animals. I know in one place the chief monk talks to these wild animals and they seem to obey the requests or orders of the monks. So I think animals are disturbed when you have fear, but when you have loving-kindness, when you are friendly towards them, I think they can feel that.

They have done some research which shows that even plants can feel your emotions, they can react to your emotions. So here again, I think loving-kindness may be able to affect them in some ways.

In the modern world we have a lot of problems with the environment, what is called the ecological crisis, and so on. I see it as a manifestation of our own self-destructiveness which comes through in this way. When you have loving-kindness you learn to develop a sensitivity to yourself, your surroundings, your environment, so this is a very simple way of protecting the environment, by making a connection with the environment. See yourself as part of the environment and not as something separate from it.

### **SERENE APPEARANCE**

Another benefit that is mentioned is that your face becomes serene. See some of the Buddha images here, they have captured the serenity of that expression. So it shows that our state of mind can affect our appearance. If it can affect our face, it can affect our body also. So when you have a serene face you don't have to use cosmetics. You can save all that money! And the serenity that comes with loving-kindness can never be captured through cosmetics. In a way, when you have a serene face I think it can affect other people. This is what is beautiful about loving-kindness, that it becomes infectious. Hatred can become infectious and at the same time loving-kindness can be infectious.

### **EXPERIENCE A CALM MIND**

There is another very interesting benefit that is mentioned, which is related to meditation. It is said that with loving-kindness it is easy to experience *samadhi*, one-pointedness. This is why I emphasise friendliness so much in the practice, because when we are practising, if you are hating things, if you are resisting things, if you are fighting things, it is not easy to have a mind that is calm. This calmness comes naturally when there is friendliness, when there is gentleness, when there is openness. So this is a very important point to remember in our practice; we are learning to use friendliness and gentleness in whatever technique we are practising.

### **GIVES YOU A SENSE OF PROTECTION**

Then another benefit mentioned is that it gives you a sense of protection. So it is interesting that loving-kindness can be so powerful it can in some ways protect you from situations. An aspect related to protection is that it also gives a sense of security, confidence. In one of the statements in the text it is mentioned that those who have loving-kindness feel at home wherever they are. So you don't feel threatened, you don't feel insecure because of loving-kindness. You feel at home with yourself, you feel at home with others.

### **YOU CAN DIE PEACEFULLY**

Another benefit that is mentioned is that when you die, you die unconfused, you die with a clear mind. So why is it considered an advantage to die consciously? Can anyone suggest a reason for it?

**RETREATANT:** *Is it because the last thought in our mind will affect where we go after we die?*

**GODWIN:** Yes, in a way. Any other possible reasons?

**RETREATANT:** *Is it because we have fear when we die because we have not experienced death, and with loving-kindness we can bring ourselves out from the fear and pain?*

**GODWIN:** Interesting. Anything else?

When we die, we have a last chance to become enlightened. Because at the moment of death, if you can really practise meditation, if you can really practise conscious dying, that will give us a great opportunity to free ourselves, so to create that opportunity is part of the practice.

There is a very interesting book from the Tibetan tradition: The Tibetan Book of the Dead. Is it translated into Chinese?

**RETREATANT:** *Yes.*

**GODWIN:** Has anyone read it?

**RETREATANT:** *I read some of it.*

**GODWIN:** It's a very interesting book. It shows how your experience at the time of death is determined by the way you have lived. So in simple terms, as I understand it, at that moment our emotions, especially unpleasant emotions, can surface and they can take many forms. At that moment we don't recognise that they are simply emotions but as they manifest themselves externally we react to these external forms that we see. So you see how this is related to meditation. How it is important to recognise how our mind works, how it works with our emotions, to recognise them, and so on. And what is interesting is, it is said that enlightenment also manifests itself and we have to recognise it, and if you don't recognise it your last chance is lost. So in practical terms, in our meditation we also should recognise our positive states of mind, just to know that they are there. So when you know them, when you recognise them, then when they manifest themselves you just know that it is the free mind, the enlightened mind that is manifesting in this way.

So it shows clearly that when you have awareness, when you are conscious at the time of dying, you can know all these things, recognise these things, and as I have said, we have a last chance to free ourselves from what is happening.

And in a way this also relates to the wounds we carry in our mind. Sometimes when I travel I meet people who work with dying people, because I am very interested in this theme of death and dying. I used to work with cancer patients who are dying. So the biggest problem at the time of death is the wounds that we have not looked at, the wounds that we have pushed away, the wounds that we have repressed, because they can surface in a very strong and intense way. Why should they manifest in such a strong way when we are dying?

**RETREATANT:** *Is it because our mind is weak at the time?*

**GODWIN:** Yes. What happens is that at the time of death our mind and body may become weak. While we are living we can consciously push these things away and deny them, repress them, lead very busy lives; but at the time of death you cannot escape from what is happening.

So this is why I emphasised that while we are living, while we are strong we should look at our wounds and try to heal them. It is interesting that these things are also mentioned in ancient Buddhist literature. Anyway, this is the 10th benefit that is mentioned, conscious dying, showing the importance of it. And it is interesting that there is this connection between loving-kindness and death.

And the last benefit that is mentioned is that after death we will be born in the realm of the gods, a pleasant destination. But what is important for us to remember and realise is that we can see the benefits in this life itself.

These are some of the benefits that are mentioned in this text. Now let us see if we can include anything more, add to this list from our own experience. Do we have any suggestions?

### **BENEFITS SUGGESTED BY OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

**RETREATANT:** *You will have no enemies, you will not have anyone whom you cannot get on with, and no hatred against another person.*

**GODWIN:** Very good one. In a way it is related to saying that human beings like you. To have enemies is when human beings don't like you. Anyway, as you say, to have no enemies is something very special. So what will happen is that you will have only friends and no enemies. What a wonderful way to live!

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *It helps me to make clear decisions. That is, when there is hatred in my mind, then I always make the wrong decision because I would make a decision from my own point of view and not consider what others think.*

**GODWIN:** Very good. So when there is hatred, when there is anger, please don't take a decision because that decision will always be coming from a confused mind, not from a clear mind. Not only decisions but also words. So I would suggest that if we get angry with someone then at that very moment we should just keep our mouths shut, because whatever we speak it doesn't come from a clear mind, so it can be confusing and can make matters worse. So the state of the mind in such a situation is very important.

On some occasions someone does something wrong and then we get angry and we try to correct that person with anger. I would suggest that to a great extent that type of reaction, trying to correct persons with anger, will not work. So these are very important practical aspects of loving-kindness in everyday life.

Anything more to add?

**RETREATANT:** *Before I learned about loving-kindness meditation, I easily got angry with others, but after I learned loving-kindness meditation I found the good thing about it is that the duration of anger gets shorter, and slowly the anger disappears altogether. Another benefit is that as you continue to*

*train yourself you will find hating another person is really quite silly because it causes suffering for yourself. The more hatred you have, the more problems you create for yourself.*

**GODWIN:** Very good. Two good points. The first point is very important: how soon we recover from these emotions, hatred, anger, or whatever. I think you should not have as an ideal that you will not get angry, but if you need an ideal, the ideal should be how soon you recover from the anger.

There is a beautiful teaching in one of the Buddhist texts which gives three similes for three types of anger. The first type of anger is compared to letters written on stone which never change, never go away. The second type of anger is compared to letters written on sand. The third type of anger is compared to letters written on water. Isn't that beautiful? That quickness: the anger is there and also it is already over.

And the second point is also very good, that it is silly, it is really foolish for us to hold on to anger and cause ourselves more suffering. I think this is compared to someone who is spitting in the wind, because when you spit in the wind it comes back on your own face.

Anything else? It is very interesting that we can think creatively and add to the list of benefits like this.

**RETREATANT:** *It makes me feel warm, happy and pleasant all the time.*

**GODWIN:** That is true. This feeling of warmth is very important because now human beings are for various reasons becoming more and more cold. As I said at the nunnery, with mechanisation human beings are becoming more and more like machines, and one aspect of this is that they lack feelings. So having this warmth, having feelings for other people and for ourselves, is something very important, very beautiful.

Another point I thought of which might be relevant to some of the people I have been meeting at the interviews is that loving-kindness can develop a sense of self-confidence. Can anyone see the connection between self-confidence and loving-kindness?

**RETREATANT:** *When you have loving-kindness you will do things quite easily that will help others, and you will think more of others and less of yourself. With this way of living, one can say one has no regrets at all in life, and when one can say that, this is self-confidence.*

**GODWIN:** I think another point about self-confidence is that we lose self-confidence when we consider ourselves as unsuccessful, worthless, useless, always failing. So it is a very negative self-image we have of ourselves, mostly as failures.

With more and more loving-kindness, especially towards ourselves, we can see how it works: we can see our own potentialities and we can become more and more self-reliant, and this can give us a lot of self-confidence in the sense that we can handle whatever arises. So it is not that difficulties will not arise; anger will arise, problems will arise, difficulties will arise, but you have the confidence if they arise: I know how to handle them, I know what to do.

Anyway, we can perhaps think of some more points. So it shows how important meditation on loving-kindness is, especially in everyday life, the changes that one can bring about in oneself, the transformation that one can bring about for oneself and, as I said, it is also bound to affect others around you.

So now any questions, any difficulties you have? If you have any difficulties, please present them because it is important to discuss them.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *The difficulty I have about practising loving-kindness is at the moment of anger itself. As you said, when I have a hating mind it is better not to make a decision and not even to say a word. My problem is that when I work in the office, when some of my staff do something wrong I immediately get angry and say something to them. Afterwards I know that I shouldn't have said it because I just add more suffering to the sufferings of the others and that's a mistake. I should have told them how to handle the mistake rather than raise my voice. I try very hard but it is always difficult to control myself at that moment of anger.*

**GODWIN:** Not only you, we can all relate to that experience. So you have raised a very important, practical question. Sometimes I think you need to speak firmly to people with whom you work. Before I went to the meditation centre, I was a librarian. So I tried to practise loving-kindness with the members of the staff there. It was not easy. People would come late, thinking: He is practising loving-kindness, so we can get up an hour late. He is practising loving-kindness, so don't send in an application for leave, just stay at home! I realised loving-kindness didn't work because some people understood only a different language. The only thing to do is to be very clear, that now I am going to be firm, speak to them very firmly. In doing that there is no wound made, there is no defilement created inside, there is just saying something that has to be said.

Anyway, the second part of the question has a very practical aspect. It is that when we get angry unexpectedly, what do we do? The first suggestion is: Don't be surprised! Because you are still practising, you are not enlightened, so don't be disappointed, don't feel guilty, don't get angry with yourself because you got angry. This is very important. It can happen to meditators, especially when we take to meditation, that we form an image: I am a meditator now. I am practising loving-kindness. This is how I should behave. It is good to have an ideal but an ideal is one thing, reality is another.

So at that moment when you have not been aware and you got angry, what you can do is just be with that anger without feeling bad: no need to give yourself a minus. Please realise that. It is very important. But what has to be done is after you recover from that anger, maybe after five minutes, maybe after ten minutes, maybe after thirty minutes, it doesn't matter even if on the following day, when you have recovered then you reflect on that anger. And this kind of reflection has to be done in a very friendly, gentle way. Just to ask the question: What really happened to me? So you take your mind backwards and try to see the incident objectively, and also see the different aspects of that incident. So our anger becomes the object of meditation. In this way our shortcomings, our failures, become learning experiences.

What is also important when we practise this way is that we don't have this fear to make mistakes; otherwise we become so concerned to do things perfectly, correctly, that this can generate such a lot of tension, such a lot of suffering. Please realise that this is not giving in to our shortcomings, but relating to them in an entirely different way, a more meaningful way, a more creative way, in a way that will reduce our suffering and enable us also to do what is necessary. So then you say to yourself: Now let me see, next time I face such a situation how will I behave? And just wait and see. So you are waiting for such opportunities to see how your behaviour is. To put it in another way, although you have got

angry there is no wound. So we come to a state where, when we have got angry, there is less suffering as a result, and I think this is a very important state.

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *You said there might have been things done wrongly in the past where we did not forgive others and did not forgive ourselves, and usually we suppress these things in our heart. At this moment, how do I know whether I have suppressed these things in the past and need to bring them out to heal them?*

**GODWIN:** Very good. Let's take a practical situation where a wound has been created in relation to what you have done to another person; you have acted incorrectly and then you suffer from guilt. The first point is to realise how the wound was created in the first place. So when you enquire into that question you realise the wound has been created by your idea: This is how I should have behaved. You realise the problem is with your model of how you should behave. It is helpful to understand this because this can help us to heal the wound. This is the first point.

The second point is to realise that we are still human, we are still imperfect, so therefore, as I have been saying very often, we need to learn to forgive our humanness, to forgive our imperfections.

Another suggestion is to realise that these things happened in the past. I cannot change the past, so why I am holding onto something that has happened in the past?

The last point – I hope I can communicate this – is that we carry the wounds in our memory. And as they are related to memories, the more we try to forget them the more they come. We have no control over our memory. The control we have is not in relation to the memory itself but how we respond to the memory. This is where meditation comes in. This is where we can work with it in practical terms. So when the memory comes in relation to what you have done, what you can observe is your reaction to the memory: guilt.

Now this is where awareness is relevant: with awareness we learn that there is guilt, and as we have also been practising, we learn to say okay to that guilt, we learn to feel friendly with that guilt, just to allow that guilt. Then after some time you might remember that incident again and then again guilt will come, so again we create space for that guilt to be there. It can also be interesting sometimes to deliberately and consciously bring the memory up and see how we are relating to it. Then one day you have the experience, the memory comes but there is no guilt, and when that happens it shows that the wound is healed. Then the memory might come but the corresponding emotion will not be there. We might even deliberately and consciously bring up the memory and the corresponding emotion will not be there.

One last suggestion is to realise that holding onto such wounds is something very self-destructive. So these are ways and means of healing such wounds. Whether it is guilt, whether it is grief, whether it is hatred, the tools are the same.

**RETREATANT:** *Today I deliberately brought some memories up to see if there are wounds or not but there was no reaction. Could it be a delusion? Would such a thing happen?*

**GODWIN:** This shows they have been healed. So no need to feel worried, thinking: I don't have wounds, or, why don't I have wounds? You can give yourself a plus because most people still have wounds. So just to say: I don't have wounds, it's good.

I think on one occasion I said to those who do not have wounds, please send loving-kindness to those who are trying to heal their wounds, because some people are really struggling with wounds. I know it is so strong in them, so deep in them, that it takes a lot for them to heal these memories. I know this by experience, through working with meditators.

**RETREATANT:** *Are love and hate the same thing?*

**GODWIN:** Can you give us some examples? I am a simple man. I like practical examples.

**RETREATANT:** *You mentioned that if our wound is hatred we can deliberately bring it up and look at the hatred, and if we have no reaction to it that means the wound is healed. But what about love: can we dig up situations where we have loved others, and then see if we have any emotion when we dig out this memory of love? For instance, not only after a parting of ways, but if for some reason you have sacrificed yourself for his or her good there can be deep emotions when these memories are dug out. Should they be treated in the same way as we deal with anger?*

**GODWIN:** When you remember such things, or when you can deliberately and consciously bring them up without any unpleasant emotions, what you will be having is pleasant emotions. You can feel happy about what you have done for another person.

I would suggest that it is important for us also sometimes to think of the good things we have done. This can give us lots of joy, lots of happiness, lots of lightness, and it will also be an incentive to do more and more such actions of love. In Sri Lanka we used to have a custom – now it is no longer there – to keep what is called a book of merits. The idea is that you note down the good things you have done, the skilful things you have done, and at the time you are dying someone reads from the book. Because usually we give more power, more energy to our mistakes, so I think this is very important. In fact it is mentioned in the Dhamma, to deliberately and consciously acknowledge our goodness, so when these memories come up you should acknowledge those positive emotions.

## TOMORROW'S PRACTICE

So now something about tomorrow's practice. One thing is that tomorrow we will try to make it a day of silence as far as possible. But this does not mean that if you have to speak for something functional, something important, that you should not speak. But as far as possible let's make it a day of silence. This is one suggestion I would like to offer.

Secondly, today it was a day of loving-kindness, tomorrow we will make it a day of emotions. So tomorrow we will make an effort to allow emotions to arise, whether pleasant, as in the case you mentioned, or unpleasant, let them arise. So with pleasant emotions that arise, this might give more joy, more happiness as we allow that to happen, and with unpleasant emotions we learn how to work with them, how to use them, because I know some meditators here are still struggling with unpleasant emotions that are coming up.

So tomorrow practise not to push them away because they are unpleasant, not to control them, not to deny them, but just to allow them to arise if there is a need for them to arise. When they arise can you allow them, can you make friends with them, can you love them? What can we learn from them? So let's use some of these tools tomorrow and see what

happens. In the evening we can use our very practical experiences during the day for a discussion on emotions, and then explore more about this question of emotions.

There is a connection between silence and emotions. With more and more silence, I think it allows emotions to arise, maybe both types of emotion. So let's see what happens tomorrow.

Now let us do some chanting.

**DAY 4, 16TH OCTOBER 1997**

## **EMOTIONS**

**GODWIN:** It has been a learning experience for me listening to your problems regarding emotions. It is clear to me that emotions arise in connection with the way you relate to yourself, the way you relate to others, and the way you relate to your surroundings. So it shows relationship is a real challenge we have in life. Many persons presented problems relating to other people. So their problem was that they were concerned about what others were thinking of them. Especially fearing minuses. So the question arises: Why have we given such power to other people that our happiness and unhappiness is dependent on them? I would like to raise this as a question: Why have we given so much power to other people?

**RETREATANT:** *Otherwise it would be difficult to get on with each other.*

**GODWIN:** Anything else?

## **SELF-CONFIDENCE**

**RETREATANT:** *If one has no self-confidence, one does not know how to get hold of one's destiny.*

**GODWIN:** I think this seems to be an important reason. Because we lack self-confidence, because we don't practise what is necessary for this, we depend on other people for it. Another point that arose in my mind today was, at least among the people I have been speaking with in this regard, only women have been telling me that how they are relating to other people creates this sense of lack of self-confidence, fearing the judgement of others, fearing to make mistakes where others will blame them. Now a question that arose in my mind is that here in this country, is this most commonly experienced by women, or do men also have this problem but are they too shy to speak about it?

**RETREATANT:** *Men have more of this kind of problem. Men know how to find ways to let out their emotions: for example, they will go out to drink with friends and when they get a bit drunk, they will just say anything, then they just let out the emotions in this way or some other.*

**GODWIN:** I think everywhere in this world this is a real problem human beings have to face. I didn't know that with men one of the solutions they have found is drinking, but then it becomes a vicious circle: because of their drinking they are also given minuses and because of the minuses they drink, so one thing leads to the other. Let us see how meditation helps us to work with these problems, whether it is in men or women, it doesn't matter.

I feel this is why meditation of loving-kindness is so important, in the sense that you learn to be your own best friend and if you can really make that connection with yourself, actually feel it, then I think your dependency on what others think of you becomes less, because whatever you need from others you get it from yourself. You will become self-contained within yourself.

Another way meditation helps us to work with this situation is through understanding the nature of plusses and minuses. It is very interesting that human beings have this very strong conditioning to give plusses or to give minuses in any situation, but we never pause to

question whether these plusses or minuses are valid, on what basis are we doing this. It is funny, we really become victims of this mechanism but we never inquire into the way these plusses and minuses operate, under what condition they arise, what is really creating them, what is contributing to them. So when we explore this question we realise that these are really related to thoughts, concepts, which have come due to various reasons from the society that you have been brought up into. Then you see them as part of your conditioning, you see them as a strong habit that we have got used to.

It is funny that this is how we use thoughts. Now as we all know, from the time that we wake up in the morning up to the time that we go to sleep there are continuous thoughts going through our mind which never stop. If you become aware, if you become mindful of the thoughts that go through your mind, then you'll realise that most of the time the way we use thoughts is in this habit of giving plusses and minuses. So when you see this clearly, then the power that we have given to them may become less.

Then you realise that sometimes it is just an innocent thought that comes: Maybe the other person doesn't like me; maybe the other person is giving me minuses; maybe the other person thinks that I'm silly or ridiculous, and so on. So if you are mindful you'll realise it is just a thought that you're having; who knows whether that thought corresponds to any reality? There is a strong imaginary aspect in our thoughts. This imaginary aspect and the reality are two different things. So with awareness, with mindfulness, exploring, investigating, this may become clear to us and this will help us to work with and handle such thoughts, and their power will become less.

## IMAGES

Another very interesting aspect related to this is: with our thoughts, with our identifications, we all have images of who we are, the type of persons we are. Each person has a model, has an image of himself or herself. So I think what we are doing is that when other people accept our image then we feel comfortable with them, we feel at ease with them. And then we make it a point to always, or most of the time, impose this particular image on other people. Then we also have images of other people. A Western psychologist has said that when two people meet, there are six people. Can you work out how two people become six people?

**RETREATANT:** *There are two real people, and four imaginary people: who you think you are, and who you think the other person is; who the other person thinks he is, and who he thinks you are!*

**GODWIN:** Yes, exactly. It is a very interesting point for us to reflect on. Sometimes when there are conflicts actually it is the images that are in conflict, but what the people really are is another question. So with meditation, with awareness, you understand this process, that whenever there is a conflict, the conflict is the result of the image you have of the other person.

Take the case of anger. So in relation to behaviour from another person how do we get angry? Why do we get angry? We have an idea of how the other person should behave and when the other person's behaviour does not conform to the image we have we get angry. Then we have an image of our usual behaviour, and when our behaviour does not correspond to that image then we feel guilty, we get angry, we get disappointed, we get hurt because our behaviour does not correspond to the image we have formed of ourselves.

## SEEING THINGS AS THEY REALLY ARE

A very interesting practice in everyday life is, whenever you suffer, whenever you are disappointed, whenever you are frustrated, at that moment can you see for yourself that the image which you have is now clashing with what is actually happening. This is why the Buddha emphasised learning to see things as they are. But what we are doing is, we want to see things the way they should be, as they must be according to our way, my way.

What we are doing is making demands about how we should behave, we are making demands about how others should behave, we are making demands about how life should be. If these demands are met life is okay, life is wonderful, it is beautiful. If these demands are not met there is suffering, frustration, disappointment, hurt; most of these emotions can arise as a result of that. So I would suggest that an enlightened human being goes through life without any images, and because of that he or she can never suffer.

Another aspect related to this is, if you can really understand the nature of life, then you realise it is not possible to form any conclusion about how life should be. In the Dhamma there is something very deep, which is to be open to the uncertainty of life. But we hold onto this idea of certainty because we assume things can be controlled. But when we think deeply we realise that in actual fact is we have no control.

In cultures and in countries where things work perfectly, without any problems, this gives a kind of sense of security because everything is happening perfectly, no problems, everything is under control. Living in countries like India or Sri Lanka, you have to be open to uncertainties.

I will give a practical example which I experienced myself. When I was in Europe I was on a train and they made an announcement in the language of that country and people were very anxious, looking at their leaflets and there was lots of talk about it, lots of disappointment, so I asked them what the announcement was about. They said the train was going to be seven minutes late. In Sri Lanka, if there is a train at all you'll be very fortunate!

So this is a very good training. Most of the time unexpected things happen. You go to the bus stand and then they say: No bus today. You want to go by train, they say: Now there is no train, it is one hour late. I get the impression that these things don't happen here. Am I right? Everything is under control, and it gives a sense of security; then when something unexpected happens there is disappointment, suffering.

So that living in cultures like this naturally you tend to be conditioned to do things perfectly. You fear to make mistakes because no mistakes should happen! So with this idea of perfection, this is why you like other people to accept that you are perfect, this is why you fear maybe they are giving you minuses, because your model of perfection is affected by that. So this is why I often emphasise this being open to our humanness, open to our imperfections, so that when we become more and more open to our humanness, our imperfections, then if you are getting minuses from other people then you are not surprised. You realise, well, that's part of our conditioning. I'm still human, so it's okay.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I would like to pause now and I'm sure you might have some questions, or need some clarifications about this, so I think we will try to have a useful discussion about our emotions and how to really work with our emotions in the context of the practice.

So it is interesting, when it comes to asking questions you are afraid: Could this be a good question? Will people laugh at my question? Will they think I'm stupid? But here we are in a group of spiritual friends so we should try to be open to anything, allow ourselves to make mistakes and learn from these mistakes: this is the beauty of a retreat like this. So I would like to hear some silly questions, and I will be happy to give some silly answers!

**RETREATANT:** *In Hong Kong we have a certain set of images to live by and we always do things in conformity with these images. For example, if we go to a cafe and order a certain type of Chinese tea but the waiter gives us another type, if we accept the wrong tea the important thing is whether we accept it with or without a grudge.*

**GODWIN:** That is certainly true. We can accept it because we want to conform to others, so we pretend it is okay and we accept it. But I think the real acceptance is: Can we really say okay to it, or perhaps not even saying okay, but just seeing it as it is?

**RETREATANT:** *My statement is: If I really accept it, the acceptance must either be with a grudge or with understanding, not simply out of conformity.*

**GODWIN:** So please, in everyday life what are the emotions that come up? We can discuss the ways and means how meditation can help us to cope with emotions in such daily situations.

**RETREATANT:** *I would like to give one example: in my office I always try to work to conform to what my clients expect me to do. It's not because I care how they judge me. Actually I don't care as long as I've done my job right, then I'm happy. But the reality is that if I don't do things in conformity with their expectations they will complain to me which results in spending a lot of time explaining the situation. So that gives me a lot of pressure. I know that it is all created by my mind and I can handle the situation if there should be any unjustified complaints, but the fact is that I try to avoid these troubles, so I try to do everything perfectly.*

**GODWIN:** Good point, a big plus to you. So what I would suggest is that what I'm saying doesn't mean that you should not act with responsibility. One thing we have to learn is how to act with responsibility but without the pressure. So you are doing your best but doing your best is done in a relaxed way, not with tension, not with stress. This is one thing we need to learn. And then when you do your best and still you have made a mistake, then you can be very clear and honest in your own mind: I did my best, but my best was not good enough for the other person, so what can I do? At least it makes your mind very clear, it makes your conscience very clear, so that it will not give rise to any inner conflicts.

So this is all we can try to do; and when we have tried, if it succeeds, it is good. If it fails, it is also good. And then in such a situation, if you have made a mistake and then some problem arises, what is also important for us to learn is that when a wound has been created, to heal that wound as quickly as possible rather than just hold onto the wound and suffer for your whole life because you have made some mistakes.

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *But in Hong Kong you may be fired by the boss. That is the source of the pressure.*

**GODWIN:** If you have done your best and if you're fired, still in your own mind you can be very clear about what has happened. So I feel it is very important in life to understand our limitations. This doesn't mean that we justify our limitations, but that it is a fact: I'm doing my very best but my very best does not correspond to what others think of as best, so what can I do? Actually, these are the real challenges we have in life: how to face them?

Another aspect of such situations – I don't know if what I'm going to say makes sense to you – some of these setbacks, some of these difficulties, some of these problems you have in such situations can later on prove to be a blessing. This is also very interesting.

I'm reminded of a Chinese tale that I would like to share with you; perhaps you already know the story. In a particular village there was a very wise old man and he had some beautiful horses. So one day one of the beautiful horses was missing, it had run away. So the whole village came to this man and said: Oh, how unfortunate it is that your best horse has run away. It seems you are very unlucky. Maybe in Buddhist terms we would say it is bad *kamma*, and so on. He said: No, it is merely that my horse has run away. What you are saying is an opinion, a judgement, about what has happened. My horse has run away, that's all, no need to give a minus about this.

Then after some days this horse came back with another beautiful horse. Then the same villagers came and said: Oh, you're very lucky, you're very fortunate, you lost one horse, now you have two horses. He said: Stop all this, I now have two horses, that is all, no need to give a plus.

This old man had a son, and the son was trying to train this new horse, and in training the new horse he fell from the horse and broke his leg. So his friends came and said: Bad *kamma* again. And then there was a war and so soldiers came to the village to take away all the young people in the village to fight in the war, only the old man's son was saved from this because of his broken leg!

This is a very good story to learn to see things just as they are, hopefully without plusses and without minuses. I suppose the wise old man did not have any image of what should happen and what shouldn't happen. Has anyone heard of this story? Everybody.

**RETREATANT:** *Everybody knows this story but nobody can practise like the old man.*

**RETREATANT:** But the story was not presented in the way that you did. The way you presented the story is very striking because you emphasised the point that there should not be any concepts. The fact is that he lost a horse, the fact is that he gained a horse, and no other judgement. But the traditional way of telling this story is about good luck and bad luck. When fortunate things happen you should not think it is really fortunate. When unfortunate things happen you should not think it is really unfortunate, you have to wait and see how it works out in the end. That is the traditional way of telling the story, so it is very materialistic because the traditional way of telling it is that in the end this old man gains. There's a reward.

**GODWIN:** I think the aspect of this story I like is that he did not have any expectations of what should happen or what shouldn't happen. So no images. This is one point. The other

point is, when there is a shift that takes place inside us, when there is understanding and realisation inside, anything can happen externally. This is the important thing. So we cannot control what is happening externally, but when there is a change inside then you will be able to handle whatever is happening externally. I think this is another aspect of the story.

Any other questions?

**RETREATANT:** *In Hong Kong society even though you can achieve 99% perfection, with the 1% you have committed as a mistake, people will grab hold of that 1% fault and go on and on against you. I fully understand the way you told us how to deal with these situations but I cannot say from the bottom of my heart whether I could do it.*

**GODWIN:** I think what you said does not apply only to Hong Kong society. For some reason everywhere in the world there seems to be too much emphasis, too much power given to the mistakes, to the negative things, and that the good things are taken for granted. This happens very often in relationships. You do good things, and with so many good things you make just one mistake and that one mistake becomes more important than all the good things that you have done. So people will be talking about that one mistake but not at all about the good things that have been done by that person.

So it brings up the interesting question: Why do human beings give so much power to the mistakes, to the negative things, and the positive things are taken for granted? I would like to hear from you whether you have any thoughts about this.

**RETREATANT:** *I can present a converse situation to what was said: some people never do anything right but somehow everything is forgiven when that person brings you a cup of tea!*

**RETREATANT:** I think sometimes people only think of the mistake and keep reminding you of it because of jealousy, so they want to magnify the mistake.

**GODWIN:** Anything else? Any other possible explanations?

**RETREATANT:** *In my experience it all boils down to greed. It's because, for example, my client expects me to win a legal battle, because if I win the legal battle he will get what he wants. When I do not win the legal battle for him then he has many complaints because his mind is muddled by greed because he does not get what he wants. And the same applies to many other situations that I have seen. When a person has greed in his mind and does not get what he wants, even though I've done my best he won't listen.*

**GODWIN:** So as we realise that this is something common to ourselves, we should in our own life try to practise in a different way. One suggestion I would like to offer is that whenever we see someone doing something good, I think we should make it a point just to mention it, to appreciate it. For parents who bring up children this is a very common problem, that the parents tell the children only when they make a mistake. When they do something good, that is not mentioned! So a child is brought up with the idea: I'm always doing wrong.

When a similar discussion took place in a foreign country I was in, in the audience there was a teacher who had been counselling parents. She told us she gave an exercise to the parents. They were told to draw up a list of all the naughty things, bad things, the children would do. So without a problem they drew up a long list. Then the parents were told now please draw up a list of the good things your children are doing. It was very difficult for them to do that!

They had to think very hard about what were the good things that the children were doing. Isn't that interesting?

And this also happens in relationships. Sometimes in Sri Lanka I have to counsel husbands and wives who have problems. It's a big joke amongst my friends. They say this man has no experience in married life and he is counselling married people! One complaint of the wives is that when the cooking is not so good the husband would be critical and make a big fuss about the food, but when the food is good they tell me that the husband practises noble silence!

There is a very interesting discussion in the Buddhist texts about spiritual friends. So what a real spiritual friend does is that when someone does something wrong he points it out in a very friendly way that you are doing something wrong; and when they do something good, when they do something right, he points out that you are doing something good, something right.

This is what we need to learn, not only to give power and energy to the minuses but also acknowledge the pluses. So I would suggest that we as meditators should try to cultivate this very important quality. And it is very important to see the good things in ourselves also. This tendency to see only the negative, only the minuses in ourselves is a very strong factor which can create a lot of emotion and suffering for us. So when we learn to see the more and more positive aspects in ourselves, then we will be able to see more and more positive aspects and pluses in others.

There are four qualities mentioned in the Dhamma. They are called Sublime States or Divine Abodes. The first one is loving-kindness, *metta*. The second one is *karuna*, which means compassion, when you see someone suffering you try to help that person. The third quality is very interesting, *mudita*: when other people are happy you rejoice in their happiness, and I would say that you can also rejoice in your own happiness. So this quality of *mudita* is something very important we need to cultivate. A meditation master has put this very clearly. He said that we have a tendency to see what is wrong in ourselves, but we never look for what is right in ourselves.

The society might have harmful, destructive values but we should try to cultivate these virtues, these values that might be contrary to what is happening in society. This is why in the Buddha's teaching meditation is compared to going upstream, that it is not easy; most people just flow with the stream. So living in a society where these negative things are prominent, where they are given power, it is not easy to do this, it is difficult, but this is where we have to make an effort. This is where the practice is important. This is why a group of spiritual friends is important, that at least we are as a group trying to practise these virtues, these qualities, though in the country, in the society, something else is happening.

### **TOMORROW'S PRACTICE**

Anyway, something about tomorrow. Tomorrow I would like to suggest we might try to practise with our thoughts, to work on our thoughts. There is always a connection between thoughts and emotions. An interesting question to reflect on is: Can there be suffering without a thought? Can there be emotion without a thought? So I feel that in our practice we should really understand, penetrate, and work with our thoughts. As I said, from the time we wake up to the time we go to sleep there is this continuous thinking going on in our mind.

## EMOTIONS

So tomorrow I would like to suggest that we forget our friend the breath, and instead continuously observe our thoughts, and see the connection between thoughts and emotions; and then try to make discoveries about our thinking, especially concerning the area of giving pluses and minuses. So tomorrow if you catch yourself giving minuses, observe it, catch it as soon as possible.

When we were coming here to this centre there was a question mark in red, and I asked someone what that question mark meant. I was told that the question mark meant: just find out what you are thinking. So it is a very interesting exercise, that during the day we ask ourselves: Now what is the thought I am having? So whether we are here or whether we are outside, let us make an effort just to know, just to understand, just to explore, just to learn, just to discover about our thoughts, about our concepts. And then we can have a discussion about thoughts in the evening.

So now we can do some chanting.

**DAY 5, 17TH OCTOBER 1997**

## **THOUGHTS AND MEDITATION**

**GODWIN:** I will touch on some aspects of how we can work with our thoughts in the context of meditation.

One thing we can discover is that our thoughts arise mechanically. They just pop up. Take what is happening now. You are listening to me but you are absorbed in the thoughts that are going through your mind. You don't want these thoughts to arise but they just pop up; and then we do something very interesting: some thoughts we allow just to arise and pass away, while others, we get hold of them, we identify ourselves with them. They can overwhelm us, they can control us. So this is one of the things that we can discover with awareness, that when thoughts arise, without getting hold of them, if you can just allow them to go away then there is no problem. This is one aspect for us to learn about and explore.

Another is the connection, the relationship, between thoughts and our state of mind. So as I said, when we get hold of our thoughts, when we identify ourselves with the thoughts, then our state of mind changes. That is why I have been suggesting that we learn not to react when thoughts come.

### **EMOTIONS**

Another interesting area which we have been working with is the connection between thoughts and emotions. What comes first, thoughts or emotions?

(Everyone answered: Thoughts)

I hope that you really discovered it, that you really learnt it for yourselves.

So in other words, if you learn to handle thoughts, work with thoughts, you develop mastery over emotions. Another thing is that when you have an emotion it is only thoughts that make it bigger. They can really blow up the emotion you are having.

### **STORIES**

Another interesting aspect is how we create stories out of our thoughts and we don't realise that we create the stories but we become victims of the stories that we create ourselves. Sometimes the stories can even become films, movies in our own mind from what has happened in the past and about what is going to happen in the future. We are sometimes creating very destructive films, movies, and we are the director, we are the producer, we are the actor, and we are the victim, all in that drama. I will give an example of what such a story is and how the story can become a kind of reality at that moment.

This is a story from the Buddhist literature. So there was a young monk who wanted to give up his robes. He hadn't told his chief monk about his plans but one day the chief monk was having a headache, so he told this young monk to give him a massage, to rub some oil on his head. So while massaging his head the young monk was thinking: Now, maybe in a month

or two I will be giving up my robes. And after I give up my robes, maybe I will find a job, and when I find a job I will get some money, and when I find enough money maybe I will find a girl and get married to this girl. But sometimes these wives can be impossible people and if my wife becomes difficult or impossible, I'll give her a good beating. And he beat the old monk on his head!

We are laughing, but this is what we also do with our thoughts. So it shows that these thoughts can be so compelling, and that they can create fantasies for us and we take the fantasy as real. So there is a connection, a relationship, between the stories and emotions. In the Dhamma there is a very interesting Pali word to describe this process which takes place in our mind: *papanca*. What it means is constructing, manufacturing, concocting, projecting, all these things we do with our thoughts, and it is said there is a direct relationship between concepts and suffering. This is how our suffering is created.

So this is why it is very important to learn to work with our thoughts, to understand the thoughts, to really understand the nature and construction of thoughts. As I said earlier, if we can learn to have a very spacious mind, allowing these thoughts and emotions to come and go, allowing sensations to arise and pass away, and we are in that spaciousness, not reacting to anything then at that moment there is freedom.

In the Tibetan tradition they use a very nice simile. They compare the mind to a spacious sky and the thoughts to clouds. The clouds do not affect the sky, the sky does not affect the clouds. So this shows that it is important to have that spaciousness, that spacious mind, allowing anything to arise and pass away.

## OWNERSHIP

Another aspect of thought is that we have a very strong conditioning to identify ourselves with them and say: These are *my* thoughts. *I* am thinking. Again without realising it, it is the thoughts that have created the thinker. This is why I have been suggesting on a few occasions just to see thoughts as thoughts without an owner, without the idea that these are *my* thoughts but just thoughts arising and passing away.

So it is funny how we have this idea of ownership. We start owning everything: thoughts, emotions, sensations, persons, possessions. And when we start owning things we don't like to let go of the things we own. This is why we find it difficult to let go of emotions because we think this is *my* anger, *my* fear, *my* anxiety, *my* sadness; so whatever we consider *mine* we don't want to let go. This is the deeper aspect of the Dhamma, to indicate to us actually there is no owner. There are just thoughts, there are just sensations, there are just emotions.

It is this sense of ownership which is creating our suffering. Nothing should happen to *my* mother – anything can happen to other people's mothers. Nothing should happen to *my* body, but other people's bodies – there's no problem whatsoever. And then in the same way we have this identification with possessions: my cup, it should stay with me; but other cups, there is no problem. We even draw the same distinction about animals. This is *my* cat; this is the neighbour's cat. So the neighbour's cat should not come and attack my cat. How can the neighbour's cat do that? So it is an interesting question to reflect on: what happens at the time of death to all the things we think we own? If we really own them we should be able to take them with us even after death, but we can't.

These are really very deep, profound aspects of the Buddha's teaching. To see the connection between our sense of ownership, with the sense of *I* and *me*, and how that is creating suffering. So these are some areas, some aspects that we can find out about for ourselves in the practice of meditation in everyday life.

In everyday life it is very important to use awareness, just to know what thoughts are going through your mind and how this is affecting you, how it is related to emotions. So if you can really practise this, be constantly aware of this, then very slowly there can be a shift in what is happening to you.

We often say we have certain worries, we have certain problems: what happens to that worry, what happens to that problem when your thoughts are with something else? The problem may not be solved but still at that moment it is not a source of suffering. If someone close to us is sick then whenever we think about that person, that is creating the suffering, that is creating the worry, but when our thoughts are with something else that person would still be having that illness but it is not a source of suffering for us. So it shows how thinking, thoughts, are really directly related to our suffering.

So I have presented certain aspects, certain areas, where we use thoughts destructively. Yesterday we had a discussion about images that arise in relationships, and again images are created by our concepts and our thoughts.

### THE POSITIVE USE OF THOUGHTS

But thoughts can also have a positive use, one can also use them creatively. How can we use them creatively? It is by using thought to reflect, to contemplate, to analyse. So this is a very important exercise, a very important meditation for us to develop, using thoughts to reflect. We should constantly reflect on our behaviour: How am I behaving? Is my behaviour creating suffering for myself, or creating suffering for others? Especially it is very important for us to see for ourselves how we create our own suffering. Then we realise that only we ourselves can bring about a change; then we take responsibility for our suffering and we can change that situation.

This brings up the Four Noble Truths the Buddha discovered. The First Noble Truth is the fact of suffering. How is suffering considered a Noble Truth? What is noble in suffering? What is your response?

**RETREATANT:** *Because if we do not understand suffering we would not practise.*

**GODWIN:** You can say that. It is noble because when we suffer then, as I said, we can reflect on what is causing the suffering. So when you suffer don't see it as something negative, see it as a Noble Truth.

But what is more important is the Second Noble Truth. It leads one to find out what is causing the suffering, or who is causing the suffering. Now this is a very difficult teaching for us to realise: that *we* are creating the suffering. It is very easy for us to hold others responsible for our suffering. Then we don't have to do anything about our suffering, the others have to do something about it. So if you can see the Second Noble Truth very clearly, the Third and the Fourth just follow from that.

## MEDITATION AS MEDICINE

Sometimes I define meditation as discovering the medicine for the sickness we have created ourselves. So during the last few days we have been discovering the medicine and I am very happy when looking at your faces that the medicine seems to be helping, seems to be working. Now what is important is to continue to take the medicine in everyday life. This is what we will be discussing tomorrow, being the last full day. Tomorrow I would like you to go over the medicine that we have been taking, the different techniques we have been practising, reflect on the different discussions we have been having. Before you leave you must be very clear about the medicine that you have to take.

Tomorrow we will have a discussion on how to integrate meditation with daily life. So reflect on all the problems, all the difficulties you may encounter or you are encountering in everyday life and then we will discuss how one can find the solution from the Buddha's teaching.

Now are there any questions about what I have been saying? Please ask questions, don't worry whether it is a good question, a bad question, a silly question, a profound question, just ask about what concerns you.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**RETREATANT:** *Talking about meditation, I want to know whether we meditators should act like stones? It seems that all the meditators behave like stones. To me, the feeling is like we are many stones. Because this morning when I was doing the standing meditation I just stood by the window and saw nature: it was so beautiful, the wind moving and nature dancing, and I thought: Can we do dancing meditation? It was so peaceful. So this is what I want to know.*

**GODWIN:** Was I also behaving like a stone?

**RETREATANT:** *Frankly, yes, but luckily you do laugh sometimes and you laugh very genuinely, so I don't think you are really like a stone most of the time.*

**GODWIN:** I have been emphasising the practice of loving-kindness, and the practice of loving-kindness is completely the opposite to being like a stone. It is really developing friendliness. This is what I always emphasise when I say: Can you feel that you are your own best friend? Can you really feel for the other people around you? But stones cannot feel anything, I'm afraid. You also described nature — I have been emphasising very much to make a connection with nature.

I am happy to say that there is a beautiful atmosphere here of people helping each other, being friendly with each other, especially the people working in the kitchen, so I don't get the impression that they are behaving like stones. I think what you are confusing is detachment with having no feelings. So here the whole emphasis is on feeling. I have been emphasising the experience of joy, lightness, friendliness; and I think the yoga teacher has been emphasising the importance of feeling the body. Perhaps he will tell you that some of you may be relating to your body as to a stone and not only in the yoga class, but that's a different matter! So I think you are confusing the non-reacting mind, the non-suffering mind with not feeling. I wanted to mention this on the last day.

I should also like to repeat that there is a beautiful atmosphere here, a group of spiritual friends interacting with each other. In fact one of the meditators told me this morning that when he came here he was having difficulties with experiencing feelings, but when people started smiling at him and showing friendliness, for the first time he experienced some feelings. That was very nice for me to hear from him.

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *Master, you have not answered my question. Can we do dancing meditation?*

**GODWIN:** Oh dancing, I did not hear the question correctly. During individual and outdoor meditation you are free to dance on your own; the only thing is do not force it, it should come naturally from your heart, otherwise the dance is not something real. It is just because you want to dance that you should dance. When there is joy, when there is lightness, when there is loving-kindness, I think whether you dance or whether you don't dance it does not matter, this is what is beautiful about it.

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *Can mind-power be as strong and firm as a stone?*

**GODWIN:** I wouldn't want to liken it to a stone. I would say that rather than seeing it as a stone it should be seen as something warm, it should be seen as something gentle, soft, tender. These are the spiritual qualities that come with the practice. So it is completely different from a stone which is something with no feelings. Something beautiful about human beings is that we have this ability to feel, and we should allow this feeling to arise, but then this feeling should be worked with, it has to be understood.

## IMAGES

**RETREATANT:** *You said earlier that we should not create an image about ourselves. But when we practise meditation of loving-kindness we create an image of ourselves that we are full of loving-kindness, so are the two things contradictory?*

**GODWIN:** Very good question, very good question. So in a way we need to have images, even to have expectations. What is important for us to realise is in what ways we are using them destructively.

So that if we don't have these qualities in us, if instead of loving-kindness we have hatred, hatred towards ourselves, hatred towards others, then it is very important to bring about a shift within ourselves by learning to be our best friend, learning to be a friend to others. In this way it is no harm having an image: I want to be a person who is friendly and tries to practise. Or you can still practise without an image but just developing these qualities and allow your behaviour to emerge from that.

So one can really practise at two levels: if you like to have an image, you can have it, but otherwise you can just practise without an image and allow your behaviour to arise from whatever spiritual qualities you have developed. What is important is to see whether that image corresponds to reality. This is what we have to work with. Images create problems sometimes if the images are unrealistic. When you have an image of how things should be and then what happens in reality is another thing, this is how suffering is created. So there

are different aspects to this question. I'm very happy that good questions are being asked. Very good.

**RETREATANT:** *When one becomes enlightened then do we have no more thoughts?*

**GODWIN:** I think there is nothing wrong with thoughts. This is what I have been trying to impress on you. What I have been trying to impress on you is how we use thoughts destructively. So this is what you have to see in everyday life: when we use thoughts destructively that is creating suffering. I also said how one can use thoughts creatively. So thoughts have a really very positive use. I would suggest an enlightened person would have thoughts but such a person will not use thoughts destructively.

There is a very interesting quotation by the Buddha himself in relation to his own thoughts: I would like to relate the details. One of his disciples told the Buddha: You have so many powers, you have so many miraculous powers. And the Buddha said: My greatest miracle is that when a thought arises, I know a thought has arisen; when a thought continues, I know that a thought continues when the thought disappears, I know the thought disappears.

This shows it is not the absence of thought which is important. I like that very much. So we can try to work on the third aspect: when a thought disappears. For someone to have that type of mind they have to have a very calm mind, an alert mind, just to know when a thought disappears.

So that's about the thoughts of an enlightened person. I think we should not worry too much about enlightened people!

**RETREATANT:** *Actually my question arose because when I watched a grasshopper for some time it was so still, it was so calm, it seems that it is the grasshopper who is in meditation. And I started to think: What is the difference between his meditation and my meditation? So this question arose about our thoughts.*

**GODWIN:** So you can think about the grasshopper and you can leave the enlightened person alone! I think we have enough problems with the unenlightened mind.

Anything else?

## UNDERSTANDING THE MIND

**RETREATANT:** *Today during the meditation I tried to put more effort into observing the thoughts, and I discovered that when I put more effort into observation there were fewer passing thoughts. It's just like you said, when you invite emotions they do not come, when you invite thoughts they do not come also. It's very interesting.*

**GODWIN:** It's a very important discovery. When we don't want thoughts to arise they arise, and when we want thoughts to arise they don't arise. When we don't want emotions they arise and when we want emotions they don't arise. Why is the mind acting in opposition to us? This is a very important question to reflect on. Is this the nature of the mind? Or have we conditioned the mind in this way?

I think what it shows is that we cannot tell the mind: Have thoughts, have no thoughts. It doesn't work that way. It's like telling a child: Do this, don't do that. And the child likes to do what you don't want him to do. So this is why I emphasise friendliness such a lot. If you

want to understand a child you have to be very friendly and see what the child wants, so in the same way if we want to understand our mind we cannot be telling the mind to do this and don't do that, but rather, with friendliness, try to understand it.

So when there's friendliness, when there's gentleness, when there's openness, then the mind may start co-operating with us. Otherwise we tell the mind to behave in one way and it is going the other way and we get angry about it. So it becomes a battle and becomes another big fight. Meditation for most people is a fight. Fighting the mind. I often tell meditators, you have enough battles in life, please do not make meditation another battle! So with friendliness we need to understand how our mind and body works, and then through that understanding, developing mastery is the next thing. When I spoke on loving-kindness I mentioned that one of the benefits is that when there is loving-kindness the mind becomes calm naturally.

Anything else?

**RETREATANT:** *Your teaching of loving-kindness is like teaching us to be a bodhisatta. I would like to practise this too but the difficulty is I cannot be a bodhisatta. For example, I go past a beggar in the street. I wish to give him \$10, but then straight after thinking that I would only give him \$5 because I need the other \$5 for my lunch box. My question is how to be a bodhisatta?*

**GODWIN:** I am very happy that you are now 50% a bodhisatta! Because from \$10 you give \$5, so mathematically you are 50% a bodhisatta! So I'm sure very soon you will make the other 50%. The day will come and you will give the beggar the \$10 and you will forget about lunch!

**RETREATANT:** *What about my lunch box?*

**RETREATANT:** *Ven. Dhammika told us of an incident when he was walking along with you. You came upon a beggar and you gave him everything from your pocket and then you had no money left and you both had to walk a long way to where you needed to go. This is something we should learn from. Do you remember?*

**GODWIN:** No.

**RETREATANT:** *My thoughts are formed by words. I do not know whether the thoughts of others are also formed by words.*

**GODWIN:** It's a very interesting discovery you have made that thoughts are really words. Words and pictures, and they give rise to feelings. Let's take a couple of examples. Let us think of breakfast tomorrow. Let us close our eyes and see what happens to our mind when we think of breakfast tomorrow.

So we see bread, we see coffee, whatever is usually there we see. Actually these are pictures that come, and then with the pictures some feelings will come depending on our likes and our dislikes. So actually our thoughts come in the form of images, words and feelings. It sounds so simple. And then what happens to us is that with these things, these pictures, films, we create our suffering.

What is interesting is that with techniques like focusing on breathing, when there are no thoughts none of these things are present, pictures, words, but we are just dealing with the sensations. Words and pictures are always from the past. We can never see pictures and

images which we have not experienced before. So only when they are absent can something new happen. This is the beauty of some of the meditation techniques that they help us to have no pictures and so on.

So this is what I have been encouraging you to do, to make your own discoveries about your thoughts, make your own discoveries about your emotions, make your own discoveries about how suffering is created. We are so fortunate to have this mind and body. Sometimes I tell meditators that we can be our own laboratories and we can make experiments, we can make discoveries, we can learn from them.

Without taking anything for granted our whole life becomes learning; and we should develop a taste for it, we should develop a curiosity for it, we should find this very interesting, entertaining, sometimes amusing. So then when you leave this place you can continue to discover, you can continue to learn, you can continue to find out. Then we have this openness that we can learn from anything, we can learn from anyone, not only from the so-called teachers, but life itself becomes the teacher, our mind and body become our teacher, and I think it is a beautiful way to live.

Yesterday we were talking about relationships. Just watching the dogs that come here reveals very interesting relationships. What have we learnt from just watching the three dogs that come here? Have you watched them? It is very interesting to see their relationships. Just like humans. Fascinating to watch.

Talking about dogs, I would like to share with you an experience I had on one of the retreats I gave in a foreign country. So on the last day I was having a talk with the meditators and one of them told the group that whatever she has learnt from me on the course she has already learnt from her dog. So I became curious about her dog. I told her, please tell something more about your dog, and she said: Well, you tell us to just live in the present and this is what my dog does; you tell us to feel grateful, and my dog is always grateful. And she went on to describe the behaviour of the dog and what happens in the retreat. Then I asked her: Is there no difference between your dog and me? She said, Yes, you talk a lot, but my dog can't talk at all! I like that story very much.

Anything else? Any question?

## WOUNDS AND FORGIVENESS

**RETREATANT:** *You taught us the practice of loving-kindness and how we should be friendly with ourselves and others and how we should reflect on wounds that we have and forgive others. But how do we know we are really being sincere in forgiving ourselves and in forgiving others?*

**GODWIN:** Very good question. I will give a practical example. Supposing you have a wound in relation to what you have done to another: guilt. So before healing the wound, whenever a thought came in relation to your action you would suffer from guilt. So the wound will be healed when the memory comes and on reflection there is no guilt. In the same way, someone has been very unfriendly and unkind to you and whenever the memory comes in relation to his or her action you feel hatred, you feel anger, you feel ill-will. So the wound is healed when the memory comes about that person but no hatred, no ill-will comes.

I'm happy you reminded us of wounds. Tomorrow is the last full day you have for healing wounds, so I would like to suggest you try to heal them and leave all the wounds here when you go from here.

**RETREATANT:** *About others' wounds: for example, one of my male friends thinks I wounded him but this is not so, I did nothing wrong. How can I help him to get rid of the wound?*

**GODWIN:** So other people have wounds in relation to our behaviour. We might try to heal their wounds by trying to explain to them; or if you have really created the wound, say sorry to them, and then try to help them to heal their wound. You can always try. Sometimes we find it difficult, so they too may find it difficult to heal them. But what is important is for you not to suffer as a result of that, because what can you do about it? You have done your best, and then the other person doesn't want to heal that wound. So let us not create a wound in our own mind in relation to their wound.

### **TOMORROW'S PRACTICE**

I would like to say something about what we should do tomorrow. So one thing I suggest, try to go over the different things we tried to do here in the last few days and if there are any doubts, any difficulties, please raise them in tomorrow's discussion or when we meet individually. And also please reflect on how you can integrate meditation in your everyday life and if there are any questions or problems in relation to that you can prepare the questions and present them in the discussion. So tomorrow's discussion will be related to that theme.

And the last suggestion is, I would like you to go over the different techniques we have practised and if you have any questions, any difficulties, you can present them also. So I won't be telling you what to do tomorrow: you are free to use whatever technique you like to practise and explore by yourself tomorrow. It is very important to learn to be your own teacher, learning to be a light unto yourself as the Buddha said.

So let's do some chanting.

DAY 6, 18TH OCTOBER 1997

## MEDITATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

**GODWIN:** We thought we would have a shorter sitting so that we can have a longer discussion, as it is the last discussion we will be having. So we will go over the techniques we have practised here. And with these techniques, if you have any difficulties please present them. Though there are different techniques the principles are the same. I present different techniques because people have different temperaments. So what I try to do is to relate to the meditators individually and find out what technique is more suitable for them.

Before we speak about the techniques we should be clear why we meditate. The purpose of meditation is to free ourselves from suffering. The Buddha often said: I teach the fact of suffering and the way out of suffering. So it is to really achieve a mind that is free and a heart that is boundless. And the techniques are rather simple but we complicate them because of the complicated minds we have. Human beings are very clever at complicating simple things! I often ask the question: What have human beings not complicated in life?

### MEDITATION ON BREATHING

So one of the techniques we presented was focusing on the breathing. Any difficulty about this technique?

**RETREATANT:** *When I observe the breathing I find that my mind is not calm and the breathing is fast.*

**GODWIN:** So I will say something about this technique. For whatever question you have perhaps what I will say might cover it. The simple thing about this technique is that it is learning just to be aware. We try not only to learn about awareness in relation to breathing but to whatever is happening in our mind and body.

So it is very simple. If you are having thoughts you just know that thoughts are there. If the breathing goes fast you know now the breathing is fast. If you have unpleasant sensations in the body, you know there are unpleasant sensations in the body. So as I have been emphasising, the whole focus of the technique is *just knowing* what is happening from moment to moment. If your mind is calm, you know the mind is calm. If the mind is not calm, you know the mind is not calm.

If we are meditating to achieve a mind that is calm, then when calm comes we will hold onto the calm. This is how suffering is created. And so if there is calm there is also suffering. So what this meditation aims at is something very simple, knowing what is happening, and as I have been saying very often, just being friendly and saying okay to whatever is happening. And if you can meditate in this way, at the time you are meditating you are free from suffering.

And what is also important is to use the breath not only when we are sitting. This is why I have been saying, please make a connection with your breath. So in everyday life at different moments you can just come back to your breath. The breath is our friend, it will help us to experience the present moment, the *here* and the *now*. The idea is to sit and develop

awareness, and then to use that awareness at other times. I would consider that to be more important than what is happening only when you are sitting, because it is in everyday life that suffering is created, problems are created, you have to face challenges.

Some meditators ask me: Am I doing it right? How do I know whether I am progressing in my practice? So I tell them the progress is not what is happening when you are sitting but how you relate it to everyday life. In Sri Lanka we have very rich people who are sometimes very unkind to their servants. So when they are learning meditation I tell them the way to know their progress is to see the way they are treating their servants at home. They are not very happy to hear such things!

So please realise our progress is in how we are relating in everyday life. It is a way of living. It is an art of living. It is a way of thinking. It is a matter of having a certain attitude towards life, like the story I related about the wise old Chinese man. So please see this clearly, please realise this. Perhaps after I go over the techniques I might go over with you that aspect of everyday living. Please don't associate meditation only with a particular posture, a particular time, a particular technique.

### LOVING-KINDNESS

Another technique I presented was meditation on loving-kindness which I emphasise very much. And meditation on loving-kindness is related to all the techniques, because if you can learn to make friends with whatever is happening, in that moment there is freedom. The simple fact is that suffering comes when we resist something, whether in meditation or whether in everyday life. So loving-kindness, friendliness, gentleness, openness, allows us not to resist but just to flow with, just to be open to what is happening.

Anyway, any problems about meditation on loving-kindness? It's a funny question: Any problems about loving-kindness meditation!

**RETREATANT:** *Sometimes you may treat other people with loving-kindness, but other people may not treat you with loving-kindness, so what can we do about that?*

**GODWIN:** Very good question. This is what happens in everyday life. This is one of the greatest challenges we have in everyday life. People who are unfriendly to you, people who are unkind to you, people who are unreasonable towards you; they should be our gurus, they should be our masters, they should be our teachers. As one of my friends put it, they really present you with a mirror. So when you meet such people you should be really grateful for them because they are testing you.

The important thing is, not to be concerned about what they are doing but to watch what is happening in your own mind. This is why we have been emphasising so much the practice of awareness, just knowing what is happening. Then when you realise that the problem is what is happening here in your own mind and not what is happening out there people may behave in any way but there is no reaction to that.

And as I have been emphasising, this shows that we are all still human. According to the Buddha, until and unless we are enlightened we are all crazy. So we are living in a crazy world. The problem with us is that we are taking these crazy people too seriously! So the sane way to live in a crazy society is to realise this, to understand this and to have compassion towards the crazy people we have to be with. So this is how we can relate to

such people – they should be our teachers. So I hope you meet more and more such masters, such teachers, such gurus in your life, because they are much better for you than this so-called teacher from Sri Lanka!

So any other questions about loving-kindness?

**RETREATANT:** *Sometimes I feel that someone has done something wrong, for example in the office I see people wasting paper, so I get a bit angry with them although I understand that they may be ignorant about this, but still the anger is there.*

**GODWIN:** It is interesting for me the example you gave. In Sri Lanka people get angry when others waste their food because food is such a precious, important thing. So it is interesting that you get angry when you see people wasting paper! So how does a meditator use such a situation?

One way of working with such a situation is to watch your own reactions to such a situation. Are you angry? Are you annoyed? Are you irritated? In what way are you reacting to that? Sometimes it is interesting to experiment with it. One day you go in and you see such people and you watch, now how long will the anger last: half an hour? one hour? Because of some paper? So you should look out for such people and see how you are reacting to such situations. Then that becomes a learning experience for you.

Now this doesn't mean that meditators are always passive, looking only at themselves. There are two very important words: reaction and response. Reaction is an emotional reaction to such a situation. Response is doing something meaningful, doing something creative without reacting emotionally. So you can have a kind of dialogue with such people in a very friendly, open way, trying to understand their behaviour. But it should be done in a very skilful way rather than speaking in a very angry way, in a judgmental way, as if you are thinking you are right and these people are wrong. Naturally there is a hostile reaction to that.

We should never be self-righteous in our life. When you see the mistakes of other people, without being self-righteous sometimes you can say: I may not have made that mistake, but I may be making worse mistakes, having wrong thoughts in my mind. Then when you see wrongdoings you relate to human frailties in an entirely different way.

So it is good to have a dialogue with such people and just get them to reflect on what is happening to them. This may work, this may not work. So if it works it's fine; and if it doesn't work, you should be able to see such human frailties and just understand that this is the way things are. So I would like to again emphasise the importance of getting the person to see what he or she is doing, to get that person to reflect as far as possible by asking questions, rather than imposing your opinion on other people.

And I would also like to suggest that in such situations, without being self-righteous, to honestly tell such persons: I'm sure I'm having shortcomings in me and I'm full of imperfections because I'm still not an enlightened person, but I'm curious to know what makes you do this? That can touch people very deeply rather than the self-righteous way.

Anything else about loving-kindness?

**RETREATANT:** *My question is related to the previous question and what has just been raised, this thing about not being self-righteous when you deal with a person who you think is not acting*

*correctly. The problem is between my wife and me. I have tried the method you have just explained to us to make her understand where her shortcomings are, but the more friendly I am in dealing with the situation the more self-righteous she feels, so I'm getting nowhere with this.*

**RETREATANT:** He says he got more and more humble and his wife got more and more self-righteous, but I don't believe him!

**GODWIN:** And I think I agree because I know his wife also!

Anyway I think I'm forced to relate my usual story about the cobra. I think most of you have heard this story. Has anyone not heard it?

The story is that there was a cobra who was practising loving-kindness meditation in a forest all by herself, and then an old woman came along and the old woman mistook the cobra for a rope. So as the cobra was practising loving-kindness, she allowed the woman to use her as a rope for the firewood she had collected. The old woman went home and this cobra escaped with lots of difficulties, lots of pain, lots of wounds, and so on.

She went to the meditation teacher and told the meditation teacher: See what happened. I was practising loving-kindness. I'm suffering as a result of the loving-kindness. And the teacher said: You have been practising idiotic compassion, not loving-kindness. You have to learn to hiss sometimes.

So sometimes we need to hiss, to assert ourselves, to be firm. But again be clear while you are being firm that your motive, what is inside, is really compassion. So the point I'm making is, loving-kindness doesn't mean that you are always passive, allowing others to exploit you. With wisdom you should know when to assert yourself and when to be gentle. And you should also allow your wife to be the cobra!

## OBJECTLESS MEDITATION

Another technique that we practised which is very important, I feel, is what is called *objectless meditation*. Once you are established in awareness and you are stable in your mind, then you are in a position to allow anything to arise, allow any thought to arise, allow any emotion to arise, especially emotions you don't like, any sensations to arise, and learn just to observe, just to be with whatever is happening in that spacious mind.

This is a very useful meditation in everyday life. In everyday life, in different situations just to know what thoughts you are having, just to know what emotions you are having, just to know what sensations you are having, seeing what they are and learning not to react to them, making them the objects of meditation, making them learning experiences. So in everyday life when you are having an emotion like anger, fear, stress, you learn to make that an object of meditation.

Meditation has different levels but to a great extent we should try to integrate it with everyday life. This is why we had one full day to work with emotions, and another full day to work with thoughts, because these are the two aspects, the two areas that we have to deal with in everyday life. So any question about this practice?

**RETREATANT:** *Regarding the objectless meditation, practically, how can we create a spacious mind in order to do such meditation?*

**GODWIN:** So using a technique like focusing on breathing we learn to develop awareness, we learn to develop a non-reactive mind, we learn to be open, and once you know that now you are fairly stable then you can open up to whatever is happening. And what is beautiful in this technique is that even when there are times when you don't have a spacious mind and when you are reacting, when you have some emotion, then that becomes an object of meditation, you learn about it, you investigate it. So if you are unable to do it at that time when it will not be very easy, at least later on you can reflect on what happened and can learn from it.

So our mistakes, our failures, they're used as our teachers, they're used for our spiritual growth. It is a very beautiful way to live. Usually when we make a mistake we give ourselves a big minus, we feel guilty, we suffer from anger, all different reactions. But in this way there is no need to have such reactions to our mistakes, instead you learn about what happened to you, so it develops self-knowledge and you feel grateful for these emotions and reactions that you have had.

I would like to emphasise this very much because I know in this culture there's lots of suffering as a result of our failures, our mistakes. So hereafter please don't suffer as a result of them, make them the object of meditation, make an effort to learn from them, because we can use them as a mirror showing us where we are. So please be very clear on this point. Then you come to a state that whether these unpleasant emotions are there or whether there are pleasant emotions it makes no difference. No big plus when pleasant experiences are there, and no big minus when unpleasant experiences are there. As the Buddha said: We learn to see things just as they are.

Any other questions about this technique?

**RETREATANT:** *You taught us not to fight with our thoughts in everyday life, and particularly during meditation we should not fight against all the sensations. During meditation I find after sitting for about half an hour my legs become so painful that I have to put all my attention on the pain and it's like putting up a fight with those sensations. And if I try to accept the sensations then all my attention is on how to accept those sensations and therefore I have no room to do any observation of the thoughts.*

*So I would like to know when I should make a decision to change my posture, because I do not want to change my posture too often in case I might have to go through the pain in order to improve the sitting. It confuses me because I have to make a decision sometimes and I do not know what decision I should make.*

**GODWIN:** A few points. One is that working with pain is a very useful experience in meditation. In everyday life when we experience physical pain, what do we do? We try to do something about it immediately, change the posture or whatever, and then get rid of the pain because it is unpleasant. So by doing this we never learn about pain, which is a most important part of the human condition. We don't know what types of pain we might have to experience in the future, so this is why I have been repeating so often, meditation is learning to be open to unpleasant experiences. Please don't see them as a disturbance or a distraction.

So this is one point. Nothing is more important than the pain itself, either thoughts or whatever else, because that is what you are experiencing. So feel grateful for the pain because you can learn about the pain in a meditative situation.

We have to avoid two extremes. One extreme is always saying Yes to the body. This is pampering the body. Is there lots of pampering of the body in this country? A good question to reflect on. The body says: I want it. We immediately go for it because it is all available here. So it is very important to learn to say No sometimes. Saying Yes always is pampering. Always saying No is being too hard on ourselves. So it is very important to have the correct balance, when to say Yes, when to say No.

So in relation to physical pain when you are meditating, if you immediately change the posture I would say that is pampering; and going through the pain, trying not to change the posture, grinding your teeth, enduring the pain, I would say that is the other extreme. So the middle way is learning, experimenting, exploring the pain, and then when it's unbearable change the posture, stand up: very simple.

**RETREATANT:** *I think it is rather difficult to know what is the point at which you have to be strict with yourself.*

**GODWIN:** Just play with it, just experiment with it, it's not as critical as you think. Don't be so serious about the practice. Yesterday you were speaking of people being like stones. This is the result if you are too serious. So this is why I'm emphasising lightness, joy, experimenting, playing with meditation.

I think this brings up another aspect of meditation which I would like to mention. I think again that this is related to this culture, that people are very goal-oriented, they want to achieve results. So it is very interesting, in everyday life you have goals to achieve, results to achieve, and you chase after goals even when you are meditating!

So naturally you go through the same stress, the same anxiety, the same tension, the same restlessness because you want to achieve some goals, some results. Buddha has something very interesting to say in this connection, he gave a simile. He said meditation is like being a gardener; so like a gardener you are enjoying planting the trees, vegetables and flowers, and the gardener is not bothered when the flowers will come, when the fruits will come but is enjoying what he is doing.

I have thought of a similar simile. The simile is trying to reach the top of a mountain which you are climbing. If you are concerned, you are pre-occupied by what you are going to see when you reach the top you'll miss the fun while climbing. So while you are climbing, what is happening to you, the falls, the adventures, the problems, those become the practice, and don't be concerned about what will be there when you have reached the top. What is happening now is the practice, and not what is going to happen later on. So it doesn't matter whether they are pleasant experiences or unpleasant experiences, see them as practice, that's the practice, not getting rid of them.

Any other question?

**RETREATANT:** *Your teaching is mainly divided into two areas, that is the technique of observing the breathing and the other is observing what is happening in our mind. Is there a suggestion that we should practise observing the breathing first and then observe what is happening in our mind, or the other way round? Which one should we do first?*

**GODWIN:** I would say it depends, but as I said earlier focusing on breathing helps you to develop awareness, a non-reactive mind, and once you develop these skills then you can practise objectless meditation. And I would like to make it clear that we should practise both

of these techniques, continue to practise these two techniques independently because in a sense they complement each other.

### **REFLECTION AS MEDITATION**

I would also like to make it clear now that from what I have been saying so far you might have the impression that meditation is only practising techniques, but there is also a very important area which I presented on a few occasions here, learning to reflect, learning to contemplate. This is very important especially for our behaviour. To reflect in a very friendly, gentle way about the way we behave, the words that we use, and so on. So we can learn a great deal from this reflection in relation to the way we are behaving, the judgements we are making.

If we can develop this quality of reflection we can see the Dhamma in any experience in life; any experience can be a meditation. It can be a sickness, it can be some disappointment, it can be some frustration, it can be some happiness, it can be anything, but just learning to reflect, to contemplate, to understand, is very important.

So in this connection I would like to suggest a technique which you can practise in everyday life. In the evening after work when you go back home, I know everyone who goes home is tired, but please try to recover from that by maybe taking a shower or something similar, and then just for a few minutes take your mind back and reflect on how you spent the day.

From the time you woke up to the time of that reflection, just try to go over all the things. See now, how many times did I get angry during the day, what were the occasions when there was stress, were there situations when I lost control of my emotions? You are not doing this as if you were a judge, trying to beat yourself, but in a very friendly, gentle, understanding way, just going over what happened.

And what is more important is also to reflect on the times when such disturbances were not there. Reflect on the good things that you have done, the generous things you have done, the friendly things you have done, the nice words you have used. You should also include these. This is more important or at least equally important.

If you can be more open to these positive things you'll be surprised to know what a good person you are. So this type of reflection will enable us to know more about ourselves, to know about our behaviour in a very objective, clear way and when you do this a natural transformation will come in your behaviour without your trying to do anything.

### **YOGA AND MEDITATION**

I think another thing we learned is yoga. So please don't forget yoga in everyday life. You don't have to do one hour of yoga, but in the morning when you wake up just spend five minutes, ten minutes, doing some of these physical exercises, movements. It will really awaken you physically and mentally. In the evening when you go back home take a shower and do a few exercises, immediately there will be a recovery.

Please try to combine meditation with yoga because physically, it is one of the things I like to mention, it is very important to relax the body. I find that sometimes the way you meditate – I can see on your faces that you are not relaxed. As I said, it is too serious, too tense, you may be trying to achieve something. So when the body is relaxed the mind

becomes relaxed, then both the mind and body are relaxed and you can meditate in a very relaxed, easy way.

And talking to some of the meditators here I find that they are mostly in their heads and not in their body so much. So it is very important to make a connection with the body, feel the body, learn to listen to our body, to come back to the body as often as possible.

**RETREATANT:** *The thing I observed when doing yoga is the question of ownership, this concept of the self, because I found the body acts very independently. It would not always do things the way I want. I want to do postures like the yoga teacher but I can't do it. It is not up to me, the body has its independence.*

**GODWIN:** It is a very good point to realise our limitations and then, as you rightly said, realise we have no control. If we are the masters, we can say: Do this, the body should behave like this – but we can't say that. So this why we have to learn to surrender to what is happening. This is why on one occasion I said we have to be open to uncertainty, because we have no control over what is happening in our mind and body and the environment and life.

Anything else? We can spend more time today as it is the last night.

**RETREATANT:** *I don't quite agree because even with the yoga teacher when he first started, it can't be that he could do all the postures he can do now, so you have to gradually learn with your body.*

**GODWIN:** That's true, but it doesn't mean that he can say: Now body, don't fall sick, don't die, please don't have white hair like Godwin's hair! Even the Buddha could not control completely what happened to his body. The Buddha's body became sick, the Buddha's body became old, the Buddha's body died. The only difference was that whatever happened in the body it caused no suffering for him because he was not identifying himself with it.

## DEVELOPING SENSITIVITY

**RETREATANT:** *You told us that we should hear and see things when we go outside. I would like you to tell us more about how we see things.*

**GODWIN:** Normally when we see things our complete attention is not there. So what we can do, and this is what is sometimes very useful about nature, is that we can cultivate this way of looking at things by examining something very clearly, very closely, and at that time your whole attention, your whole awareness, is on that object that you are seeing.

So if we can learn to do this in relation to seeing our senses are really awakened. There's a freshness that arises, there is a lightness in your being. I think as children we had this quality, but maybe with our pre-occupations, with our anxieties, with our thoughts, they are there most of the time and we try to see things with such a mind, so we hardly notice things.

So when we develop this quality we can see small things, little things, much more clearly, so that these ordinary things can become extraordinary. In the Buddhist texts there are some very beautiful references to monks and nuns living in the forest and they describe very minutely what they hear, what they see.

So another word for this is to develop a kind of sensitivity in a positive sense to seeing things, hearing things, smelling things, feeling things, so your whole living is alive, is fresh,

is new, is innocent. In the Dhammapada, a very important book in the Dhamma, it is said that if we do not cultivate this awareness, this alertness, we are like dead people. So we become alive with this quality.

I think that maybe you might have experienced this: before chanting, when we hear the sounds, how we can really make the sounds the object of meditation. If we can really hear them sharply, clearly, as if for the first time, then space is created in your mind only for the sounds; and the same quality of living can be present in whatever we do. When we are eating, we'll be really alive, we will be really conscious, really present when we are eating. So this is what I'm trying to emphasise.

**RETREATANT:** *Sometimes when we are meditating we have vibration or movement in the body? What should we do?*

**GODWIN:** Sometimes just allow the body to move. Sometimes you need to control it, to say: Now stop it. Sometimes to allow it, sometimes to control it, to stop it. The only thing is you should not react to it and say: This is a funny feeling, this is strange, am I doing it right? That is unnecessary. When we meditate so many things happen in our mind and body, but whatever happens, just learning to be aware, learning to say okay.

I would like to hear something about chanting. What is your experience with chanting?

**RETREATANT:** *I feel very irritated about the bell-ringing. It's very interesting sometimes when I concentrate on the chanting, it feels that the bell-ringing is very far away but sometimes, I don't know when, I am still not so aware of my mind, sometimes the bell-ringing really gets very irritating to my brain, like something hitting me. I don't like it.*

**GODWIN:** Many experiences have both a plus and a minus, and this is why we have to say now plus, now minus; now pleasant, now unpleasant — okay, this is life. So you see, chanting shows what life is. It doesn't go one way, it isn't all beautiful. You see how one can learn from anything. This is what I say, this is the way of life: pleasant things come, unpleasant things come. Can we be open to both?

I would like to share my thoughts about chanting. I love Chinese chanting. It really makes me — how shall I put it? — I feel I am really present. Sometimes without my knowledge, my body is moving: wonderful. And I like the bells because in Sri Lanka, we don't use bells, so it has some magic for me.

**RETREATANT:** *Actually the bell is a device to develop our awareness also, because the sound of the bell is very clear. Secondly, it vibrates slowly and reduces its volume to the end so your awareness can follow the bell from the time it is hit right to the end of it, when the sound finally vanishes.*

**GODWIN:** Very good point. Any questions?

**RETREATANT:** *I still have one question. Talking about awareness, I want to know: during meditation I have many, many imaginings. The imaginings keep coming. Is this one aspect of the nature of awareness?*

**GODWIN:** Can you give an example of what you mean by imaginings, one which makes you happy?

**RETREATANT:** *For example, when I look at the grass and I look at the small plants, when they move I feel like dancing with them, so it's a kind of imagining. I don't know whether it's thoughts or not.*

**GODWIN:** It doesn't matter, but if you can just dance, just dance and enjoy it, it doesn't matter what it is.

**RETREATANT:** *And even when I look at the clouds I see many, many things and so I want to know if imagination is a kind of thought?*

**GODWIN:** Find out for yourself. I mean, this is what I have been encouraging people to do. So when you imagine you can find out: Now am I thinking? What is happening? So tomorrow I would like you to experiment with it and come and share with me the discoveries you have made. This is what I have been trying to encourage.

The last few days are for you to make your own discoveries. And if you learn to make your own discoveries, as I said on one occasion, when you leave this place, you will continue to make discoveries about life, about anything.

One danger about imagination is that you may not be able to be clear what is imagined and what is reality. I know some people have breakdowns because they don't know how to distinguish what is imagined and what is real.

**RETREATANT:** *I told you about the grasshoppers last night. I don't know whether the grasshoppers are meditating or not but I imagine they are, and so this was very interesting.*

**GODWIN:** This is why I said the danger is that you might come to a stage where you don't know whether you are imagining or whether it is real, and that can cause serious problems. I mean, this is what is beautiful about the meditation techniques. There is nothing to imagine, it's something real, something objective, and then when there is unreality, imaginations, let them go, come back to the reality: sounds, it is something pleasant, everyone can hear, or sensations. When I meet people who have psychological problems, these are the techniques that I give them and for the first time they can distinguish between what is real and what is unreal.

## **TOMORROW'S PRACTICE**

So tomorrow we will be having a different schedule, as you know. There's a lot of working meditation we have to do, clearing up. And of course I know you have not been practising silence but tomorrow you are free to really speak out openly. But I would like to make this suggestion, it is very important to everyday life: when you speak, see how far you can be aware of your speech, because in everyday life this is an area where there's lots of problems, difficulties, suffering, when we use our speech incorrectly. So silence is important, right speech is important.

So please make an effort tomorrow. It will be a very good training for everyday life. When you are speaking tomorrow, just to know that you are speaking, and to observe the tone of your speech. When others are speaking, do you really listen attentively? Also tomorrow while you are working, as we have been trying to do here, see how far you can see work as a meditation and not something different from meditation. Then we will have a last session, a concluding discussion, so we might have some more time to speak about everyday life, or some aspects of meditation if there is a need for it.

I am very happy that you presented questions clarifying some problems and difficulties you have in meditation. So I hope you are very clear about the medicine now. Now the important thing is to make a commitment to use the medicine in everyday life. I would like to urge you to really make use of the medicine; the medicine can really work and help you. You will see the medicine helps us to work with the sickness that we create ourselves. And I would also like to suggest that while you use the medicine yourself, please make an effort to share the medicine with others. There's a lot of people suffering in this world. So it is very important for us while we take the medicine to share it with others.

Now we will do some chanting.

DAY 7, 19TH OCTOBER 1997

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

**GODWIN:** As this is the last discussion I'd like to share with you some of the things I have learned during the last few days from the meditators I have been meeting. These are some of the things that I have already spoken about but I'd like to emphasise them so that you can really make an effort to work with them.

### SUFFERING FROM GUILT

One problem I encountered with many meditators is that they are suffering from guilt. Maybe there are some historical or social reasons why there seems to be a lot of guilt in this culture, because in old cultures like the Tibetan culture, Sri Lankan culture and some other cultures there is not even a word for guilt! I read somewhere that his holiness the Dalai Lama was surprised when he encountered so many Westerners suffering from guilt.

People who generally suffer from guilt from the past, they seem to remember mostly the wrong things they have done in the past. So they seem to have a selective memory in this connection. The good things they have done they have completely forgotten and they remember only their shortcomings, only their failures, and they don't realise that they are punishing themselves with the guilt that they are holding onto.

It is unfortunate that traditional Buddhism also sometimes seems to be emphasising this, especially with the doctrine of *kamma*. This is why I never speak about *kamma*, because what happens is you think you have done some wrong things and you think you are going to suffer because of *kamma*. So it is really unfortunate that the Buddhist doctrines are used to create more suffering. And of course they only think of bad *kamma*, they never think of good *kamma*!

So the whole idea of Buddhism, as I have been emphasising, is to develop more joy and freedom from suffering, so I'm very sorry to see that Buddhism is used to create more and more suffering. Just to give an example, when I was in Hong Kong I met a woman, a very good woman, a very kind-hearted woman. A Buddhist teacher had told her that there was a devil inside her and this teacher had said: I can see it in your face. So when I met her she was really suffering from what she had heard from this Buddhist teacher.

So this brings up something about the tradition, that we have to be clear what is taught in the culture and what is really taught in the teachings. It's interesting how to some extent even in Sri Lanka I meet Buddhists who seem to emphasise more the suffering aspect, so I tell them: Please, that is only the first Noble Truth, what about the other Noble Truths? So this is one area I would like you to reflect on, and as I have been emphasising, please use loving-kindness, gentleness, learning to be your best friend, seeing your worth, seeing your potentialities, seeing that you have the Buddha-nature in you.

Another point related to this is the fear of making mistakes. I'm not asking you to deliberately make mistakes, but when we have made a mistake we should learn how to relate to that mistake. So this is why I have been emphasising to see them as learning

experiences, as valuable experiences, feeling grateful for such situations because we can learn from them.

### **MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE**

Another thing that I discovered here is that people associate meditation only with sitting, or a particular time, a particular posture and so on. But as I have been emphasising, if you are really serious about meditation it has to be a way of living, especially in everyday life, in relationships that you are having whether in the place of work, at home, or whatever. They should be areas of meditation for you to work with. So it's really a way of understanding, it's a way of knowledge, it's a way of developing wisdom, and then try to integrate that with your daily life.

So I saw that some meditators here associate meditation only with sitting, so that when they sit it is something special. When you sit, if you think it is something special you're bound to have special problems. Even the way you are breathing, you try to do it differently. And then when you sit you want to immediately achieve states of calm and have special experiences, but at other times you're not worried about these. So it is clear there's a kind of fragmentation, a duality between the person who is sitting and the person outside sitting practice.

So as I said, if you can see meditation as something that you do most of the time – it's just being aware, it's just understanding what is happening – then when you sit it is just continuing that. This is why we had one day for working with thoughts, one day for working with emotions, for us to see how we use thoughts destructively, how we use emotions destructively, to see how they work, the conditions for their arising, so that in everyday life we'll be able to handle our thoughts and our emotions when they arise.

So some teachers say that when you are sitting, please see the sitting as nothing special because nothing special is happening. There are the same thoughts, sensations, emotions, sounds. So how can it be different? The difference is there when we know what is happening, when we understand it, when we are clear about it.

### **UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES**

I think another thing I discovered is that most of these things are common to our humanness, but I'd like to spotlight some aspects because they are relevant to this culture. One is repressing, pushing away, denying, not looking at unpleasant experiences. So again we have this kind of duality, that meditation, spiritual life, is having pleasant experiences and that we should not have unpleasant experiences: again a battle, again a split, again a division, again a duality.

I would suggest – please don't be surprised – that the pleasant experiences are not so important, what are more important are the unpleasant experiences, because there is no problem with pleasant experiences. The problem is with the unpleasant experiences, and we don't realise that by repressing, by pushing them away, by not looking at them we give them more power. So it's a kind of vicious circle, it's a kind of dependent origination: how one thing is leading to another, and how it is leading to suffering. So this is why I have been emphasising so much to be open to unpleasant experiences; let them arise, don't push them away. So then the power that we have given them by repressing them and by pushing them

away because we are afraid of them, when you take away that power you'll realise that they are no problem.

In a way you can relate this to some of the exercises I gave in relation to nature. Seeing things very sharply, seeing things very clearly, because when you learn to observe external things very clearly then you learn to see everything, all the things that you can see, the pleasant ones, the unpleasant ones, you just notice whatever there is without exclusion, without selecting.

It is interesting in the Dhamma you get this phrase: externally and internally. Then you learn to notice so many things that are happening inside you, internally. Then when you see more and more things that are happening inside you then you see more and more your real qualities, and your shortcomings, they become also very clear to you. And as I said, it is very important to experience them completely and fully and see how they create suffering. The Buddha emphasised this very much, for us to experience these things fully and completely and see how that is creating suffering. Now we even don't know that they are creating suffering, we are just accepting the Buddha's word or just because someone says so.

So when we have things like anger, fear, jealousy and so on we must see what it does to us. If there's a resistance to these emotions, there's a dislike of them, then we don't really experience them. The simple point is, if you don't experience them how can you work on them? And then when they are not there, just to know that they are not there, then you naturally see the difference. Then, as it is said in the Dhamma, a natural unfolding takes place in your practice.

## **GREED AND NEED**

I think another aspect of this is pampering ourselves. One of my friends said the word pampering is too mild, maybe we should say we are spoiling ourselves. In the talks I gave at the nunnery I spoke about consumerism, materialism and so on. We are living in such a culture in which we can be spoilt very easily. Very easily you can start pampering yourself, sometimes without even knowing what you are doing to yourself. So it becomes a kind of self-indulgence without your realising it. This is why I suggested that sometimes you have to say No to things in a friendly, gentle way. Sometimes you have to say Yes.

In relation to saying Yes, now when you think you need something you should ask the question: Do I really need this, or am I buying this, or want to get this, just because of society, the expectation in society that I should be wearing this or I should be like this or I should live like that?

So it is really funny, we have given a lot of power to other people, we have given a lot of power to society, social values, and then we don't realise how we have become victims of this, we don't realise that society is manipulating our greed. We don't know what is greed and what is need, what it is that you really need.

In the kitchen in our Centre we have a poem: 'He who knows his need, and yet is without greed, whatever be his creed, he is a saint indeed'. This was composed by a friend of mine and what made him compose this was what he saw in India. He told me that he was going to one of the Indian temples and outside the temple there was a beggar who was seated and he had a piece of cloth in front of him for the money and the beggar had his eyes closed. When my friend saw this beggar's face with his eyes closed, he was so impressed, inspired

by the serenity, the calmness with which the beggar was sitting like this. He was so curious that he stood alongside him and just spent some time with him. And suddenly this man got up, picked up some of the coins and threw the other coins onto the ground. Then he went to a shop nearby, he took something to eat, something to drink and he disappeared. So this incident really had a strong impact on my friend and when he was reflecting on this incident this poem came to his mind.

I'm not telling you to throw away your money, but what I am suggesting is to use the money functionally. We need money, we need material possessions but what is important is that they're possessing us now. So what we need to do is not to allow them to control us but for us to learn to control them. Then there is a change which takes place inside you, then a very beautiful spiritual quality comes into being, which is contentment. It is rarely that I meet someone who is really contented with himself, with herself, with whatever they're having. This spiritual quality is very much emphasised in the Dhamma. There's a beautiful Pali word for this: *santutthi*. Contentment is the greatest wealth. It's very interesting.

### NO COMPLAINTS

Another aspect related to contentment is having no complaints. Human beings are very good at complaining. We can complain about anything, even people who try to help us – if they make a mistake, we start complaining about them. So if you can lead your life in a way where you have no complaints then when you die you can say: I have no complaints.

There is an interesting story in this connection. There was a Zen student under a Zen Master and he was practising for many years. So one day the Zen Master called his student and said: I have taught you whatever I can, now you must go and meet another teacher. So he gave an address of another Zen teacher.

When he found the place and when he found this teacher, she was a poor woman, not very impressive at all, just a woman there. So he thought he was in the wrong place. But then he realised it was the right place, the right teacher: she was not teaching him anything, she was just doing her work normally, but as a meditator he started observing this woman. So when he started observing this woman two words came to his mind: no complaints.

### SPIRITUAL FRIENDS

So these are just some suggestions that I would like to share with you for the continuation of your practice. And I'm very happy to say that you have a very good organisation, that you have a Dhamma group and you have a good teacher, you have very good spiritual friends so you can really benefit from such a group. So I would like to ask everyone to help this organisation, to help this group. In that way it will be helping yourself and it will be helping others.

Now I would like to say one thing: it is also related to the Buddha's teachings. Some of you have been calling me Master. I just allowed you to do that. Actually in the Dhamma, in the Pali tradition, the word *teacher* is not used. Two beautiful words are used: *spiritual friend*. This is how I would like to see myself, as a spiritual friend. And it's a very beautiful relationship to have. When you say you are the Master, then again a big division between the Master and the student, but when we are spiritual friends then we are exploring together, investigating together, learning together, sharing with each other, it's a beautiful way to relate to each other.

And then there's another danger I would like to also warn you about. With the Master you just accept whatever the Master says. You accept him as an authority. There is no place for such authority in the Buddhist teaching.

I would like to conclude by quoting from a very well known Buddhist text. A group of spiritual people called the Kalamas who were exposed to different teachers came to the Buddha and said: We are confused, so many teachers are saying so many different things. What should we do? Please help us. The Buddha said something very radical at that time. He told this group of people: Don't accept anything just because it is in the traditions. Don't accept anything just because it is in the scriptures. Don't accept anything just because it is logical, reasonable, rational. Don't accept anything just because a teacher tells you, but accept only when you know in your own experience what is conducive to happiness, what is creating suffering and what can help you to overcome suffering. When you know that in your own experience, then accept that experience. What a statement to make! Experience is your teacher. Life is the best teacher you can have!

So with these words, I would like to conclude what I'm saying about the Dhamma.

### THANKS

Now I would like to thank some people. Firstly I would like to thank everyone who is here. I think everyone here gave real commitment to the practice and it was nice that there was a good group atmosphere that was built up. And I would like to thank the organisers. It's a very good team, they are working very well as a team and their organisation is excellent. Unlike Sri Lanka, everything here is very clear! Everything is written down, everything is on paper! It's very impressive for someone from Sri Lanka.

Special thanks for the very sweet lady who was in the kitchen. Always with a smile. And I must also give special thanks to those who helped her. I was very impressed to see how they were working. And watching them working and helping in the kitchen, the impression I got was that they are really enjoying what they do. So as I said, our working meditation can give us lots of sources of happiness. It can be seen as action in loving-kindness. Of course, I would also like to thank the yoga master, Jack.

**YOGA TEACHER:** Please don't call me Master! Just a yoga friend!

**GODWIN:** Very good, very good. So we should thank our yoga friend. And I should also like to make special mention of the interpreters. It was a very difficult job because sometimes they had to be present even for the interviews. So they had to stop their practice and then sometimes listen to the problems of other people. So I had a feeling that they did an excellent job, and with no complaints!

So let us now do some chanting and then we will end with loving-kindness meditation.