

A Guide Book For Inner Journey

Extracted from The Teachings
of Meditation Master

Godwin Samararatne

**For the commemoration of our beloved teacher Mr.
Godwin Samararatne's 20th death anniversary**

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Preface

As the 20th death anniversary of our beloved teacher, Godwin Samararatne is commemorated, we realize how much his simple way of teachings are relevant, effective and practical today than then. His teachings are necessary for today's society more and more. Further, there are so many books available today, about meditation, which describes the spiritual path in a descriptive way, but we wanted to bring out some common bearings and directions that could be found in the spiritual path whatever the tradition one may be following, through his teachings. We believe it is an honor to him in this moment.

Therefore, we invited Mr. Amy Chang to select and organize a collection of his teachings; mainly because Godwin Sir has done the most number of retreats in Hong Kong. Further, the biggest outcome of books on his teachings has come to existence from there. As a person who initiated and organized programs in Hong Kong, and edited most of his books, he was very close to Godwin Sir's life. We thank him profoundly, for completing this task in double quick time.

We also thank each and everybody who helped us in producing this book so beautifully and completely in time for the commemorative program.

We wish that this book will be a light to everybody, Buddhists or non-Buddhists, who are traversing in the spiritual path to gain wisdom.

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Teacher, Friend, Nobody by Upul Gamage

(Meditation Teacher and successor to Godwin at Nilambe Meditation Center)

I first met Godwin when I used to visit Kandy Library as a schoolboy in the 1970s. He was an assistant librarian at that time and he was so kind, always smiling. Sometimes he organised seminars for us and games at the end of the year to help develop our intelligence and speaking skills. One year I was the winner and got a book as a gift from him. But I learnt from Godwin that the greatest gift I can obtain is not from reading books or by not talking, but comes from reading myself when I am being silent.

After high school I started to practise meditation and staying in monasteries. As a teenager I was so radical because the traditional practice was doing rituals and expecting Nibbana in the time of the next Buddha. I thought: "Why do I have to wait many lifetimes to achieve enlightenment in the future Buddha's time?" Therefore when I heard that there was a spiritual person who had a well-developed mind I used to visit them with big expectations, only to return with big disappointments.

The traditional preachings and books didn't feed my spiritual needs, so I started to read teachings from living masters from other countries as well. I was very impressed by J. K. Krishnamurti because he said "The present moment is more than enough to see reality. " I thought he was an enlightened person because of the way he presented his teachings.

There was an Australian monk living in one of Peradeniya University's bungalows and I used to visit him to get spiritual nutrition. One day I asked him about Krishnamurti and whether he was enlightened. He replied that Krishnamurti "knows a lot about the human mind, but sometimes he gets angry and sometimes when people ask questions he replies in an angry way.

"Then I asked: "Dear venerable sir, did you ever meet anybody who did not get angry?" He said: "Yes, there is a person who never gets angry." I was so excited and asked: "Where is that person?" "In Sri Lanka," he replied. "Which area?" I asked. "In Kandy," he answered. Then I was so happy and thought: "Now I know what to do, and whom to follow.

"Venerable sir, please tell me, who is this enlightened person?" I asked. Then he opened one of his photo albums and pointed at one of the photographs. I said "How can it be? He is a librarian, an ordinary person." "Yes, but he is always calm and quiet, nobody can make him angry. Upul, if you are searching for a spiritual person, go and meet him."

Now by that time in 1985, following his mother's death, Godwin had given up his job and gone to the Nilambe Meditation Centre to help the meditators there. So when I went there to meet him, he recognised me after 10 years and asked me what I was now doing. I told him that I was trying to meditate and was also teaching monks at the Subodharama monks' training centre near where I lived. I then invited him to visit Subodharama to teach meditation and he came many times. There were monks from several countries and all of them were so impressed by Godwin and his friendly approach. He came many times to

Subodharama and conducted guided meditations and discussions over-night.

I used to go and meet other meditation masters and long term meditators. They were nice, but after the meetings I had a headache. All of them seemed to have as their favourite question: "How long did you meditate? What are your achievements?" I replied by saying: "Nothing, I just meditate." Then they started to speak about the 1st stage, 2nd stage, 3rd stage and the 4th stage, "and when you meditate you can see this colour, this picture ... " But I told them that I saw no colours and because of this I felt a lot of stress. But Godwin did not ask such questions, not even once in the entire time I was with him at Nilambe. He just encouraged me to continue to enjoy the practice, to be in the present moment, and to let go of any attachments to being someone else. I was so relaxed and so comfortable with him.

I also noticed that whatever he taught us, that was the way he lived. His entire life was a teaching; therefore he needed very few words to explain even deep Dhamma. He was very simple as well. Sometimes we used to go to other centres to conduct meditation retreats and sometimes we might have to stay over-night. I was taking my big travelling bag, but Godwin would just go as he was. People would ask: "Godwin, where are your clothes and personal things?" Then he'd put his hand in one of his trouser pockets and take out his rolled up sarong and show it to everyone like a magician. Then they'd ask: "Godwin, is that all?" "No," he said and took his toothbrush from his other pocket and showed it to everyone. He told them that was all he needed. And that was true.

I think there were several reasons for so many people from different countries being attracted by Godwin's way of

teaching meditation. One was because he was not teaching a "religion" and was not teaching theories. Therefore most people felt very comfortable with him because it did not matter what framework of ideas they came with. He didn't make arguments against the beliefs of others and didn't make any complications in the meditators' minds. His teachings were so simple, so practical, and so understandable.

Once there was a Dutch meditator at Nilambe who was a scholar. He would put forward very complicated arguments during the evening discussions, but Godwin's simple answer was usually: "Buddhism doesn't speak of such things. " Then that meditator began to learn Pali so that he could argue with Godwin using the language of the Buddhist scriptures.

One evening he asked: "Godwin, Buddhism says that our mind is conditioned. But you said that if we meditate we can go beyond all the conditions. How does that happen? How can the conditioned mind become the unconditioned mind?"

He asked that question very loudly and with an argumentative tone, and he may have thought that he was putting a very deep question and that Godwin could not answer it. But Godwin replied in his usual calm and kind manner: "The conditioned means that the mind is suffering but the unconditioned mind means that the mind is not suffering. So if you meditate then your mind is not suffering, that is all." That was the man's last question; after that he did not make any more arguments, stopped learning Pali and concentrated on meditation.

Another reason for people being attracted to Godwin's way of teaching meditation was that he knew how to calm

people down when they had arguments and conflicts, especially about spiritual ideas. Once Godwin and two friends were waiting for a bus near the stream that flows through the Peradeniya campus after participating in a seminar at the University. They could here the sound of the nearby stream and one of the two friends said that the sound was very beneficial for meditation. But the other friend said that it was good, but only for concentration meditation, not for vipassana (insight) meditation. Then the first friend started to argue with that saying: "No, you can do vipassana with this sound of the water stream." So this argument went on and on while they were waiting for the bus.

They were unable to come to agreement about the matter so finally they decided to ask Godwin what he thought. "In the hearing is only the hearing," was his gentle response. Then a deep silence was there because the argument had been much louder than the sound of the water in the stream.

Another reason for Godwin's popularity was his manner of teaching. He didn't give long discourses; instead his talks were short and simple, but very direct and practical, because a few words can be enough to entirely change one's life. Near the Nilambe centre is a place where water comes from the ground which Godwin used to call the "well" and which he liked to visit to bathe. There is a popular and well-known Sri Lankan spiritual teacher who was once staying at Nilambe. This teacher later told me that one day he decided to join Godwin on his visit to the well to wash his face. When they got to the well the teacher was very disappointed because it was just a small place where water came out of ground into a little depression. He told me that he said to Godwin: "Dear Mr Godwin, we

can make a beautiful pond here," and went on to describe his plan: "We can build a concrete wall here ..." etc.

Godwin then gently said to him: "Sir, you don't need any projects to wash. You came here to wash your face, which you can do without having to make any projects." The spiritual teacher told me that it was the best teaching that he ever had.

Godwin also had unlimited kindness and most of the time he knew what people's problems were before they described them. So often he was able to give a solution before any help was asked for. Once we had one of our regular meditators staying at Nilambe and when Godwin came back from Kandy he put something in the man's top pocket. The man looked at it and saw that it was quite a lot of money. Now he had financial problems and had been unable to get any help from anybody. Then he had come to Nilambe to try to reduce his worries, but he hadn't spoken to Godwin about his financial problems. The money Godwin had given him was exactly the right amount that he needed. He didn't know how Godwin knew about his situation as he hadn't told him about it.

Another quality of Godwin's was that he wasn't pompous and had the ability to laugh at himself. Once we had a young cook working at the centre who was very aware of his own poverty. He thought that all the foreigners who came to Nilambe were enjoying life because he thought they were rich. He was therefore looking for work abroad, but as he had little education he could not fulfil his dream. At that time we needed to replace our coir carpets in the meditation hall and one German meditator offered to pay for new ones. The estimated cost of that was 1,000 Rupees and that surprised the meditator as he said in Germany the cost would be the equivalent of 100,000 Rupees.

I told this to the young cook hoping to reduce his depression by letting him know how expensive life was in the West. But to my surprise he became more depressed. He said that Godwin was crazy. I asked him why he was saying that just because of the cost of the coir carpets. He said that Godwin was crazy because he could be selling coir carpets in Germany instead of teaching meditation.

I told Godwin what the young man had said and he laughed and laughed and laughed. He told this story many times to other people by telling them: "My friend asked me to stop teaching meditation and to start selling carpets!" So this is another reason that many people were attracted to Godwin: self-humour. He encouraged us to laugh at ourselves. It's not easy, but Godwin did it often and without any effort.

Godwin also applied meditation and the Dhamma to his own experiences in daily life. He used to visit Bodh Gaya in India every year from August to September to teach Theravada meditation to American university students. Once he told us in a discussion about the first time he went there. He had flown to New Delhi and from there he was picked up by the program director to be taken to the train station where he would go by first class overnight express to Bodh Gaya. When he took him to the train the director said: "Dear Godwin, this train will arrive at Gaya station at 4 a.m. but it will stop there for only 2 minutes. Will you be awake at 4 a.m. to get down, or do you need an alarm clock?" Godwin said he didn't need a clock because he woke up before 4 a.m. every day.

After a few hours he became aware that another passenger was talking to him: "Dear friend, you told me that you want to get down at Gaya station." "Yes," said Godwin. "Well, now we are past the station." Godwin called the conductor,

but was told that the train could not stop now and that he would have to wait until the train stopped at the next station in a few more hours. Eventually he was able to get off the train at the next stop, but had to take an ordinary train back to Gaya. This train was not first class, it had no air conditioning, no sleeping berths and people were everywhere: below him, above him, sweating, hot, smelly and crushed together. He was in trouble.

Godwin asked the people at our discussion how they thought he dealt with this and we gave many suggestions, such as loving-kindness, none-self, awareness of the breathing, etc. Godwin told us that when he looked around at the other passengers he realised that nobody was suffering like he was. Everybody was enjoying the train journey except him, so he contemplated about that. Then he realised that psychologically he was still travelling by first class express and therefore he was expecting a comfortable journey. But the other passengers didn't have that expectation so they were quite content. So he let go of his first class expectations and joined the third class group. Then he could enjoy the journey, no sweat. I asked him what happened the next time he went to Bodh Gaya and he told us that after that he remembered to take an alarm clock by letting go of his self-image as a first class meditator.

Knowing Godwin and staying there at the Nilambe Centre with him brought me many spiritual benefits. At first I had the idea that practising meditation for the spiritual benefits it brought meant that I had to sit meditating for as long as possible. Therefore I tried to sit many times per day and I tried to lengthen the time that I sat in meditation. Then I began to realise that there were some conflicts between when I was sitting and when I was not sitting.

Godwin's central teaching was that there should not be any kind of duality of that sort. He said that meditation is a life-time programme. When I learnt and practised meditation in that way I began to experience peacefulness and equanimity wherever I was and with whatever I was doing.

Originally I always expected positive qualities like peacefulness, calmness, tranquillity, and so on, out of meditation. Whenever I did not experience these then I created conflicts in my mind with such thought as "I am not a good meditator," or "Other people are disturbing my meditation," and so on. Godwin advised me to let go of my attachments to gaining spiritual benefits. So now I am relaxed in most situations, it doesn't matter where I am.

Godwin always emphasised that we should try to see the Dhamma through our life experiences, not from books. Whenever we would ask questions or give answers to questions, he asked us to give practical examples. Therefore we could not play word games with him; we had to practice and experience for ourselves.

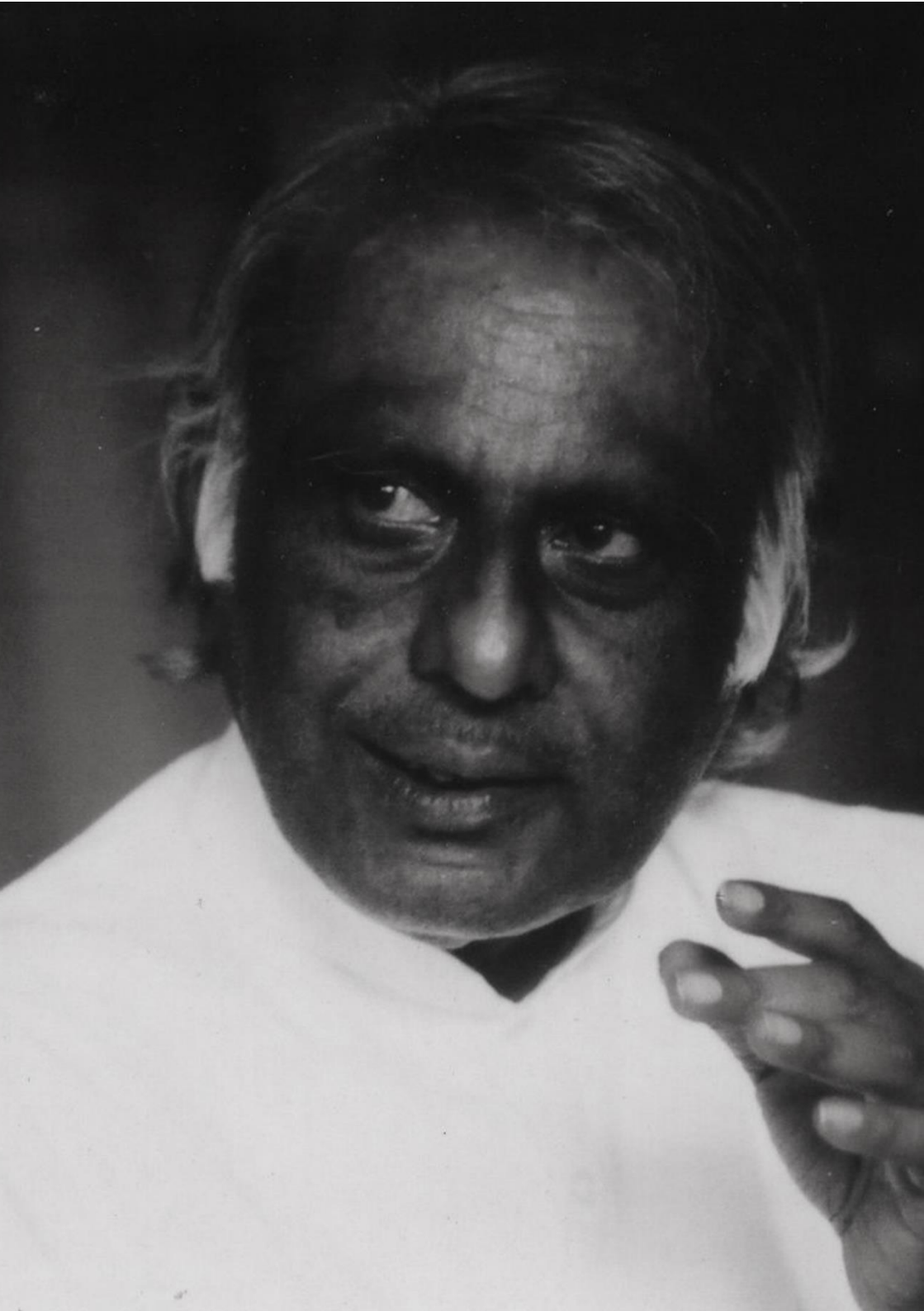
Whenever I knew that Godwin was giving a talk I used to go there if possible to listen to his wisdom, but whenever he noticed that I was there he would invite me to speak. So he trained me as a person available for the Dhamma 24 hours per day, for everybody and everywhere.

So I am fortunate to have had such a beautiful meditation master, and he may have been fortunate in having such a pupil as me.

Upul Gamage,

Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre,

Kandy District, Sri Lanka



A Guide Book for Inner Journey

Introduction of meditation

The aim of meditation is to find the medicine for the sickness that we create ourselves.

The Buddha, his greatest discovery, was the finding of what is called the Four Noble Truths. So the first noble truth is the fact of suffering. And I am sure every one of you here can relate to suffering, either physical suffering or mental suffering, in some form or other. And the second noble truth is trying to find out the cause of the suffering. And then, after finding the cause of suffering, the third noble truth is solution and the fourth noble truth is the way of the solution. Sometimes I like to use the medical model sickness, cause of the sickness, medicine and the cure. So the aim of meditation is to find the medicine for the sickness that we create ourselves. Because we create the sickness, we have to find the medicine ourselves. In a way, it is a very hard teaching, because we have to use our own effort, our own self reliance to free ourselves.

Meditation is knowing the mind, shaping the mind, and freeing the mind. 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.

Knowing the mind

knowing the mind is understanding how the mind is working. If we do not know our mind, we are just like machines. Therefore, it is extremely important to know and to understand how our minds work.

Shaping the mind

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.

Freeing 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.

In meditation one should see the practice as not for achieving certain states of mind but rather for learning, discovering, exploring.


It is also very interesting that the Buddha encouraged monks and meditators to experiment, to explore, to 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.

Meditation is not having special experiences, special qualities, extraordinary things... Meditation is all about ordinary things.

Meditation is all about ordinary things. Breath is something very, very ordinary. Being aware of the body is something very simple and ordinary. So this is another very important perspective we should have in everyday life – to have this connection with ordinary things, then you learn to see ordinary things as extraordinary.

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. 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. 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.

Meditation helps us to learn to be our own teacher, to be self-reliant, to have complete confidence in ourselves. This is a hard teaching but it's a very important teaching: to develop your own resources, to develop your own self-reliance, to develop your own tools, how to work with suffering when it arises. So what is the result of that? We learn to take responsibility for what is happening in us, without blaming others, without blaming the surroundings that we find ourselves in. When such a change takes place in our minds, then we'll be able to handle whatever arises in a particular environment, in whatever surroundings we find ourselves.



Forget what you have read,
forget what you have heard.
Just be simple and practical and find out.
This can be so fascinating,
if you can have the openness to learn,
you can discover so much.
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.

Awareness, Mindfulness

A very important aspect of meditation is developing awareness, mindfulness. If we do not practise mindfulness or awareness, we will become more and more like machines.

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. 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.

Being aware helps us to know what is happening in us, in our mind and body, from moment to moment as far as possible.

Being aware has many benefits. One is, it helps us to be conscious, it helps us to know what is happening in us, in our mind and body, from moment to moment as far as possible. And this awareness can help us to develop insight, to see what we are doing to ourselves and to others. Again, to see how we create suffering in ourselves and how we create suffering in others.

Mindfulness helps us to experience the present moment, the *here* and the *now*.

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.

With awareness, we need to understand how to use the past and the future consciously and deliberately.

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*.

We can see the past as a learning experience, as a teacher.

One simple way of using the past and the future creatively is, if we can learn from the past, whatever has happened in the past, if we can see the past as a learning experience, as a teacher. So whatever mistakes we have made in the past, rather than hold onto them and then feel guilty and suffer from them, we can ask ourselves: “What can I learn from my past mistakes?”

We can make friends with the future and learn to be open to the future.

And in the same way we can use the future, again as a friend. As we know, when we think of the future sometimes what happens is that we feel anxious, we feel insecure. But if we can make friends with the future and learn to be open

to the future, we will be learning to relate to the future in a much more creative way.

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.

Question from retreatant:

I notice from my daily life that the longer the gaps are between the times I apply mindfulness, the harder it is to do so. So it seems a shame that I have the tools but never use them.

Godwin:

It is interesting that one meaning of *sati*, mindfulness, is recollecting and remembering. So we have to remember. If you are sick and if the medicine bottle is there but you have forgotten to take the medicine, you can't be healed. So you have to remember to take the medicine at the right time. And I must say, sometimes the medicine in this practice is not very sweet. The medicine is not always pleasant, as you know. There are some medicines which are not sweet at all, not tasty at all, but sometimes such medicines can be very powerful. Like an injection: it is very unpleasant but it can work very quickly.



Meditation on Breathing

We can use the breath to develop the practice of mindfulness and awareness because we are breathing all the time and the breath is with us all the time.

A very important aspect of meditation is developing awareness, mindfulness. So here we can use our breath to develop awareness. In Pali this technique is called *Anapanasati* – developing awareness, mindfulness, in relation to the in-breath and the out-breath. We can use the breath to develop the practice of mindfulness and awareness because we are breathing all the time and the breath is with us all the time. Ajahn Chah, one of the meditation masters in Thailand, has said that if you have time to breathe, then you have time to meditate. So this is the first point I want to make as to why the Buddha might have chosen breathing as a technique for meditation.

Just find out, just explore, when you breath, where you really feel and experience the breathing naturally and just focus your attention in that area, very simple.

There is a difference of opinion where we should focus our attention and how we should do it. Sometimes you are asked to be aware of the nostrils, to be aware of the sensations in the nostrils when you are practicing this technique. Then some teachers tell you to be aware of the rise and the fall of your abdomen. Then other teachers tell you to be aware of the whole breath... What I would like to suggest is please experiment and explore on your own... So what I would suggest is just find out, just allow the body to breathe naturally and then find out what sensations you may experience in the body naturally. So whatever you feel naturally, you can become aware of, be conscious of. If you are not feeling any sensations in the

area of the nostrils, then trying to feel it in the area of the nostrils become a big issue, a big battle and that can give rise to suffering. So I'd like to repeat, just find out, just explore, when you breathe, where you really feel and experience the breathing naturally and just focus your attention in that area, very simple.

It is extremely important to learn just to allow the body to breathe naturally.

Focusing on breathing is learning non-doing. So it is interesting that we are so used to controlling things, manipulating things, interfering with things, that this conditioning comes up when we try to be aware of our breathing. It is funny that we can't just leave the body to breathe naturally, the way it likes to breathe. So it is extremely important to learn just to allow the body to breathe naturally, and it's possible, because it's a very strong conditioning that we will be controlling it. But again, as I said, just be mindful when you are controlling it and then when there are moments when you are not controlling, just know that you are not controlling.

When you realise that you have not been with the breath for some time, so you know it and you just bring it back... there is no need to create a conflict as a result of this.

As we are going to develop mindfulness, there will be moments when there is no mindfulness. It means, what I have in mind is, you might be not with the breath always, you'll be with the secondary objects that I mentioned (i.e. thoughts, different sensations, different states of mind, etc.). So when that happens, not to create a problem out of it but then bringing attention back to the breath... So when you realise that you have not been with the breath for some time, so you know it and you just bring it back,

so realising that you have not been with the breath has helped you to establish mindfulness, so there is no need to create a conflict as a result of this. Please realise this important point. So I'd like to repeat, the emphasis of this technique is not concentration, but knowing.

You know these things (thoughts, sounds and sensations, etc.) are happening, you become mindful of these things and then just come back to your breath.

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.

Please realise that it is not trying to stop thoughts, trying to prevent thoughts from arising, or trying to prevent other sensations from arising, or trying to prevent any sound, from hearing any sound.

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.

Just being friendly and saying okay to whatever is happening.

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.

In everyday life at different moments you can just come back to your breath.

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*.

Learn to control the thoughts rather than allow the thoughts to control us by being with our friend (the breath) and experiencing the present moment.

Whenever we are lost in thoughts about the past and the future, and there is confusion and disorder in our mind, we have only to think of our friend (the breath) and immediately we can experience the present moment. Another important aspect is that, as we all know, we are sometimes affected by our thoughts. Most of the time thoughts control us. Here again our friend can help us to learn to let go of the thoughts, maybe even for the first

time; to learn to control the thoughts rather than allow the thoughts to control us by being with our friend and experiencing the present moment, letting go of the thoughts about the past, letting go of the thoughts about the future.

If we can spend a few minutes with the breath, it will help us to find some space in our mind and then that space can help us to recover from whatever emotions we are experiencing.

There's a very strong connection between our thinking, between our thoughts and emotions. So sometimes thoughts can create emotions, and then what happens is that when we have these emotions, we can make them bigger than they really are. Here again, if we can remember our friend, immediately it will help us to recover from our emotions. Because if we can spend a few minutes with the breath in such a situation it will help us to find some space in our mind and then that space can help us to recover from whatever emotions we are experiencing. You can experiment with this. You can try it for yourself.

Question from retreatant:

Master, when we meditate, when we are doing meditation, very often we cannot meditate well. Our body, our mind or breathing is not peaceful and calm. What should we do?

Godwin:

It's a very useful question. So I would like to offer a few suggestions. One is that when we sit to meditate, please don't have any expectations of what should happen or what shouldn't happen. And without any expectations you just know whatever is happening. What is important is not to judge, not to give a plus, not to give a minus, but just

know from moment to moment what is happening in your mind and body, with some openness.

The whole idea of meditation is to experience freedom, to be free of suffering, but sometimes the way we try to meditate with all our expectations, we create suffering for ourselves. So if we have an expectation that our minds should be calm, that we should be having only positive experiences, then if they arise what we do is to hold onto them. And when we are unable to hold onto them, that creates suffering. And then when the mind is not calm, when the mind is not relaxed, you will think you're not meditating rightly and then that is creating suffering. So without this idea of positive and negative, just be open, just be friendly to whatever is happening from moment to moment with awareness, that can give us immediate freedom.

Question from retreatant:

When I meditate, I am aware of the passing thoughts and at that stage I am okay, I can still concentrate; but when I am aware that "I am aware of the passing thoughts", then that affects my 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 plusses 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 plusses, giving minuses, giving plusses, 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.

Question from retreatant:

What do you think about physical aches during meditation? Is it good to put my full awareness and attention on these?

Godwin:

I would like to offer some suggestions on how to work with pain in meditation. One way is not to see the pain as a

disturbance or as a distraction to meditation. So the pain becomes the object of meditation. When the pain is there, you can try to explore, investigate and find out about the pain. In everyday life, when we have pain what we do is try to get rid of the pain, but by doing that we never learn about pain. So here when pain comes you should consider it a blessing, for it gives you an opportunity to work with pain and to understand it. You can explore when there is physical pain whether you can observe and work with the reaction to the pain. Sometimes it is the reaction that is creating the suffering in relation to the pain – by your not wanting the pain, considering the pain as a disturbance, and hating the pain. Having these reactions can create more suffering on top of the pain.

If it has a physical reason, you can work with the pain in this way for some time and then change the posture. However, you should avoid two extremes. One extreme is pampering the body, for example whenever there is pain you change the posture immediately or try to get rid of the pain. The other extreme is being very hard and severe on yourself, so that you continue to sit without changing the posture at all even when it is very painful indeed. I would suggest therefore discovering a middle way where you learn to be friendly and gentle to the body, to the pain, avoiding being hard and severe towards it, but at the same time not pampering the body. In practical terms, this means to work with the pain when you are sitting and then if necessary to change the posture as I have explained earlier.

If the pain does not have a physical reason, we may have to explore the emotion behind the pain that is creating the pain.

Question from retreatant:

When we meditate at home, is it better that we don't choose a time when we are too tired to do meditation?

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.



Loving-Kindness

I am going to talk about a very important aspect in Buddhist meditation. It is related to developing four very important spiritual qualities in ourselves. They are called "The Four Sublime or Beautiful States". They are also called "The Divine Abodes", because when we develop these qualities we are like divine beings, like gods... They are *Metta*, *Karuna*, *Mudita*, *Upekkha*. So *Metta* is loving-kindness, friendliness. *Karuna* is compassion. *Mudita* is sympathetic joy. And *Upekkha* is having a non-reactive, equanimous mind.

Loving-kindness begins with ourselves. Learn to be your best friend in a most friendly way.

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 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.

Begin the meditation of loving-kindness with our body.

When you begin with yourself, where do you start? One has to start with the body... Really making friends with our body, really discovering our body, really learning to listen to our body, and learning to accept our body as it is, no matter what you discover in the body. This is why I have been emphasising: please be open to unpleasant

sensations, tensions, pleasures or whatever you may discover in the body.

The healing of wounds in our hearts

Another area that meditation of loving kindness can help us is to heal wounds that we are carrying. I'm sure everyone here has experienced at some point in their lives a wound, a mental wound. What I mean by a mental wound is actions, your own actions which have affected another person, you can be really holding on to that guilt. Another common wound is what others have done to you and the emotion is holding on to hatred and ill-will... It can create a lot of suffering for oneself and suffering for others and sometimes you don't know the reason why you are doing this to yourself and why you are doing this to others.

Learn to forgive ourselves and learn to forgive others.

Meditation of loving kindness is a powerful tool in healing these wounds. So the simple solution that is offered in meditation of loving kindness is that if you have made mistakes in the past, if you have hurt other people, learn to forgive yourselves. In the same way, if you are carrying wounds in relation to what others have done to you, just heal them by forgiving them.

Forgive ourselves by realising that we are human. Forgive ourselves by realising that we are still not enlightened, we are still imperfect. And in the same way, forgive others by realising that they are being human, that they are also imperfect like us.

It is extremely important 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.

Let go of the past

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: It is okay not to be okay.

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.

Learning to see more and more of your positive qualities.

Another very important aspect of loving-kindness meditation is learning to see more and more of your plusses, or more and more of your positive qualities. When you see more and more your positive qualities, you are bound to see more and more the positive qualities of others. This can again generate a lot of joy and a lot of happiness, to see these positive qualities in ourselves and the positive qualities in others.

Developing gratitude or feeling grateful.

Another very important quality of loving-kindness is developing gratitude or feeling grateful. When I was in Bodh Gaya, I heard this story of the Buddha and I read it many times. According to the story, the Buddha spent seven days showing his gratitude to the tree which gave him shelter while he was struggling for enlightenment. When I reflected on this, it really touched me very deeply. Feeling grateful to a tree? Spending seven days there for the sake of a tree?

If we reflect on our lives, do we show gratitude for what we receive from others? Do we express our gratitude either in words or with our expression when we get help from others? If a person can develop such gratitude towards a tree, how much more gratitude should we have for the people around us?

Do we feel grateful for the things that we are using? Do we feel grateful for some of the things that we normally take for granted? Do we feel grateful that we can see? There are people who cannot see. Shouldn't we feel grateful that we can hear the birds? There are people who cannot hear at all. Shouldn't we feel grateful and happy that we are discovering the Dhamma and we are making a commitment to practise the Dhamma? Shouldn't we feel

grateful for that? These little things we take for granted, but these little things go a long way.

Question from retreatant:

Usually when nothing happens it is very easy to say let's have loving-kindness to ourselves and to others. But when things happen, for example, somebody says or does something and makes us very unhappy, my experience is I get very angry, to such an extent that I completely forget everything about loving-kindness and I can't even sleep for a few nights, and this hatred remains for a few days. I want to know whether you have had any such experience. If you have, how did you handle it?

Godwin:

Very good question. I'm happy that you're presenting very practical questions relating to everyday life. So firstly I will share how I work with such situations, which hopefully will help you to work with what you described.

The first point is: don't be surprised. Because as I said, we are still human, we are still imperfect. So as long as we are human, as long as we are imperfect, we are bound to get angry, so why should we be surprised?

The second point is: don't give yourself a minus because you are getting angry. By giving yourself a minus, what you are doing is getting angry about the anger and you're hating yourself because you have anger.

The third point is that if you are unable to observe the anger at the time that it arises, at least later on you can start reflecting on what happened. So why did I get angry? Why did I use those words? What really made me lose my control? Our failures can become very valuable spiritual

friends. And this kind of reflection has to be done in a very friendly, gentle way rather than doing it in a very hard way, beating yourself and unnecessarily experiencing guilt and remorse in relation to what has happened. And then as I said in my talk, you can forgive yourself: "I'm still human, I got angry, but let me see now when I meet that person next week or whatever, how I will be relating to that person." So then you'll be learning from such experiences, then you can experiment with such situations.

And if we need to have an ideal, the ideal should not be that we will not get angry. The more realistic ideal we can have in relation to anger is: how soon we can recover from that anger? This is the importance of practising awareness in everyday life. So that if you can practise such awareness, and as I said yesterday, if you can have a connection with your breath, then as you are getting angry the breath will tell you that you are getting angry, and with awareness you can notice it and that will help you to recover from that anger.

Question from 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.

Question from 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.

Question from retreatant:

In the office, I have to have expectations of what my colleagues do. For example, I asked my colleague to send a letter to a certain place. My colleague has done that many times before so I expected this colleague to do the same this time. When I found that this very simple job was not done properly, I got agitated immediately because I had this expectation that my colleague would be able to handle it. What I find is that after practising all these years, I can recover from my agitation very quickly because I very quickly understand that every human being makes mistakes. When I make a mistake myself, I really wish that somebody will forgive me. So when somebody makes a mistake, I better forgive him. But still the expectation is there because it is my job. So in that situation, do you have any suggestions?

Godwin:

I like such practical situations. So a few suggestions. One is it is okay to have expectations because it is natural to such expectations but again to realize, having expectation is one thing, reality is another thing.

The second suggestion is when such a thing would happen, learn not to be surprised. Because we have to deal with human beings who can be forgetful and we have to also deal with human beings who are not so responsible. We should be surprised only if we find such people who never forget and are always responsible. We should always remember that we are living in a world of imperfect human beings.

The third suggestion is very important, but you must learn to play it like a game. Now I'm going to call this man X who has forgotten to attend to this very important letter but I am going to speak to him very firmly, in a very hard way but knowing very well I am just only pretending, I am just consciously doing it but inside I have no hatred towards him. Some people understand only that language. So you can really firmly say that next time you do such a thing, as they say in Sri Lanka, "I will reduce your salary by 50%."

Another interesting suggestion is to try to have a dialogue with that person. It's a very interesting exercise to just to raise questions in such a situation. Now tell me: "What happened to you? Why did you forget? Is it because you were not really interested or you had other more important things to remember? Are you normally forgetful?" So just to get him to reflect on what has happened to him. So it enables that person to reflect on his own actions. This can be sometimes extremely helpful and it can reveal to him something that he might have not looked at before.



Emotions

Learn to be open to emotions. Learn to say okay to them. Learn not to give very strong minuses to them. Learning to be friendly to them.

Perhaps it would be interesting to list the emotions we do not like. Aggression, a bad mood, feeling lazy, being indifferent, giving up, anxiety, insecurity, doubts, mental pain, sadness, panic, antipathy, pressure, confusion, not being awake, feeling guilty... As children we have been conditioned to hate our emotions, to repress them, to deny them and so on, and then we grow up with this idea that they are bad, that they are wrong, that we should not experience them. This is a strong conditioning that we have, and then in addition to that when we take to meditation and the spiritual life, we are told anger is bad. All these positions about emotions create a kind of split between what you should be and what you are. Thus the spiritual life becomes a battle, a battle with emotions, and meditators find they really hate themselves.

So this is the first point I want to make, which is not easy: to learn to be open to these emotions. Learning to say okay to them, learning not to give very strong minuses to them.

A phrase you can say to yourself which can be helpful sometimes is: "It's okay not to feel okay."

By hating, disliking and resisting emotions we give them a lot of power.

Related to this is that when they are there, not to be surprised! Often in our model of perfection there is no place for such emotions, and we feel we should not have

them. I suppose only enlightened people may not be having these unpleasant emotions. But as we are still human, as we are still imperfect, we should not be surprised when they come. Not being surprised and being open are related. There is a phrase that I use very often: learning to be friendly to them.

Find out, learn, discover and explore emotions by experiencing them.

The second tool is related to learning, discovering or investigating them, as it is said in the Dhamma... So if you can fully experience them, then once you know that they are there, finding out, learning, discovering and exploring them is very interesting. In addition, there are very different emotions, and each emotion is something special. Thus we can learn something different from each of them.

It is very interesting to explore emotions without giving them and yourself a minus.

Yesterday anger was mentioned. Let us take this emotion as an example, because I think we all can relate to it very easily. So when anger comes, you must say: "Wonderful! I am going to learn from this anger." And then you try to find out – now what causes the anger? What is the reason for this anger? When you explore in this way what might you learn?

When there are so many emotions and you are overwhelmed by them, it is impossible to have even a little space. But there will come a time, maybe after one day, two days or three weeks, when you recover from them. Then you can take your mind backwards and reflect: "Now what really happened to me? What is the mechanism by which this family of monsters (emotions) come together? I

must understand their secret.” So this becomes an exploration, an investigation – but again in a very friendly manner just to understand them. Say honestly: “Now last time they won. Let me wait for the next time they come.” With an open mind, you wait with friendliness: When are they coming, how are they coming?

Helpful here are our friends, the breath and the sensations in our body. These two friends help us to experience the present moment, and they can prevent emotions from blowing up.

When these unpleasant emotions are not there, to know that they are not there.

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 (emotions) 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.

This is very much emphasised in the Dhamma: to know when the emotions are there and to know when they are not there. When they are there, you use the tools, and when they are not around, just be aware of their absence.

Another very strong conditioning we have is that when they are not there we give a big plus, and when the emotions are there we give a big minus. We have to slowly learn not to give a minus or plus, but just being with and learning to reflect things as they are.

When you are having an emotion, avoid labelling it and just be with what you are really experiencing without the word.

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.

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.

A meditation technique called noting: you acknowledge very honestly what is happening.

(This) tool I would like to mention comes from a meditation technique called noting. You can try this. It is very interesting. You do this by labelling whatever you are experiencing. You do not control or try to push away

whatever that arises. You acknowledge very honestly what is happening. For instance, you just say: “Sadness, sadness; fear, fear; thoughts, thoughts; sensations, sensations.”

Our emotions don't really belong to us.

Someone went to a Zen master and said, “I have a big problem.” The Zen master asked, “Well, what is your big problem?” “My big problem is that I got angry.” The Zen master replied, “So where is your anger now?” Of course, the anger was not there. The Zen master continued, “If it is your anger, you should be able to produce it!”

This brings up an important perspective: the realisation that our emotions don't really belong to us. Because we have a strong sense of ownership, we think we own things, we also think that we own these emotions. This is my anger, this is my fear. Of course, what you own, what you think you own, you don't want to give up.

Learn 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.

The Buddhist perspective here is that emotions are empty of a separate self. There is no real owner. All things arise due to causes and conditions, and all things pass away due to causes and conditions.

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.

This sounds very simple. When the visitor comes, when the visitor stays, when the visitor goes, the host remains the same: no problem. Just visitors coming, visitors going. This brings up the Buddhist perspective of impermanence: everything changes, there is coming and going, going and coming.

Relate to emotions, pleasant or unpleasant, without plus or minus.

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?

Question from 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.



Thoughts

Our thoughts arise mechanically.

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.

We can discover with awareness that when thoughts arise, without getting hold of them.

And then we do something very interesting: for some thoughts we just allow them 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.

Learn not to react to thoughts. Allow them to come and go on their way without reacting to them.

We react to the thoughts in some way. And this reaction is mostly about, as we have been saying, giving plusses and minuses to the thoughts. This is a very important experience for you, to realise what is happening when thoughts are coming and going.

And this process of reacting is how thoughts are related to emotions. One thing we could try to do is to see how far we can allow them to come and go on their way without reacting to them. If you can do that there is no need to stop thoughts, to get rid of them, or get angry with them. You

will reach a stage in which whether there are thoughts or not makes no difference because the mind is not reacting.

If you learn to handle thoughts, work with thoughts, you develop mastery over emotions.

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

(All retreatants answered: Thoughts.)

I hope that you really discovered 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.

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.

We construct, manufacture and create stories from what has happened in the past, or what is going to happen in the future, or even sometimes from hearing and seeing things in the present. Constructing, constructing.

Sometimes we can be very creative in a destructive way with our thoughts. So it is very important to know when we are using thoughts destructively... Can someone give an example of a story that we create?

(Retreatant: I just sit there and eat and somebody sits down near me and makes a loud noise whilst eating, and

there is the possibility I just hear, you know, or there is the possibility that I develop an aversion against him.)

Yes, we can create a story out of that. Someone is sitting next to us and the person is making a very unpleasant noise. Why is this person sitting next to me? And why is she making this noise? I have been eating now for 20 minutes, but she is continuing to make the same noise. I think she is doing this to agitate me! We are laughing. But this is exactly what we do. A very good example, I can go on and on. Yesterday we spoke of monsters, emotions. In this story, you see how many monsters can come at the same time – with just this woman sitting there. We can have anger, and because of anger we can have guilt, and because of anger and guilt we can be confused, and because we are confused we can feel jealous when we look around and see other people sitting so calmly. You see how from this little noise, four or five monsters can come within a few minutes. Aren't we funny? See how we can be so destructive with our thoughts!

Distinguish what is real and unreal, and what are mental constructs.

So you see how important awareness is, how important observing thoughts is. This is how we create our own suffering in everyday life. The stories that we create become so real. If you can see a story as a story, then of course there will be less arising of suffering or emotions; but when you take the story as something real, when you give reality and power to it, that is how emotions can come about, and that's how suffering can arise.

You see the implications of some of the meditation techniques, like focusing on breathing, where we are taught to be just in the reality of the present moment, so

that we understand and can see through the constructions that we make from our thoughts to thereby achieve an understanding, a realisation, an ability to distinguish what is real and unreal, and what are mental constructs.

We need to learn about the judgments we make.

As we are still human, I am sure we will be reacting to some of the thoughts... You will understand that these reactions are generally related to this very strong habit we have of making judgments, of giving plusses and minuses. We need to learn about the judgments we make, understanding that sometimes we need to use judgments functionally. However, understanding this process of giving plusses and minuses also opens up a very, very important area for us to explore regarding how we relate to ourselves and how we relate to others.

Here again what we are doing most of the time is to use the plusses and minuses in a destructive way... Let's take how meditators in a retreat use plusses and minuses in the context of meditation. Perhaps in one sitting your mind is calm, very clear and peaceful, and so you conclude: "At last it is working!" But at the next sitting after lunch, feeling sleepy, drowsy and experiencing no calm, you give a big, big minus, thinking: "I had a pleasant experience during this morning sitting, but I know in the long run these things don't work for me. I have never succeeded in life!" So you feel worthless, hopeless and useless.

We first judge ourselves, and then we do the same with others... Think about this – do we ever question our likes and dislikes, our plusses and minuses? The danger is that we think they are always correct! Especially when we are judging other people, but even about ourselves, we are so certain, no question about it.

Learn to see how our private world, our subjective world, how the world we have created functions and operates.

We live in a private world of our own. We have constructed a private world from our experiences, from our plusses and minuses and so on, and we are living in that private world. This private world does not correspond to reality... So in meditation what we are trying to do is, at least in the first place, to acknowledge this, understand this, and then to see how our private world, our subjective world, how the world we have created functions and operates... And then slowly, gently, tenderly, as I have been emphasising very much, learning to see things as they really are from our own experiences.

Thoughts can also have a positive use. It is by using thought to reflect, to contemplate, to analyse.

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.

Question from retreatant:

I understand that having no judgments and having no "I" will free us from having emotions. How do we apply this

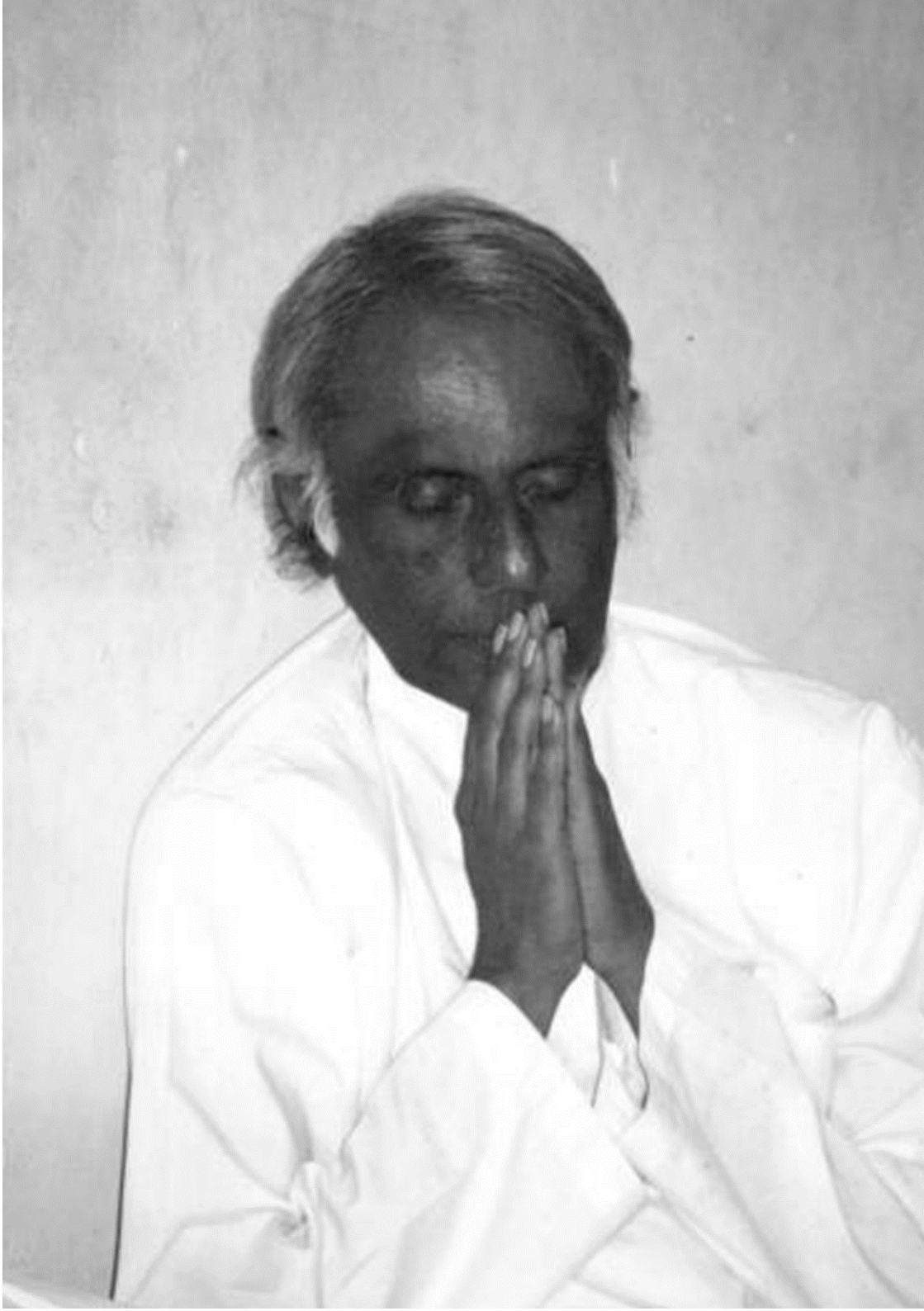
having no judgments in our daily life especially when someone hurts someone?

Godwin:

We need to use judgments in certain situations. When we buy some fruits, something, we have to make judgments. When we are relating to other people, we have to make judgments. But what is important for us to realise is, are we making these judgments objectively or are we making these judgments subjectively? Are we giving these pluses and minuses as a result of our habitual way of thinking or can we represent something more real than these habitual ways of thinking? And if these making judgments are habits, then every time we meet people, we need to make judgments. So again, to find out under what circumstances we make judgments and are they really functional, are they really useful? So again, to explore and investigate these judgments is a very, very interesting and sometimes amusing experience.

This is a useful situation that is mentioned here. How do we apply this no judgment in our daily life especially when someone hurts another? So we will take a practical situation where you see someone hurting someone else, maybe verbally or physically. So as a meditator, how can we relate to such a situation? One thing is, as I often said, don't be surprised at such a situation because there are different types of people living in this world and some people can be very unreasonable and very violent, so it is natural that this violence, this kind of behaviour is manifested in some situations. And it's also important to realise, to reflect on yourself: "Don't I also hurt other people? Am I free of hurting others?" Because when we make judgments, we make judgments as if we are free of such situations. And if you can think of yourself, then you

realise in a sense there is no difference between myself and what the other person is doing. But this does not mean that in some situations if you can act, if you can respond; by all means you may do that. So if you can intervene in that situation and prevent that person being hurt more, please try to do that because if you have compassion, you'll just be responding with that compassion without necessarily reacting as a result of that situation. So it means in everyday life we need to make judgments but again to make such judgments with awareness, with understanding, with clarity.



Everyday Life

We have to slowly, slowly make an effort so that meditation becomes a way of living.

We are learning to see meditation as a way of living. Otherwise what happens is that we associate meditation only with a particular posture, or with a particular time that we are meditating. The danger when we practise in that way is that when the person is sitting there is one kind of individual, but when the same person is interacting with society another kind of individual arises. So there is a big gap between the meditator sitting and the person functioning in everyday life. What we have been trying to do today is to make this gap smaller and smaller so that meditation becomes, as I said, a way of living. Then any situation in life can be a meditation, can become an object of meditation. So if we are really serious about the practice we have to slowly, slowly make an effort so that meditation becomes a way of living.

The idea is to sit and develop awareness, and then to use that awareness at other times. I would consider that (the latter) 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.

The progress in meditation is not what is happening when you are sitting but how you relate it to everyday life.

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.

Not to expect the mind to always be calm, spacious, having loving-kindness and so on.

The first point is not to expect the mind to always be calm, spacious, having loving-kindness and so on. This is very, very important. It is easy to have such states of mind when you are here (in a retreat). But if the same conditions are not available in everyday life, how can one expect similar states of mind?

Know clearly about your commitment to meditation.

We have to be clear in our minds about our priorities in life. What is the most important priority you have in life? And then you have to find out, if you have a list of priorities, where meditation fits in that list. If the commitment for meditation is amongst the first few priorities, then that in itself will look after meditation. This is because if you know clearly your commitment to it, then you will never say: I do not have time for meditation.

Not to be concerned and preoccupied about progress and results in your meditation, but rather to see what you are doing as interesting.

So here one suggestion I would like to offer is not to be concerned and preoccupied about progress and results in your meditation, but rather to see what you are doing as interesting. One of the teachers gave a very beautiful simile on this. He said, "It is like a gardener who is planting things. If he is a good gardener, he should enjoy what he is doing." This means he simply enjoys the process of learning to take care of the plants. He finds it interesting,

and maybe even challenging sometimes. So when a gardener plants something, he can never know when the flowers will come, or when the fruits will arrive. This is the type of relationship we might try to cultivate with meditation.

Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, just to know, just to be aware of what is going through your mind and body from moment-to-moment as far as possible.

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.

During the day just be aware, just be conscious of the 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.

See unpleasant emotions as our compost, using them for our growth.

The real challenge we have in everyday life is when facing anxiety, stress, anger, and all the other monsters... They should be precious learning experiences for you, and they should be your teachers. So the practice is not to suppress them. This is a very important point to remember. It is not to get rid of them. But rather just to see them as our compost, using them for our growth when they are there.

Make what is unpleasant, what is disturbing you, what is bothering you, the object of meditation.

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... 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... 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.

Okay meditation

Here's another meditation for you to consider: what I call the okay meditation! You can apply it in everyday life. You can apply it when you feel there is stress, anxiety, fatigue and so on. When you feel you are very tired, simply say: "Okay, okay", and in that way practise the okay meditation. This is because when there is resistance, dislike, not wanting and fighting, it creates tension, which in turn creates more stress. So just spending a few minutes with the okay meditation can help us to create some space.

In a way, practising the okay meditation can also be seen as developing compassion and developing loving-kindness towards what is happening. This is the beauty of loving-kindness. It is learning to make friends not only with very pleasant things and beautiful things, for that is easy, but also how to make friends with things that we do not like. This is the real challenge we have in everyday life. And it is by learning to say: "It is okay."

Meditation on loving-kindness

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. 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.

Forgiveness

In everyday life we need to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. If we cannot forgive ourselves and forgive others, this can create a lot of suffering for ourselves in everyday life.

Gratefulness

When this was mentioned in Nilambe, the meditation centre where I live, there was a nun from Thailand who made a very interesting point. She said that not only should we feel grateful for the positive things, but we should also feel grateful for the challenges, for the opportunities in life to work with ourselves. So for instance, when we get angry we can feel grateful that we have an opportunity to study anger. Sometimes when we have physical pain we start hating the pain and the body, but it is possible instead to feel grateful. We can make it an object of our meditation. In this way we learn to be grateful for positive things, the blessings we have; and we can also be grateful for the difficult situations we face, because they can be very valuable learning experiences.

Learn to practise compassion in action.

Maybe one other suggestion – learn to practise compassion in action. Again, this can be done in a very simple way. If you can make some commitment to practise this, you will get a lot of opportunities, simple opportunities in everyday life where you will be able to perform some kind act. For example, while in the bus, you may see an old man struggling to board the bus; just give that person a helping hand. In your workplace, you may notice someone with a very sad face; try to speak to that person. Learning to do these little things for others can give us such joy and is such a beautiful way to live. If you have this sensitivity, you see so many opportunities to act kindly, and you do not have to do something special.

Eating meditation

Eating can also be a very important meditation. Firstly, before we eat, to feel grateful for those who have prepared the meal or at least to feel grateful that I have the food.

Secondly, as I have emphasized today, be mindful and be aware while eating. Thoughts about the past or the future may arise while we are eating. Just be aware of the thoughts, let them go and come back to eating.

Another suggestion is, please try to consciously chew your food, eating very slowly and consciously, and see the differences brought by consciously chewing your food. And please truly taste the food, and consciously swallow the food.

Another thing is, while we are eating, we may have our likes and our dislikes. So, just get to know them, just observe them.

Another very important point is about eating the right quantity of food. So there are two extremes. One extreme is eating too much and the other extreme is eating too little. We have to find out the right quantity of food for ourselves. And this can only be done by learning to listen to your body, listen to your stomach!

Note: This part was recovered from the Chinese book on 1998 talks in Hong Kong. I translated the Chinese into English, so they might not be the exact words by Godwin. This was a very good presentation about eating meditation but unfortunately this part was missing in the English transcript available on Godwin homepage and kept in my computer. – Amy Chiang

Reflection

Another practical suggestion I would like to offer is to do some reflection. If you can do this every evening, it is good. At least when you have the space, try to do this reflection that I am going to outline to you. Reflect on the way you have spent the day. Again in a very friendly, gentle way, just go over what has happened during the day. No plusses, no minuses. But to realise for instance: I got angry at about 10 o'clock in the morning, and at about 2 o'clock I had an argument with this man, and it was not very pleasant. In the afternoon, another incident happened, and it is unfortunate that it happened.

What is more important is also to reflect on things that did not happen. Say for example, you got angry at 10 o'clock, but you were not angry until 10 o'clock! Then between 10 and 2, until that unpleasant incident happened, there were no monsters. Very good! So then you realise: "Now for two or three days only one or two unpleasant incidents happened here and there. I am surprised, I never thought I was such a good person!" Then if you have an inner dialogue such as this you can say: "Do not be surprised that you have been so good!" Like this you can make a beautiful connection with yourself. This is one way of learning to be your best friend.

Learn to see what you really need and what is simply your greed when living in a consumer society.

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, you should ask, “Now is this really necessary for me? Why do I really need this?” 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. And as I said, joy and lightness come from within yourself.

Summary on how to integrate meditation with daily activities from morning to night

Wake up

Now just as you wake up in the morning – you may have lots of things to do, but just as you wake up, can you spend a few minutes meditating, even while lying down on your bed? I mean, it would be ideal if you could do some sitting meditation in the morning even for a short time. But let us assume that you are too busy, at least while still lying down, spend 5 minutes in the lying-down posture and start the day with loving-kindness meditation, just feeling friendly towards yourself and maybe radiating thoughts of loving-kindness. And it is useful to make a wish: “During the day may I get an opportunity to practise loving-kindness, Karuna, Mudita and the other things that we

have been discussing.” So this is a beautiful way to begin the day. It won’t take more than 5 or 10 minutes.

Conscious brushing of your teeth

Then there are certain things that we have to do in the morning. However busy you are, I think everyone will brush their teeth in the morning. Can we just practise a little awareness, mindfulness when we are brushing our teeth? What happens when we brush our teeth? Again, we have thoughts. We hardly know we are brushing our teeth. So with awareness, knowing thoughts are arising, knowing thoughts are coming, just learn to let go of the thoughts and come back to brushing, the conscious brushing of your teeth.

Toilet meditation

It is interesting that in the main text in which the Buddha described how we should develop awareness, it says that when you are in the toilet, try to be aware, try to be conscious of what is happening while you are in the toilet. I call this *toilet meditation*! If you are really interested, if you are really motivated, if you really want to take the medicine, even if you are so busy at least you will have time to do *toilet meditation*.

Breakfast

Then I think you will definitely be having breakfast. I won’t be telling you to eat breakfast in silence because it is not possible. But at least spend one minute before you start eating breakfast, feeling grateful. Then to make an effort while eating your breakfast, at least occasionally, to come back to awareness, just to come back to tasting, just to come back to chewing and swallowing.

Relationships

Maybe you have to go to work. Now work is a very interesting place, with many interesting challenges. A very important aspect in the place of work, and also in everyday life, is the problem of relationships. How to relate to the people around you? What we can try to do, as I suggested earlier, is to try to learn from them.

Emotions

And it is natural that you sometimes have unpleasant emotions in relating to people, so don't be surprised. See how we can work with these emotions, how we can understand them, how we can let go of them.

Reflection

Supposing at some time we get angry, we get annoyed, we show our anger. Again, please don't be surprised. Please learn not to give yourself a minus. If you do not have the time, then when you go back home, or when you have a little space, what you can do is reflect on what really happened.

The breath and toilet meditation again

And I also would like to suggest that during the day, especially if you are very busy, just try to take very brief breaks to spend some time with yourself. You don't have to leave the place of work and you can still be seated on your chair and you can even have your eyes open so no one really knows what is happening. And then please spend some time with your friend, the breath. Even for 5 minutes, it will create space in your mind. Even for 5 minutes, whatever the build-up that is happening in your office, or whatever you are doing, there can be some recovery and some space. And of course you have the freedom when in the office also to do some toilet meditation where you can be completely alone, secluded.

Reflection at the end of a day

And when you go back home maybe you'll be too tired to meditate, so at least spend 10 minutes, maybe not in the cross-legged posture but just lying down or sitting on a chair, and just reflect on how you spent the day. Try to do this reflection in a very friendly, gentle way.

See the Four Noble Truths in everyday life

It's a really powerful, very practical, direct practice – to see the Four Noble Truths in everyday life. It would be really excellent, it would be wonderful if when you are suffering during the day, you could remind yourself: “Here I am experiencing the Buddha's First Noble Truth.” If you can tell yourself this, if you can remind yourself of it, you'll see you'll be relating to that suffering in an entirely different way. And then you can really move from that to the Second Noble Truth: “Now let me see, in what way am I creating my own suffering?” And then you can use the Third Noble Truth and the Fourth Noble Truth in the same way.

Godwin's Last Retreat in Hong Kong

Below was part of the conversation among Godwin and retreatants on the last night in his last retreat in Hong Kong in 1999. It was October 17, 1999. Such a beautiful day!

Retreatant:

Which teacher impressed you the most?

Godwin:

A teacher named Ven. Nāṇarama.....

Ven. Nāṇananda.....

Nyanaponika Thera.....

Another monk lived in a deep forest.....

And when I travelled to various places, I visited masters from different traditions. In India I met a person who was recognised as enlightened. He indeed told me that he was enlightened. But my best teacher's name consists of 4 letters. Make a guess, who is my best teacher?

Retreatant: L-I-F-E

Godwin:

That's right, it is LIFE! LIFE can be our best teacher. It is teaching us every moment, because unexpected things always happen in life. Therefore, life is a tough teacher, but also a great teacher. What happen in life are often unexpected. No one knows what will happen in future.

Note: This part was recovered from the Chinese book on 1998 talks in Hong Kong. The 1999 conversation was included in the book as end note. I translated the Chinese into English, so they might not be the exact words by Godwin. Unfortunately I could not find the English transcript. – Amy Chaing

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Previous Publications of Light of Nilambe

1. What is Human Life?
2. Be an Outsider if you want to change the Inside
3. Seeing Emptiness
4. Suffering is a Dream
5. In between Happiness and Unhappiness
6. Buddhism = Heartfulness + Mindfulness
7. No Colour No Shape
8. Living with Awareness & Watching Thoughts and Emotions
9. Sit on Your Own Seat
10. Illusion of Painful Painkillers
11. Disentangling Tangles
12. Rain of Thoughts
13. No Burning
14. Springs from the Heart
15. Multiple Characters Multiple Suffering
16. Save Time by Investing in Time
17. Hatred, Love & Mettā
18. Acquiring a Mind like Pure Gold
19. Seeing the Nature of the World
20. Living Inside a World of Stories

21. The Beauty of the Silent Mind
22. The Happiness of Letting Go
23. The Path of Coming Alive
24. Acquiring the Light of Insight
25. Working with Emotions
26. Craving, The Deceiver
27. Trust is the Door
28. Myth of Security
29. Conversations with Godwin
30. Noble Meeting
31. Mind – Never Mind
32. Multiplying Thoughts & Cultivating Mindfulness
33. Inner Shower
34. Out of the Circle
35. Are you Yourself?
36. Empty Eyes
37. Perfect Respect