

Discovering Meditation

Godwin Samararatne

For Free Distribution Only

Dear Reader,

If you wish to share in the production costs of this and many other beautiful Dharma Books and CDs for free distribution, so that more people could be touched by the beauty of Dharma and be inspired to live a happy and meaningful life, please photocopy the sponsorship form at the back of this book, fill in your particulars and return it to us. *“The gift of Dharma excels all gifts”*

Contents

Preface	<i>vi</i>
A Short Biography	<i>vii</i>
The Late Godwin Samararatne, A Personality I Loved and Respected	<i>x</i>
Day 1: Discoveries	2
Day 2: Meditation on Breathing	24
Day 3: Loving-Kindness	38
Day 4: Emotions	68
Day 5: Thoughts	90
Day 6: Stillness	118
Day 7: Relationships	142
Day 8: The Four Noble Truths	168
Day 9: Everyday Life	192

Preface

It is a great pleasure to have completed the editing of a second set of transcriptions from Godwin's retreat talks at the Waldhaus in Nickenich, Germany. As with the first set of talks from the Waldhaus in 1998, there is always the problem of converting the spoken word into a written form, and I have tried to balance faithfulness to the original with readability. I hope that Godwin's voice still comes through, especially his humour and lightness!

Many thanks to the Waldhaus for making the tapes available; to Petra Mertens, Beate Maaß, and Ute Barth for their committed work in transcribing the tapes verbatim; and to Helen Minder for organising the whole project. But most of all our thanks go to Godwin himself for these simple, practical, yet profound teachings on meditation and the Dhamma, particularly as they relate to our everyday lives and experience.

Jeanne Mynett

June 2003



A Short Biography _____

Acharya Godwin Samararatne was one of the best known lay meditation teachers in Sri Lanka in recent times, based at his meditation Centre at Nilambe in the central hill country near Kandy. After his death in March 2000 letters and tributes poured in as many people around the world attested to the impact that Godwin and his teaching had made on their lives.

Godwin was born 6th September 1932. He grew up as one of seven children in a Kandy-based family, in the central hills of Sri Lanka. He attended a well-reputed Buddhist school, but later admitted to neglecting his studies there in favour of exploring the deeper philosophical questions of life. After school he became a librarian, serving in libraries in and around the Kandy area before being promoted to the post of Chief Librarian at the main Kandy Public Library.

While his brothers and sisters all married, Godwin remained living at home, devotedly supporting his widowed mother until her death in 1977. By that



time Godwin was already involved with a Buddhist lay group who were studying the Dhamma and practising meditation, so when in 1979 this group founded a Meditation Centre at Nilambe, at the top of a tea estate some distance outside Kandy, he gave up his work as a librarian and took up residence in the new Centre.



He subsequently became the Centre's chief meditation teacher. Godwin based his teaching on his own practice and the understanding he gained of the Dhamma through that. He had no particular teacher himself, but he discussed the Buddha's teachings widely with many experienced monks, scholars and other meditators.

News soon spread about Godwin and the new Centre, passed on by word of mouth by those who had been there and benefited from their stay. Young Westerners especially those who were seeking a spiritual dimension to their lives were attracted to the Centre, appreciating Godwin's ability to translate the Dhamma into a language relevant to people's everyday lives and concerns.

Godwin's reputation as a meditation teacher grew steadily throughout the 80's both in Sri Lanka and abroad. By the mid-80's Godwin had already been invited to teach in Europe and South Africa, and he became over time an internationally acclaimed and much loved teacher.

In the 1990's his teaching tours extended to many more countries, including England, Germany and Switzerland; and other Asian countries such as India, Singapore and Hong Kong. Fortunately many of the talks and retreats he gave on these tours were recorded, and it is transcriptions of these recordings that form the basis of Godwin's website (www.godwin-homepage.net) and recent book publications.

At the end of 1999 he made another teaching trip to South Africa and Botswana, and it was shortly after his return to Sri Lanka that he passed away on 22nd March 2000 in Peradeniya Hospital of a progressive liver disease. He was 67 years old.



The Late Godwin Samararatne, A Personality I Loved and Respected

by Sampath Dissanayake, Toronto, Canada



x

I first met Godwin Samararatne when I was a student at Dharmaraja College in Kandy in the late seventies. At that time he was the Librarian of Kandy's D.S. Senanayake Memorial Public Library. I used to see him frequently when I visited the library almost every afternoon after school.

During a discussion session on psychotherapy which I attended at the library, Godwin spoke briefly at the request of the medical professionals who were gathered there that evening. He said only a few words regarding his experiences about the workings of the mind and the importance of meditation in understanding the psyche. I felt something deep in his gestures and soft voice beyond what he expressed verbally. I experienced a kind of deep calmness in his dignified appearance, his smile, his half-closed eyes and his white attire.

I started enquiring about him after this encounter. I also spoke to him when I was at the library. He had many intellectual interests. He had read widely, from religion to psychology to philosophy to politics. He was an academic researcher in addition to being the Librarian of the public library. His investigations encompassed fields such as the therapeutic aspects of Buddhist meditation, the development of Buddhist meditation traditions in Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries, reincarnation (rebirth studies), near-death experiences and other paranormal phenomena.

He started as a member of the research team set up by the late Prof. K. N. Jayatilleke in the early sixties and later served as a field worker and as a collaborator in various research projects carried out in Sri Lanka and abroad with researchers and academics connected to the University of Virginia, the Northwestern University, the University of Iceland, and many other institutes throughout the world which pursued studies in the preceding fields. He collaborated with Prof. Ian Stevenson of the Dept. of Behavioural Medicine and Psychiatry of the University of Virginia in his research projects in the



field of parapsychology for nearly thirty-five years. In the last stage of his life, he worked closely with Prof. Nimal Senanayake, a well-known Sri Lankan medical educator, researcher and practitioner, in his research projects in this particular field.



I did not see Godwin for one or two years. However I remained interested in the topics that he had spoken of. In the early eighties, I tried to meet him to discuss those subjects further. I learnt through his friends that he had retired from the public service and started a meditation centre with a close circle of his spiritual friends in a village called Nilambe. This place was located about seventeen miles away from the city of Kandy on the Peradeniya-Galaha road. I also learnt that he was the Resident Teacher there. I went to the Nilambe Meditation Centre after a couple of weeks with a friend of mine. The Centre was located on a beautiful hill overlooking a number of small towns and villages around Nilambe. There was a beautiful forest and a small lake in the vicinity of the Centre. There were about fifteen Westerners and a couple of Sri Lankans in addition to my friend and myself. The Centre had just opened, and it was

crowded with foreigners, especially Westerners, who outnumbered the local people.

Godwin was very casual. We were undergraduates of the University of Peradeniya at that time. When my friend and I started talking to him, he did not utter a word on meditation or anything related to that. He just asked about our problems related to memorising course material, paying attention to lectures in our classes, applying the facts that we have learnt in our exams, and things of that nature while offering us some tea. Then he said that there was going to be a group sitting around 6:00 pm and asked whether we would like to experiment with some meditation techniques with him. We told him that the purpose of our visit was to experience these things.

The sitting lasted about two hours. Godwin showed the people who were gathered there some simple techniques for improving their concentration. He taught us to accomplish this by paying attention to a particular natural process taking place in our body (such as breathing) and by listening to a particular sound in our surroundings. Then he



suggested that we pay attention to how distractions arise when we try to focus attention on something. He gently guided us in observing how thoughts about a past incident take our attention away from the present. He also showed us how a simple casual thought proliferates to manufacture an entire new story which is not related to what is happening at the moment, and how subsequently we create anger, jealousy, anxiety and all other forms of psychological suffering. He encouraged everyone to experiment with trying to catch distractions immediately when the mind started to wander off and to see how long it takes even to realise that the mind has become distracted.

We also experimented with attempting to bring our attention back to the present moment in a gentle way without forcing the mind too much. This was one of Godwin's ways of understanding and overcoming psychological suffering. This experiment, although using simple techniques like calming down and observing one's mind, was the beginning of a learning process for me towards seeing, knowing and understanding the way our minds work.



Around 8:00 pm, after experimenting with these techniques, we sat for a discussion session while having soya coffee. Everyone was given a chance to briefly tell what they thought about the techniques and whether they could use them in day-to-day life as well as in a relaxed environment such as at home or in a Centre like Nilambe. Everyone shared his or her experiences about how thinking associated with emotions from the past could become an unnecessary burden in everyday life. The positive aspects of objective thinking and planning and the importance of being in the present were also discussed. From time to time, when it was necessary to explain and open people up to underlying processes and the subtleties of the mind, Godwin told us of some of his own experiences. Sometimes he quoted parallel descriptions found in Buddhist and other spiritual texts. Whatever he said, his every word and every gesture conveyed the fact that everything he said came from an experiential source rather than from an intellectual process. It was interesting to observe that everyone could relate to what he said through their own background and experiences in life. This inner learning process which I started with Godwin continues in my life even today.



I spent one or two days at the Centre with my friend. I became a frequent visitor to the Centre in the weeks and months that followed. During these visits I gradually learnt what a busy person Godwin was. During one subsequent visit, when we were chatting about things related to meditation, I learnt that he had been invited to conduct sessions and discussions in a number of countries in Europe. The invitations had come from universities, colleges, social organisations and other community organisations. In addition he had been invited to participate in some group discussions with professionals in fields such as psychiatry, psychology and various schools of alternative medicine.

When I enquired about his private schedule he humbly told me that he was going to be away for about 6 months and invited me to come and stay in the Centre and further explore the techniques which I had been practising. He suggested a number of things for me to experiment with, such as whether it is really difficult to live in the present moment, whether and how far we can let go of our negative emotions associated with the past as well as



daydreaming about the future, and whether there is a positive and objective way to deal with psychological wounds which we have created through our past relationships.

He also mentioned the names of a couple of frequent visitors to the Centre and told me to discuss, practise and work with them on these things. Two of the names he mentioned to me were Harilal Wickramaratne and Upul Gamage, who is now the Chief Administrator and Resident Teacher of the Nilambe Centre. The association which thus began between Godwin and I grew into a lifelong relationship which lasted almost two decades, until his passing in March 2000.

A few years later, around 1985, Harilal Wickramaratne encouraged Godwin to form a discussion and a practice group at his residence in Kandy. Godwin accepted this invitation. The group met every Tuesday. Godwin travelled from Nilambe to Kandy each week to conduct the sessions and guide the discussions. One thing that really impressed me during these discussions was





Godwin's open-minded approach to meditation and his handling of day-to-day situations and human relationships. The main topic or theme most of the evenings was the application of mindful meditation to real-life situations. The group consisted of people from different age groups and backgrounds, such as teachers, students, doctors, nurses, businessmen and other professionals. People regularly brought their relatives and friends. Some parents attended the sessions with their children. The discussions which Godwin initiated in this way continue even today in different forms and in different places in Sri Lanka and abroad. The people who were regulars at these earlier meetings have now created their own small groups in their own communities, workplaces, schools, and so forth.

The people who gathered at the Nilambe Meditation Centre as far back as the early eighties branched out into different activities in their social lives as time went on. But one thing remained with them. That was the application of the insights and understandings which they achieved through the light of meditation to their personal as well as their

social lives. The people whom I met there came from different walks of life, different educational levels, different professions, different schools of thought and different religions and faiths. Everyone gathered to discuss life experiences and issues with one other and how mindful meditation could be applied in different situations to gain understanding about these situations and qualitatively change one's responses to them.

Godwin was not only a facilitator in this process. His deeper understanding of the phenomena of life provided the necessary guidance in this exploration to many of those present. Some other facets of Godwin's life that became clear to me during these meetings were that meditation was not something external to his life. The essence of it was present within him wherever he went, whatever he said and whatever he did throughout his life. A great and deep awareness was present in his whole personality in all life situations, whether he was attending a birth, attending to last minute arrangements for a foreign trip, visiting a patient, or attending the funeral of someone close to him. He had a deep sense of



alertness towards both external events and his own thought processes regarding them. In this respect, he was not only a teacher or a guide but also always a student and an experimenter.



Another marvellous aspect of his teaching was the way he used his own experiences, anecdotes, stories and quotations to illustrate the application of meditation in everyday life and ways of overcoming challenges associated with doing so. He never neglected to discuss and emphasise the problems associated with using meditation in a society where the majority are unaware of the importance of meditation. Some days he spent hours discussing the traps, pitfalls and escapism associated with meditation. He always encouraged us to investigate these things. Both highly educated people and persons with limited formal education were comfortable with his approach and responded to his words and guidance in a favourable manner.

One evening in the early nineties a few of our friends met at a place in Kandy to give a farewell dinner to Godwin and to wish him the best prior

to his going abroad to teach for an extended period. This was just after the country had undergone a period of terror and violence. At the time Godwin was becoming busier than ever. The demand for him both locally and abroad was becoming increasingly great. He was not used to having such a busy official schedule. But his desire to help his fellow human beings was great and he adjusted to the increasing demands on his time little by little. He spent certain days of the week at Nilambe. Other days he spent teaching and meeting regular groups in Kandy and the surrounding area. Sometimes he went to schools located in very remote areas to conduct discussions and retreats at the invitation of teachers and student societies. At other times he visited the Peradeniya Teaching Hospital where he offered his services as a counsellor to the medical team at the psychiatric ward.

During the dinner Godwin came up with an idea to create a continuing dialogue regarding the burning issues in the country and whether there was a way of handling these issues in the light of the Dhamma and meditation. This idea became very



popular among our close circle of friends. As a result of this, we developed a series of lectures, discussions and dialogues which we presented in public halls in Kandy, in the University of Peradeniya and at private homes on a very regular basis. We invited a lot of specialists and experts in different fields, living in the country as well as sometimes from abroad, to these meetings. We discussed spirituality and its relationship to social and economic development, ecology, education, aesthetics, health and human relationships, the therapeutic aspects of meditation, alternative therapies, issues and problems associated with violence, and many more psychological and social themes.

Dr. Kithsiri Herath and Bertie Seneviratne, two close friends of both Godwin and myself, acted as pillars in organising and co-ordinating these events. More than anything else this gave my friends and myself a chance to interact with Godwin very closely and to feel his deep concern for other human beings. Godwin worked with other groups of people to implement support services for the ill, vocational training programmes for youth, educational



programmes for the disadvantaged, and much more. It was sometimes difficult to imagine how he managed all these things while being the Resident Teacher of Nilambe and undertaking a large number of teaching assignments abroad. The Nilambe Centre had only three or four guestrooms for short and long-term residents at the beginning of the eighties. He managed to expand it by adding more guest rooms and some additional facilities for bigger groups to practise meditation. His kalyana mittas (Dhamma friends) and the committee members of the Nilambe Meditation Centre offered generous support to him in achieving these ends.

Another important and unforgettable quality of Godwin was his generosity. He was one of the most generous people I have ever met in my life. Every time he went abroad he brought at least a small gift for every single person he knew. Sometimes he brought things for people whom he did not even know. Yet I cannot remember any occasion when he brought anything for himself, other than a large number of books and other resources he purchased for the Nilambe Meditation Centre. Thousands of



people still visit and make use of the Centre he built up over the years during his life at Nilambe.

Without any exaggeration, Godwin was a great and beautiful person who brought insight to this world every moment he lived. I personally feel it is extremely important for us to remember and reflect upon Godwin and the things he did during his 67 years on this planet. This will help us to understand the deeper dimensions of human life and provide an example of the kind of life one should lead during this short span of existence. He was an embodiment of the Buddhist way of life. He led his life totally for the benefit of himself and for the benefit of others. He accomplished the Buddhist ideals of generosity, compassion and wisdom.

Although he did not expect any praise or honour for what he did, I was personally disappointed that he was not recognised and given the honour he deserved in Sri Lanka when he was widely recognised and respected abroad. People living on the other side of the planet frequently visited Sri Lanka to learn, discuss and practise meditation under his guidance.



The main reason for this lack of recognition in his native country may have been the simple and self-effacing life he led. But I was immensely pleased when he was honoured as a distinguished Old Boy by the Arts Foundation of the Dharmaraja College, where he had received his complete education in Kandy from the late 1930's to the early 1950's, in the latter part of 1999 for his contribution to the culture and tradition of the country and for his services to humanity, six months prior to his passing away.

May he attain Nibbana within the shortest possible span of time.



Day 1:
Discoveries



Why is Meditation Interesting?

Godwin: Let us begin by reflecting on what is happening for each one of us at the start of this retreat. You find yourself surrounded by strangers, you are trying to find out what type of a teacher is here, and the first few days you normally feel tired. For those of you who have been working hard, when you come here and relax more fully it is natural that you feel tired. And then just imagine a newcomer here: he sees these meditators moving around like zombies, in silence, with hardly any expression on their faces!

I am sure there must be many more such problems, but today I would like to focus on something entirely different from all that. I am trying to do this for the first time in a retreat: I would like to discuss with you how we can find meditation interesting, how we can sometimes find it entertaining, a little amusing, how we can develop a taste for it, how we can develop a curiosity about meditation.

So let us see what happens. I will start and tell you how I find my thoughts interesting: with my thoughts sometimes I suddenly find myself back in Sri Lanka! It only takes a few seconds and I can visit any country in the world I like, and without a visa! Isn't that interesting? Just watching this is fascinating. This is only one example. Are your thoughts like that? No?

Retreatant: *I not only go to other countries but I am connected with so many people who are important to me, who are interesting, whom I like.*

Godwin: Exactly. So even without the people being here we can meet them, and sometimes we have dialogues with them, sometimes arguments, and here we can even start a new argument. The argument was old but here you can start it again anew, thinking: I should have said that, too! Or if he or she says that, I could say this and he would be silenced!

So this is the way to find it amusing, this is the way to find it entertaining. So today what I said

is just to watch what is happening. This is a big challenge.

Retreatant: *I do not need to meditate for this, I do this all the time.*

Godwin: You are an excellent meditator then! Today I am emphasising awareness, alertness, being awake, that is the difference. Another question, yes?

Retreatant: *It seems to me the examples you have given so far sound more like daydreaming to me, and not what I understand meditation to be all about, which is that we are trying hard to get away from our thoughts, for the mind to settle for a second. I think the examples you are giving are not what I understood meditation to be about.*

Godwin: I am not surprised to hear this. But if you are daydreaming, you can never be alert and awake. And if you are not alert and awake, you will not know what thoughts are arising. As I have said quite a few times: Can you be aware of each thought that

arises? That needs a lot of space, a lot of clarity. If you are daydreaming you cannot do that.

In subsequent discussions I hope to speak about the stories that we construct, the daydreaming and fantasies, and to even explore questions such as: what is the difference between a daydream and a night-dream? Very interesting material.

Then there is another very fascinating thing we do especially with our thoughts. From the time that we wake up in the morning to the time that we go to sleep, generally speaking we have this continuous chattering going through our minds. Let us be honest – while you are listening to me you have your own inner chattering going on.

So an interesting question is: what are we thinking about from the time we get up in the morning until the time we go to sleep? What are the themes? You see the importance of observing thoughts? What are you thinking now?

Retreatant: *I think I have no idea what I was thinking of!*

Godwin: I am not surprised, that seems to be the reaction for most people here. Please consider this as a meditation, reflecting on the themes of our thoughts, the contents of our thoughts.

Retreatant: *To me it often happens that I recognise these themes, they come again and again, so I realise that I am bored to observe them yet again, and I try to let go and come back to something else like the body or the sounds.*

Godwin: The question I raised was very simple. It is the themes that we are discussing, not whether you are reacting to the thoughts with boredom, that is not the question I raised. I will give a helping hand and that might answer the question.

We can ask ourselves: About whom am I thinking? Most of the time we are thinking about ourselves, everything is related to us. Isn't this very fascinating? Even when we are thinking about others,

it is always related to ourselves. And then we do something more interesting. What do we do when we are thinking of ourselves and others?

Retreatant: *We think how we would like others to be.*

Godwin: Very good. Right, what else do we do?

Retreatant: *We compare.*

Godwin: We compare.

Retreatant: *We have doubts about ourselves.*

Retreatant: *We think how things can be useful to me.*

Godwin: Yes, right.

Retreatant: *We emotionally make judgments about others.*

Godwin: Wonderful, excellent. You put it so clearly.

And the phrase that I use is: we give plusses, we give minuses. Please see it for yourself. Good things that you remember about yourself – plus. Good things you think of another person – plus for him. Bad things, wrong things you have done – minus. Wrong things, bad things others have done – minus.



The people I meet who suffer the most are those who give themselves minuses most of the time. Such people can create a hell for themselves, and in that hell only minuses exist. Minuses about ourselves, minuses about others, minuses about the world. When that happens we use a very common phrase, we say: “I suffer from depression.”

So you see the connection between plusses, minuses and emotions? Isn't this interesting? Isn't this fascinating? Shouldn't we find it curious? Isn't meditation something very worthwhile? Isn't there an element of lightness in it? Isn't this an adventure? Isn't this the most beautiful adventure we can have, understanding, exploring, investigating, as I said this morning, the inner world?

Retreatant: *It is a little difficult because when I am depressed or sad I take myself so seriously that I can't get any distance to simply watch myself.*

Godwin: This is why I suggest you do it before you are depressed, because then you can really understand this process, you can really see very clearly what we are all doing to ourselves. This is what is called Dhamma insight. With more and more such insights, with more and more discoveries, the chances of becoming depressed become less.

We will be having more discussions about this very interesting theme of emotions — about anxiety, fear, depression and guilt. And as I was saying just now, if you can really be alert and awake, observing what is happening, you will see what I am trying to communicate to you.

What else can be interesting for us in the context of meditation? What else can be an adventure for us? Yes?

Retreatant: *Without thoughts I have no problems.*

Godwin: So the question is how to get rid of thoughts! You will realise when I present the meditation of focusing on breathing how even when we try to concentrate on the breath more and more thoughts will come. So let us wait for that day before we delve deeper into our discussion about thoughts.

So what else? The question I raised was: what else in meditation can be interesting?

Retreatant: *Sometimes when I have a problem I am able in the meditation to let go of the problem, then there comes some solution, some idea, how to solve this problem.*

Godwin: Big plus for you! A big plus, a very important discovery, that we can take responsibility, we can find a solution by ourselves to a problem that we discover. Then you develop self-confidence. And you have a realisation, an insight that we create our own suffering, and if we realise we create our

own suffering, then we can free ourselves from that suffering. And when we have that realisation, we will stop blaming others for our own suffering. One day we will be discussing the Four Noble Truths in relation to our experience.

So any other interesting things we can discover?

***Retreatant:** Here I am sometimes talking with my pain. When I am sitting for some time and I cannot sit any longer and I am having pain all over, I start to talk with the pain or with the part of the body that is affected, and I try to find out what it wants to tell me. And sometimes they tell me one thing and sometimes another, and then we try to get along with each other.*

Godwin: Isn't that amusing? Isn't that fascinating, to have a dialogue with pain? The best dialogue I have heard so far was shared with me by a meditator. Sitting in a group like this she said: When pain came I told the pain: "No-one in this world likes you, my dear pain. May I have compassion for you, my dear pain." The way she said it, it really touched

everyone. Isn't this wonderful? See the different aspects meditation can have.

Anything else? I am happy that you are sharing these experiences.

Retreatant: *We can send light and loving-kindness to other people.*

Godwin: As I said earlier, I very much emphasise the practice of loving-kindness. Open your heart for this. Open your heart for yourself. Without meditation your heart is closed. So with more and more meditation of loving-kindness it opens up like a flower. And when the flower opens, other people can sense the fragrance of the flower. It becomes infectious. So we will be practising more and more loving-kindness this week. Opening your heart like a flower. You can be affected by that, others can be affected by that.

Aren't we fortunate that we are meditators? Shouldn't we feel grateful to the person who discovered this? Anything else, please?

Effortless Effort

Retreatant: *For me, meditation is also a kind of relaxation.*

Godwin: This is very, very important: to learn to meditate in a very relaxed way. This relaxation can come, for one thing, when your body is relaxed. This is why the first thing we do here is bodywork in the morning. When the body is relaxed, generally speaking, the mind is relaxed also. Likewise when the mind is relaxed, the body can become relaxed.

It is interesting: why can't we relax? What prevents us from relaxing? I would like to hear from you.

Retreatant: *Our thoughts.*

Godwin: Thoughts.

Retreatant: *Something in me is in a hurry.*

Godwin: Something in me is in a hurry - to become enlightened! Anything else that prevents us from relaxing?

***Retreatant:** I do not want something, or I want something.*



Godwin: Ah, you put it so beautifully, we want something, we do not want something; liking, disliking; accepting, rejecting; plus, minus; minus, plus; how can we relax? Most of the time, from morning till night, this is what is happening. In meditation we want pleasant, calm, nice, peaceful states. So when they are not there, how can we be relaxed? And when they are there, how can we be relaxed because we do not want them to go away? Aren't meditators funny?

For relaxation to be there in meditation, there has to be what is called right effort. But there is a better phrase: effortless effort. And this has to be something natural. This is why I have been emphasising that you should see no difference whether you are sitting here or whether you are outside.

I think most of the meditators are more relaxed outside. Normally I open my eyes and look at your faces when you are sitting. And when I see the same faces outside, you look more relaxed than when you are sitting. And when you are sitting, do you know when you become really relaxed? When you hear the bell! Sometimes our real meditation begins only after the bell. Why? Because the “meditator” is not there after the bell. Aren’t these things really fascinating?

Anything else? I am happy that you are sharing these experiences.

***Retreatant:** When we are relaxed we might discover something about ourselves we do not really want to know. So we find a way not to be relaxed!*

Godwin: This is a very, very interesting point — that we do not like to see ourselves as we are. We are very clever, doing all this simply so as not to see ourselves as we are. And over the years I have realised that this is quite common among meditators. Why do I say this? Because as meditators we are given

ideas, models and images of how we should be. So there is a conflict between what we are naturally, and what we should become. Therefore we do not want to look at what we are, it is not so pleasant.



All the time we are so impatient to become enlightened in the future that we don't really see what is happening at the moment. What meditators do most of the time is to push away things, to deny things, pretending they are not there. Isn't this very interesting, what we are doing to ourselves? So if we do not have awareness, if we do not have clarity, how can we make these discoveries about ourselves?

And if we can be really honest, sincere and genuine in seeing what we are doing to ourselves, then slowly, gently, like a flower we can open up more and more. Then we can be open to any pleasant experience, we can be open to any unpleasant experience. Pleasant experience comes: just a pleasant experience, no plus. Unpleasant experience comes: we are open to it, there is no minus.

Anything else?

Retreatant: *For me, it is interesting to see how thoughts and emotions just arise, without my influencing it.*

Godwin: To put it in another way: we realise that we have no control. Today, I felt that during the day some of you were experiencing boredom. I felt that some of you were feeling very tired, I felt that some of you were feeling very restless, I felt some of you were feeling a little confused. So this is the meditation! As a Zen master said: “There is no escape.”

So without escaping from such feelings what we are doing is learning from them and discovering about them. Otherwise what happens in everyday life is that these moods, these emotions, they come and go, and we really do not know the mechanism of how they operate. We normally become passive victims of this process, or we try to escape from them. Does that work? But here in meditation we learn to confront these emotions, to be with them. Aren't we meeting a real challenge in life?

So this is why meditators are called warriors. There are two types of warriors. One type is “worriers”! But there is another type of warrior where they have the courage, they have the confidence to be a warrior, and to work with these difficult emotions, to play with them. So this is what we will be doing during the next few days, practising to become more and more like warriors in the second sense of the word.

I am just reminded of something that happened in the meditation centre at Nilambe — it could never happen here. One evening we discussed the importance of being warriors. Then afterwards the meditators went to their rooms to sleep, and one of the women heard a big noise outside her room. She opened the door and she saw a huge buffalo outside. Naturally fear, anxiety, insecurity and panic came up. Fortunately she thought of the evening discussion we had had earlier, and so she asked herself: “How can I be a warrior now?” And she said that something amazing happened — it was so inspiring — how when she thought of being a warrior there was simply no problem. So meditation



helps us to work with buffaloes! Shouldn't we be happy that we are meditators?

Retreatant: *Didn't you say that this could never happen here?*

Godwin: Am I wrong?

Retreatant: *We never know.*

Godwin: We never know. That is a very interesting phrase to remember. This is a sentence a real meditator will always tell himself or herself. We really do not know what is going to happen. Can you say what emotions you will have in the next three minutes? Can you say what sensations you might have in ten minutes time?

So this is a very, very important aspect in the Dhamma — to be open to uncertainty. Otherwise we have created a very secure world where we enjoy a false kind of security, where everything is controlled and we know what is going to happen.

But the real security is being open to insecurity, the real security is being open to uncertainty. So you see what a profound teaching is in the Dhamma. If you can really take this in you are open to any experience, whether internal or external. When we have a relationship do we know what will happen in two years, three years, six months even? What about death? Who knows? So here is really opening up, being open to the reality of what life is.

In a way, it is a very hard teaching. So in a sense it is for mature people. Shouldn't we be happy that we are mature people? In the next few days, we will be really open to any uncertainty. Externally, rain or no rain: no problem. Internally, pain or no pain: no problem. Plusses and minuses coming and going, being open to it all.

We will try to arrange that one day when we go for breakfast, there is no breakfast! How would you relate to that situation? Something similar happens many times in everyday life. Ajahn Chah, one of the teachers that I really respect, a teacher from Thailand, was asked: "What do you teach? Do you

teach samadhi, calm, tranquillity; or do you teach vipassana, insight?” With a very mischievous smile he said: “I teach frustration!” That is what he does with his monks, creating situations where something unexpected happens. And he tells them: “Look at your mind, are you holding onto your suffering or can you let it go?”

So the Dhamma is something very simple, very practical, very direct. The Buddha often said: “I teach suffering and the way out of suffering.” Therefore in any situation when we are suffering we have to see what we are doing, see how the suffering was caused, and then see if we can let go or if we hold onto it. This is a powerful teaching.

Isn't meditation interesting? Isn't spiritual life challenging? Anything else?

Retreatant: *Yes, in meditation I sometimes discover that the body is not as I thought it to be. I mean the body parts are not in such a good shape as I thought. Or there is one sensation here and another sensation there and nothing in-between, and it is not so clear*

what is up or down, etc. So it doesn't correspond to the image I have of my body.

Godwin: Exactly, exactly. It is the same thing with our mind, it is the same thing with other people, and it is the same thing with life also. Thus one can develop these insights just by sitting and by realising this. And that realisation we get in sitting — we have to apply it in everyday life. So you see how the so-called unpleasant experiences can be wonderful teachers. Please see them as teachers and not as disturbances and dissatisfactions.

Having said that, we will now end the discussion by chanting, and then after chanting we will meditate on loving-kindness.

Day 2:
Meditation on Breathing



Meditation on Breathing

Godwin: Today we are going to have a very serious discussion. We have to discuss our friend, the breath. A question we can explore together is, “Why did the Buddha choose the breath as an object of meditation?”

Retreatant: *Because the breath is always there.*

Godwin: This is a very important point: it is always there. Even when we are sleeping, it is there. And as it is always there, this is why we should relate to it as a friend. Who is the friend who is with us always? Even when we are asleep, our friend is there. So it is very important to make a connection with our friend. And then during the day when we are awake, the friend is always prepared, ready to tell us just to be in the here and now. Because the breath always happens now, in the present. So in any situation, any moments when we are daydreaming, fantasising, getting lost in the past or in the future, our friend is patiently waiting. Anytime one wants

to experience the present moment, the reality, it is there to help us. What a friend we have! Anytime, all the time. First point. What else?

Retreatant: *The breath serves as a mirror.*

Godwin: The breath is always a mirror, or to put it in another way, it always indicates to us our state of mind, our emotions. Can anyone give a practical example?

Retreatant: *When we get angry, our breath quickens.*

Godwin: Not only when there is anger, but also when there is fear and anxiety it indicates our state of mind to us. And when the mind is calm and relaxed, what happens to the breath then? When we are meditating and the mind becomes calm sometimes we cannot even feel that we are still breathing. I know some meditators who come running to me, saying: "I think I have stopped breathing!" That is one of the many problems meditators have!

So as you rightly said the breath, our friend is very useful, very objective; he or she is never mistaken. Who is the friend who can always be objective? So in that sense the breath is like a mirror, it just reflects your condition objectively, just as you are. Anything else?



Retreatant: *It reminds us that we are connected with the universe.*

Godwin: All living beings have to breathe. So as you rightly said, it reminds us of the Buddhist idea of interconnectedness, interrelationship. What Thich Nhat Hanh calls interbeing can easily be realised by connecting with the breath. It is also related to the fact that we are breathing the same air. We cannot say that this is my air, which is separate from the air others breathe. You see what a deep, interesting, profound implication this has. Anything else?

Retreatant: *It is coming and going, and changing all the time.*

Godwin: Absolutely right. It is changing all the time. Rising, falling, coming, going. If you can really

observe it, it becomes very clear how from moment to moment it is changing. Anything else?

Retreatant: *You can smile with the breath.*

Godwin: I think Thich Nhat Hanh said this beautifully: “Breathe in, feel calm, breathe out, smile.” So again, we can use our friend to feel calm, we can use our friend to learn to smile. And sometimes a smile can be infectious. It can infect others, again making a connection with others. Any more discoveries?

Retreatant: *The breath reminds us that we are alive.*

Godwin: We can use the breath to remind ourselves that we are living, and living from moment to moment, if each breath can be seen as the first breath or the last breath. I mean you are then really living from moment to moment. And the moment of dying is also the last breath. I read one Buddhist text where it said that if you practise this meditation at the time of dying, then death may come naturally to you. So it helps us when we are living, and it

helps us when we are dying. And again, who is the friend who will be with us until the last moment? The only friend who will be there is our last breath. And it helps us to experience calm, to experience some peace. It helps us to die peacefully. Anything else?



Retreatant: *The breath shows us that there is a polarity — the in-breath and the out-breath.*

Godwin: You use the right word: polarity. It is not just one way, one has to have these two processes. And this polarity can be used in a very important way. One thing is that in meditation it can sometimes be very useful to find out whether there is a difference between the in-breath and the out-breath. If the in-breath is long, does the out-breath also become long? And another very interesting aspect is what happens between the in-breath and the out-breath. Please try to discover this tomorrow if you have not already discovered it.

In the Tibetan tradition, they use the breath to develop compassion: You breathe in the suffering

of the world, you breathe out compassion for other beings. And I have been using it for developing loving-kindness; we might try it sometime tomorrow. Breathing in friendliness to yourself; breathing out friendliness to others. Breathing in — forgiving yourself; breathing out — forgiving others. Please try this. Because if you can develop this association, if you can make such a connection, then the breath will always be associated with loving-kindness. So that can be another very positive aspect of our friend: whenever you think of your friend, loving-kindness arises. You can have loving-kindness for yourself, and you can have loving-kindness for others. See how the polarity can again be used functionally.

***Retreatant:** It is an experience of reality when you are breathing with awareness: to be alive, physical sensations, coolness, freshness...*

Godwin: That is why it helps us to experience some calm. Another thing is it is so non-selective: there is no Buddhist breathing, there is no Christian breathing, there is no Hindu breathing. And equally it is non-selective between females and males.

There are so many divisions in this world: religious divisions, racial divisions, gender divisions and so on. Here there is no such division. So the friend is always reminding us to let go of these divisions — that itself is a valuable teaching. The friend is saying: “Give up all these concepts and identifications that you have.” I hope when I go back to Sri Lanka I can tell this to the Tamil and the Sinhalese people also: “Please stop the war. There is no Buddhist breathing, no Sinhalese breathing, no Tamil breathing.” I hope they will listen to me.



The Breath Helps Us Develop Awareness

An important reason why the breath is used as a meditation object is that it helps us to develop awareness. The meditation which we did today is called in Pali *anapanasati*. It is awareness or mindfulness or attention in relation to the in-breath and the out-breath. A problem meditators have is that they try to exclude other things, they try to exclude sounds, for instance. When they hear sounds they become a problem. When they have thoughts they also hate the thoughts. Poor thoughts!

Any sensations in the body, they think this is a disturbance or a distraction in the meditation. But it is very simple: the first emphasis must be on awareness. Just being aware of whatever is happening. This gives us a very interesting experience: you hear sounds, so you are aware of the sounds, and then see with the sounds what happens to you. We see we can convert sounds into noise, which is then disturbing

us. It can be a very deep realisation, that the problem arises because of the way we relate to things.

When I talk about sounds, I sometimes speak about an experience we have in the meditation centre at Nilambe. There is a bell to wake you up at 4:45 in the morning. Thus you can just imagine what association the sound of the bell has! But it is the same sound which is heard to indicate lunch. No difference. Where is the problem? It rests in its meaning, the associations we make. So it is not the sound, not what you hear, but how you relate to it.

As I was saying, the breath helps us to develop awareness, and while sitting we discover this very important skill. Then in everyday life it is a matter of using the skill we discovered while sitting. So you see, meditation has an important application in everyday life.

Another glimpse or experience we can have with the help of our friend the breath is that the friend helps us to abide in the present. You may have a

further realisation that even the idea of the present is just a concept. So you can have a glimpse of what is described in the Dhamma as the timeless experience where the past, present and future do not exist. It shows that our little friend can show us some very deep and profound aspects.

Another similar experience is what is taught in the Dhamma as *anatta*: there is no “I” or “me”. So here again you can have a glimpse that there is only the in-breath and the out-breath — there is no “I” or “me” apart from the in-breath and out-breath.

Another aspect which I tried to present today was how, with the help of the breath, we learn non-doing. It is very interesting that we are so used to doing things, controlling, manipulating and interfering. Because of this strong conditioning, we cannot leave the breath alone. Some meditators come and tell me that they are really controlling their breathing. It is sometimes not very easy to get them to let go of the control. But what the breath is teaching us is to leave it alone. And then that helps us to experience this non-doing — just doing nothing. Allowing the



body to do what it likes. In Sri Lanka we are very good in that non-doing! I think in the West you need to learn some non-doing.

It is certainly true that we are so busy now, we are so active, that we have no time to stop and reflect. This is one of the greatest challenges human beings have in this modern age where there is such a lot of activity, where one has to be extremely busy otherwise one is left behind. And in this activity, in this being busy, how does one create some inner space? How can one create some inner stillness? That is a real challenge. Because if you are doing a job — I mean, a picture came into my mind of people who get down from a train. They walk and run from the train like a horde of ants. But someone has to do the job. So if you are doing a job you have to be like the ants. Otherwise you arrive late at the office. In Sri Lanka there is a register people have to sign, and if you come in too late for work there is a red mark. So you cannot do slow walking meditation from the train. The red mark will be there!



That is the challenge we have — how to function in such a society, how to do things quickly, and at the same time have this inner space, this inner friendliness. This is a real challenge we have. I will talk about this on the last day — how to be like ants and still be a meditator when you go back to your place in society.

Retreatant: *Ants are busy but they take care of each other.*

Godwin: There is a simple explanation for that. Ants know their boundaries, we do not know our boundaries!

I think with those profound words we will begin chanting.



Day 3:
Loving-Kindness



Loving-Kindness

Godwin: Today has been a day of loving-kindness. And one of the meditators told me that people were smiling at one another. They even broke the silence and said something very kind to one of the meditators — so I thought one day of loving-kindness is enough!

Now, why do I emphasise loving-kindness so much? It is based on a very simple model of what I consider Buddhist meditation. It is something very simple, very practical and very direct. What we need to do firstly is to develop a lot of loving-kindness — loving-kindness to oneself and loving-kindness to others. And if we can really do that, then we experience a lot of joy, a lot of bliss, a beautiful lightness both in the mind and the body.



Natural Morality

And when you experience that, the moral aspect or the ethical aspect is looked after by itself. Because when we have loving-kindness, when we have compassion, it is not possible to harm oneself or to harm others. It is not possible to be destructive to oneself or to be destructive to others. Thus a kind of natural morality or natural ethical behaviour arises.

There is a beautiful phrase emphasising this connection in the Dhamma. The two Pali words are *anavajja sukha*, which means the “bliss that comes from harmlessness”. When you never harm yourself nor will you harm others, and that can really bring a lot of bliss, a lot of joy. This is the first step, and I must say, a very important step.

And after that, as you go deeper, you realise that even loving-kindness is *anicca*, or impermanent and constantly changing. And that loving-kindness does not belong to anyone. There is no “I” or “me” that is practising loving-kindness. So you

experience emptiness. This is my simple model of what I consider Buddhist meditation. And I feel that every human being who is motivated in this way is capable of achieving it. Only the other day I was thinking that we all have the necessary qualities of freedom and enlightenment. But these qualities are covered up, or as it is said in the Dhamma, they are obscured. But with more and more loving-kindness, these qualities arise.



The Practical Aspect

Now I would like to say something very practical about how to develop the meditation of loving-kindness. It is interesting that we have to begin with ourselves. You cannot be friendly to others if you are not friendly to yourself. So when you begin with yourself, where do you start? One has to start with the body. That is why in this retreat after Yoga I have been emphasising meditation relating to the body. Over the years I have met meditators who do not seem to like their bodies. Sometimes they even hate their bodies. When one hates the body or when one dislikes the body, this can create many problems.

One problem is that it is possible you can make your body sick in different ways. When we have a kind of self-destructive aspect, this can manifest itself in the body. It has been very interesting that when I travel in the West I hear there are even diseases related to eating food, or what are called eating disorders. And I have been told this is mostly due to the way people relate to their body. In Sri Lanka,

the problem is that there is no food. And here in the West, because of food people become sick! This is very interesting for me. If I tell my friends in Sri Lanka about this, they might not believe it.



Another way this dislike for our body can affect us is that we push away and do not look at some aspects of our body. This can result in feeling a kind of physical split, where part of the body is denied. I meet meditators who feel such a split in two ways. Sometimes it is a horizontal split, other times it is a vertical split. And I am sure this split is there psychologically as well. They feel as if they are two different persons.

One more thing I have discovered over the years is that people have tensions in the body. These tensions that people carry, located in different parts of the body, are again due to the way they relate to emotions, or the way they have been relating to their body.

Therefore it is extremely important to begin the meditation of loving-kindness with our 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. This is briefly about the body.

Then we come to other aspects. The first is this idea of giving minuses to ourselves as I have mentioned a lot earlier. In giving minuses to ourselves, we find more ground to dislike ourselves and even to hate ourselves. This can have many reasons, but I would like to mention one very important reason, because this is related both to the physical splits and maybe also to self-destructiveness.

As children we have been asked, or we have been told in various ways, to be different from what we are. We have been given models, ideals, images of how we should be. So naturally there is a split between what you are and what you should become. We begin with this and then people take it into their spiritual lives too. They attend certain meditation

retreats, and the meditation teacher says: “You must be calm, you must have loving-kindness,” you must have this or that, and so on. Naturally you cannot always achieve this. Then there is more self-hatred, more feeling oneself as worthless, as being a failure. So what do you do with such meditation teachers?



This is why I now emphasise as a first step — mind you, as a first step – to accept who you are honestly and very sincerely. To accept our humanness. To accept the fact that you are still imperfect, and to work from that fact by having loving-kindness towards what you are. This does not mean that you give in to what you are, but you work with these areas with friendliness, gentleness and tenderness. This is another aspect in developing loving-kindness.

The second concerns what I call psychological wounds that are created maybe in childhood, or wounds that are created in subsequent relationships. It is interesting how these wounds are created in relationships. When there is a relationship, naturally you have a model or come to a conclusion as to how

the other person is. Usually you start with a big plus. Otherwise how can a relationship begin? Very soon — after how long I do not know — slowly but surely the minuses start coming in. And this happens in a very interesting way: with the plusses we put the other person on a pedestal — “I have a wonderful girlfriend”; or “I have a wonderful boyfriend.” And what happens after some time? They fall from the pedestal. It is natural that they fall, because you have put them on the pedestal. A big wound is created: “I never thought he would behave in this way, I cannot accept it, I cannot believe it.”

So the bigger the pedestal, the bigger the wound. And then what do you carry as a wound? Hatred, ill-will, disappointment, frustration, hopelessness — we hold on to it all.

We do this to ourselves too. Especially when we turn to meditation and spiritual life, we put ourselves on a pedestal, thinking: “I am practising loving-kindness now; I am sure I will not get angry now.” And then you want to overcome craving. In fact, I met a meditator today who says that he

wants to completely overcome his craving. So then what happens? You fall from this high pedestal that you have placed yourself on. And the wound that is created is guilt. I meet many, many meditators who suffer very much from guilt. For some reason, guilt is a big issue here. And this can be extremely self-destructive, because with guilt you are really beating yourself. And you can also with guilt punish yourself. And you can punish yourself in different ways, in very subtle ways.

And when you have these wounds, what are the effects of these wounds? One thing is that they can affect relationships. Without your knowledge, you can be creating suffering for yourself and suffering for others and why this is so is not clear to you. As I have said earlier, they can also affect the body in two ways. They can cause what is called psychosomatic illnesses, and they can cause certain blocks in the body: tensions, pains, and so on. Also they can affect how we sleep – these things can come up in our sleep. Don't we start crying in our sleep? Don't we feel sad in our sleep? Sometimes without any reason we can have an emotion, we feel like crying,



we feel sad, we experience panic but we cannot find any apparent reason for it.

What is more important is that at the time of death these wounds can come up. While living we can push them away, we can deny them, we can pretend that they are not there. But at the time of death they surface in a very strong way. Can anyone suggest a reason why this should happen at the time of dying?

Retreatant: *Because we are too weak to push them away.*

Godwin: Exactly. At this time we are mentally weak and physically weak. We can no longer push them away, thus they can surface in a very strong way. So unless you heal these wounds you cannot live peacefully, you cannot sleep peacefully, you cannot die peacefully. So do you realise the importance of healing these wounds?

The Healing of Wounds

How does meditation help us to heal these wounds? I will offer some suggestions how they can be healed. The first suggestion is to find out how these wounds have been created in the first place. And when you find out the reason for that, you realise, as I said earlier, it is related to your own expectations, your models and so on. The second suggestion is to realise that holding onto these wounds can be extremely self-destructive. Another way, as I have been suggesting, is learning to forgive oneself and to forgive others. As I often say: to realise that you are human and that others are human too.

Another way to work with these wounds is to understand how they arise. When we observe our thoughts and our emotions, we realise that these wounds surface in relation to our memory. As they are in our memory, is it possible to completely erase them? Is it possible just to forget them? You will experience that the more you try to forget, the more you will remember them. The more you try to push

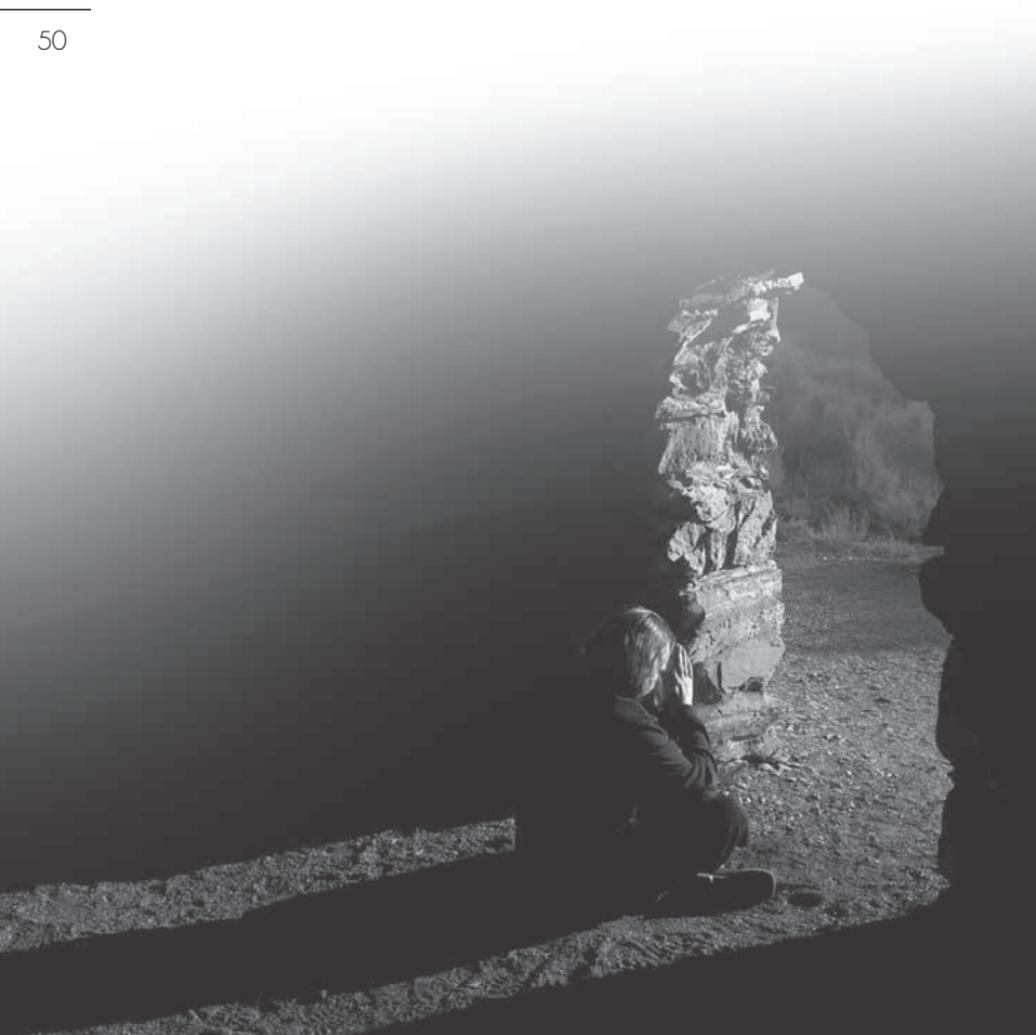
them away, the more powerful they become. And then what do you do?

This is what can be done in a practical way. When things arise in the memory, and you remember them in unexpected situations, understand that we cannot prevent this from happening, but as meditators we can observe this process. The memory of the wound brings anger. The memory of what we have done brings guilt.

So one thing we can do is just to observe, just to see what is happening. And if these emotions are arising, learn just to be with them — as I have been saying so often, creating space around them, making friends with them and saying: “It is okay not to feel okay.” This is meditation of loving-kindness.

Another thing that we can attempt is to sometimes deliberately and consciously bring up these wounds, these memories. Because that is a way of making friends with them. So that when they come up unexpectedly, the power and the energy that we give to them may become less. When you practise like

this continuously, you will experience a day where the memory comes and no reaction to it arises. That is an indication that the wound is healing.



Other Aspects of Loving-Kindness

These are some ways and means of healing these wounds. And the most important thing, which perhaps is not so easy sometimes, is to realise that these things happened in the past, and to learn to let go of the past. We cannot change the past. It is over and gone. Only when your wounds are healed can you really experience some peace again, some joy and some lightness.

Another aspect of loving-kindness is using it to work with our emotions. This can be a very powerful tool. Using loving-kindness to help us to work with unpleasant physical sensations and unpleasant states of mind.

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. Then you will be in a position to handle the minuses in you and the minuses in others in an entirely different way, with loving-kindness, with understanding and with compassion.

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, who cannot hear the birds. As I said this morning, 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. So please realise meditation is not about having special experiences, special qualities or extraordinary things. It is about seeing these simple things; seeing these ordinary things as something truly extraordinary.



The Benefits of Loving-Kindness

Now I would like to very briefly go over some of the benefits that are mentioned in a particular text about the meditation of loving-kindness. There are 11 benefits that are mentioned — some of them are extremely interesting.

The first three are related to sleep: when you do meditation of loving-kindness you sleep peacefully, you wake up peacefully, and you do not have unpleasant dreams or nightmares. That is why in this retreat after the meditation of loving-kindness, I say: “May you sleep peacefully, and may you wake up peacefully.” I hope you have been sleeping peacefully. If you have not been sleeping peacefully, your meditation of loving-kindness has not been good. At least I am happy that you are waking up because I have seen everyone this morning!

Another interesting benefit that is mentioned which is very logical and makes common sense



is that other human beings come to like you. It is natural that when you like human beings, and when you are friendly to others, they are bound to be friendly to you. So this is a very important tool to develop in relationships. If you want others to be friendly to you, you have to be friendly to them. When you have loving-kindness generally, this friendliness comes to you.

Another benefit is that non-humans like you too; not only human beings, but even non-humans. Who can these non-humans be? Animals, angels, plants, flowers, gods — they say the gods protect you. It is interesting how even gods protect you if you are full of loving-kindness. Good reason to practise loving-kindness! You get loving-kindness from human beings, you get loving-kindness from gods, you get loving-kindness even from animals.

Another benefit that is mentioned is that your face becomes serene. Thus you have no need for cosmetics. Loving-kindness is much cheaper!

Then there is another benefit that is mentioned in relation to this meditation; your mind becomes calm quite naturally. This has a very important implication. You can never experience calm by trying, by fighting, and by resisting. Calmness has to come with more and more friendliness. It has to come with more and more gentleness. Then the mind becomes calm naturally.

I will mention one more benefit: it is said that when we die, we die unconfused, we die with awareness. Can anyone suggest a reason why it is important that we should die consciously, that we should die unconfused?

Retreatant: *So that we do not go to hell!*

Godwin: Well, that is a very negative way of putting it. Starting with a minus: hell. I think if we are unconfused, if there is awareness, we have a last chance to become enlightened. In fact, there is a very interesting book, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* which presents some very interesting methods

for conscious dying. The book explains that if we can die consciously, we have a really good chance of becoming completely free at the time of dying.

What this book is presenting is what we are trying to do here. To recognise our emotions, and to make friends with our monsters. They can manifest themselves externally as very unpleasant demons. Thus, if you can recognise that these demons are projections of your own emotions; if you have learned, as we are doing here, to understand them, to make friends with them, to create space for them, there is no problem with seeing these figures. It is really recognising them for what they are. This is why I have been emphasising that we must learn to see things just as they are.

Another thing that is mentioned in this book is that our enlightened mind, our free mind, also manifests itself at this time. If you can recognise it, and if you can just be with it, then that's it. That is why I am also suggesting to allow the positive to emerge, to see our free mind, the Buddha mind, to

be aware of it, and to know it. All these things help us when we are alive, and all these things will help us when we are dying.

Isn't meditation and spiritual life something beautiful, something that we should be happy and grateful for? So do you have any questions? Please feel free to ask them. I would like to hear very practical questions that are related to your life in a very simple and practical way.



Questions about Loving-Kindness

Retreatant: *How can I learn to love my anger?*

Godwin: Yes that is a very good question, because we all have anger. Usually when we get angry, we follow it by getting angry with our anger. Then we feel guilty and we feel very bad. In a way, this is a good thing too. But if you can say to yourself with friendliness and gentleness that it is okay when the anger is there, you can learn about it, explore it, and make discoveries. So it is not giving into the anger, but learning from it.

I will speak later in the retreat about working with these emotions, and I have thought of a few tools. So when I speak on emotions, I will mention different tools with which to work with these unpleasant emotions. Simply, when anger is there you know anger is there, and you work with it without getting angry; and when anger is not there you know it is not there. I will speak more about this when we are talking about emotions. Any other questions?

Childhood Wounds

Retreatant: *What can I do about childhood wounds?*

Godwin: You are raising a very important question. I did not speak about childhood wounds as I knew it would come up because I have been encountering this with many meditators that I have been meeting. So I will try to give you a full reply because I feel this is extremely important.

It might interest you that in Sri Lanka I do not meet people who speak to me about childhood wounds. So this was fascinating for me when I was meeting Westerners. They invariably speak about their childhood wounds in the context of meditation. In the beginning I told them just to be aware and to be forgiving. Then I realised it was not working because these wounds were really deep.

So I will share with you the ways and means I have discovered within my own limitations. Earlier when someone had a childhood wound related to his or her parents, I told the person just to forgive

them and to have loving-kindness towards them. That person would get very angry when I spoke of forgiveness. Due to the anger, I have stopped doing it. Now I suggest to such meditators to go somewhere in the meditation centre or to the surrounding forest and bring out that anger about their parents. I would not tell my Sri Lankan friends about this, I do it very secretly! So I tell them to bring up the anger, and when they are able to do so to a great extent, I would then suggest how it is possible just to forgive them.

Sometimes I use some principles of a psychotherapy which I learned originally from Paul. So, in a meditative state of mind, with some calmness and clarity, some space, I get people to reflect on these three questions: What are the good things you have done for your parents? What are the good things they have done for you? What are the difficulties you have created for your parents? I have heard some very interesting answers. Sometimes when people reflect on these three questions, certain memories and things they have forgotten come up. It is fascinating that we have such a selective memory.

With this selective memory we are holding onto only the minuses. So with this simple, practical exercise you bring up the plusses in your parents. And then you realise that you have also created some difficulties for your parents. When meditators come to me and say: “Now I feel guilty!” I know the meditation has worked.



This is one thing I try to do in working with those burdened with childhood problems. Another thing I try to emphasise is: “Do you realise that your parents are only human? Do you realise that they have not been capable of behaving in another way? Don’t you realise that you may be the victim of another victim?” As I mention this, I will share with you a very moving story I heard from a woman whom I was working with.

She had a most terrible childhood. Her mother was beating her physically and mentally, and hearing some other things she described I was horrified. Naturally, it affected her substantially and she carried a big wound in her mind because of her mother. She lost contact with her completely. After many, many

years, when this woman was in her 50's or 60's, she made enquiries about her mother. Then, she heard that she was in a home for old people. She found out the address and met her there. When she met her mother, she hugged her and with all her heart said: "I love you, Mother." Her mother was crying and not saying anything. Then this woman asked: "Why can't you say that you love me?" to which her mother replied: "How can I say I love you? I have never known what love is." When she heard those words, the wounds she had been carrying for many, many years healed there and then. So this story asks us what do we really know about our parents? It is easy to give them minuses.

Another thing I try to tell the meditators I meet is that anything could have happened in childhood, anything could have happened at birth. It is interesting to see the Western models regarding this issue, and how they change. With Freud it was childhood experiences, after Freud it was birth trauma and now I hear it is reincarnation therapy!

First you start digging and digging for childhood experiences. And even that is not enough: you have to go back to what happened at birth. And now you have to unearth what had happened in previous lives. People have a compulsion to go deeper and deeper. I met such a reincarnation therapist who had written a book about it in Germany during my previous visit, he was telling me very seriously that one life wasn't enough, and that you have to go back at least three lifetimes!

So I tell people: "Anything could have happened in previous lives, anything could have happened at birth, anything could have happened in childhood, but what are you doing about it now?" It is very easy to blame previous lives; it is very easy to blame what happened at birth; it is very easy to blame your parents. But here and now, do you take responsibility for your life?

The model that is presented in meditation is this: "Be in the present and whatever has to come naturally from the past, with gentleness let it come." It is very important to realise this. This



is the importance of silence, one aspect of silence. Sometimes the need to talk is really to prevent certain things from coming up. In some of these intensive retreats people have shared with me some very deep memories coming up from the past, just popping up.

The whole emphasis is to allow things to arise. Once your mind is calm, spacious and stable — this is very important — you can allow anything, anything in relation to thoughts, emotions and sensations to arise. And how do we prevent these things from arising? It is again by giving a minus, by controlling and pushing them away. It is extremely important to learn to allow them to manifest without a minus, without controlling them. If they have to come, if there is a need for them to come, they will emerge. This shows the importance once again of awareness. When they arise, can you just be aware of them? And if these are strong emotions, can you just be with these emotions?

So this is what I try to suggest when I meet meditators who have childhood problems.

Day 4:
Emotions



Emotions

Godwin: Today I would like to discuss how to work with emotions in the context of meditation, especially the emotions that can create suffering for us. 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. We are all familiar with these emotions; we have all experienced them before. Is there anyone who likes them?

Emotional Intelligence

Not most of the time. I think this is the issue. Because even as children we have been taught or influenced in a way to see these emotions as bad, and that we should not be having or experiencing them. There is a very interesting book that came out recently called *Emotional Intelligence*. Has anyone heard of it? Written by Daniel Goleman, an American Buddhist, it achieved bestseller status within a very short time. This shows that emotions are a big issue! He makes some very interesting points in the book. One is that Goleman says it is nonsense to consider having a high IQ as something very important. He says even if you have low IQ but you show some intelligence towards emotions, then that is more important than having a high IQ.

Goleman wrote this book because he found that in America young children are becoming more and more violent and aggressive. The children also experience some of the negative emotions that we have mentioned earlier, but they are not taught how to work with these emotions. Perhaps as a result of

this book, some schools and education authorities are thinking of ways and means of educating children so they know how to work with emotions intelligently.



This is related to the point I was making earlier that 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. What I am going to share with you is based on my own experiences and understanding of the Dhamma after working with meditators for many years. Over

the years I discovered what I call tools to work with these emotions.

I have already mentioned the first tool, which is learning to be open to them — learning to say okay to them, learning not to give very strong minuses to them. This is not easy, but it is very important to learn this first tool.



Discover Emotions by Experiencing Them

The second tool is related to learning, discovering or investigating them, as it is said in the Dhamma. But to really investigate them and work with them, we have to really experience them first. How do you work with them if you do not realise that you are experiencing them? 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.

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?

Retreatant: *Bad thoughts cause the anger.*

Godwin: I think we can all relate to that experience. You have an expectation of how the other person should behave — this is very important. It is natural that we expect people to behave in the way we think that he or she should behave. And we should see this as very interesting, to discover: “Ah, I get angry because I have this idea of how others should behave.” So when you get angry, if you can learn to see that, realise that, then you can be with the anger and not so much with the person who is creating the anger. You can watch what exactly is happening inside your mind. If you can do that, the anger can become an object of meditation.

Perhaps another tool related to anger is not to repress it, not to push it away, and not to indulge it, but just to be with the anger with awareness. What is more fascinating and more interesting is to find out what happens to the body when there is anger. Here again you can see the importance of awareness — if you can learn to be aware of these sensations or whatever you experience in the body

with the anger, you will realise there is no more build up. I think what happens with most of these emotions is that there is a build up with thoughts, and more emotions arise. But here just being with the sensations prevents this huge build up.

You can do this exploration, this investigation, this discovery, in relation to any emotion and you will learn how each single emotion is different from the other, but at the same time there is also an interesting pattern to all of them, and to discover the pattern is fascinating.

Now an interesting practical question arises in everyday life. Does this mean that you allow everyone to behave in his own way, and then you look at your own anger and you do nothing else about it? Is this a solution? What do you think of this solution?

Retreatant: *It can be dangerous.*

Godwin: The point I am making is that if you are always passive and just watching, this can be easily

exploited by others. People would say: “He is a meditator, you can do anything with him. He will only look at his breath, he will just investigate it, so you can do anything to him.” This is the challenge we have in everyday life. There are times when you have to assert yourself, when you have to be honest and communicate this to other people.

This is the second tool. The first tool is being open to it, braving the conditioning we have; and the second tool is exploring, investigating, learning and so on.

The third tool, which I consider extremely important, is to know that these emotions are not there when they do not arise. We give them such power, such energy that when they are not there we are hardly aware of this fact! I would consider this as a real tragedy in the human condition. There are moments when we are free, but it is too good to believe that we can be free. Some people come to me and say: “Maybe I am repressing the emotions.” It is really funny that we have this reaction, this position in relation to these emotions.

On this, Thich Nhat Hanh once said something very beautiful, which I like very much. He said: When you have a toothache you suffer from it, so when you do not have one why can't you say: "Wow! I have no toothache!" and enjoy that? This is a very simple, practical and direct teaching which comes from the Dhamma itself. 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 as I said this morning: just being with and learning to reflect things as they are.

Making Friends with your Emotions

Another tool which I have mentioned very often is making friends with these emotions. As I said earlier, due to our conditioning we hate them, we really dislike them. It would be a very good experience if you can see for yourself that by hating and disliking them, by not wanting them to be there, you give them more power and more energy.

There is a very interesting story in Buddhism, which presents this important aspect in the form of an allegory. It seems there was a demon, and this demon would live on other people's anger. So you can just imagine that he never had a lack of food! He had food wherever he went: Sri Lankan food, German food ... The demon eventually got tired with the same food he was always getting from humans, and he wanted to taste something new. So he thought of visiting the gods to find out whether he would starve or whether he would get divine food.

Then, as the story goes, he went to the world of the gods. A security officer of the gods was there as he entered into this world, and this officer got angry. Thus the demon had his first taste of divine food and he liked it very much! He went in to find out more about the place. Finding the throne of the chief god empty, he went and sat on the throne. When some gods saw that a demon was sitting on their boss' seat, they got angry too. And something very interesting happened. The demon grew bigger and bigger! He was very tiny when he first sat on the throne but the more the gods got angry the larger the demon became!

By then the chief of the gods had got wind of what was happening. He came and spoke to the demon in a very friendly way, welcoming him and showing him every kindness. Of course, the demon started to shrink as there was no food for him to feed on!

So when working with a person having strong emotions, I would say: Just invite the emotions and see what happens, and then I would urge the person

to do that from time to time so as to get used to it. Sometimes I would also get these meditators to sketch their monsters. Even just to sketch these things they would become nervous and insecure. The principle is that by making friends with them, by saying okay to them, the power and energy that we give to the monsters become less when they emerge unexpectedly.

It is the same when working with fear, phobias and similar emotions. The practice is not to move away from them. When you move away from them, you give them more power and energy; but instead you should slowly, very slowly experiment with them, and explore them. This is a very important practice in the Dhamma. One way you could use this method is that when you have fear, you deliberately and consciously expose yourself to fearful situations and watch these fears. I know there are young monks in Thailand and Tibet, who would go and spend a night with their teacher in the cemetery. This becomes a learning experience for them to see what happens in that situation. This example is related to this principle of inviting the monsters, bringing them up.

Another tool to use is when you are having an emotion, avoid labelling it and just be with what you are really experiencing without the word. Please try this. Sometimes we become victims of words, of concepts. The other day someone was telling me that he was feeling depressed. When I questioned him, asking what exactly was his experience when he was depressed, he said: "I am having negative thoughts about myself, and giving minuses to the thoughts." Just this process of giving minuses to the thoughts, you label it depression. So the next time, try taking away the label 'depression' and just watch this process of giving minuses.

One last 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."

I have given you 7 or 8 tools, so I would like to pause here. If you have any questions, any difficulties, please raise them, because this is a very important theme, especially in everyday life. Generally speaking, on a retreat the monsters are sleeping. Everyone is practising loving-kindness. Everyone is smiling. The bell rings and you get good meals. There is beautiful nature all around. It is easy to put the monsters to sleep, but when you are back home they will really wake up. This is why before they are aroused from their slumber, I am giving you the tools.



Questions Relating to Emotions

Retreatant: *What to do if many different monsters are coming up at the same time?*

Godwin: Some people might say, “I cannot handle even two or three!” This brings up a very important point about how these monsters are related. They are all one family. Let us take one emotion as an example: anger. When there is anger you can also have guilt. When you have guilt there is another emotion that arises, and so on - they are all related, they come as a team and they work very well as a team, they are very powerful.

Retreatant: *Perhaps you can give them a ball to play with.*

Godwin: That is one solution. I am happy you mentioned this idea of playing. When you play, you learn you can't always win — sometimes they win, sometimes you win. When they win, do not give a minus, when you win, do not give a plus. Just see it as a fact. Here again what is important is just to

have friendliness. The phrase that you can use is: “I do not feel okay with all these monsters, but it is okay not to feel okay.”

When there are so many 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 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?”

And you will discover there is a paradox: when you are open to them, waiting for them, they do not come. This principle is presented in the Dhamma in a most beautiful way. According to the Dhamma, the biggest monster is Mara. It is Mara, according

to Buddhist concepts, who is bringing up these different monsters in different ways. And it is said that Mara really likes people to fight with him, because when you fight with Mara he becomes very powerful. So again you should just say: “There you are, Mara. It is okay that you are here, Mara.” Then he becomes very insecure.

Any other questions?

Retreatant: *There is one technique where we are not using words, and another technique where we are labelling – isn't this a little contradictory?*

Godwin: They seem contradictory. This is why I offer many tools — for some the noting technique helps, and for others they need to drop the labels to get the same distance. I give you different techniques, because different people, depending where you are at, have to use different techniques. You have to find out which one works best for you and is most effective.

The crux is you do not give anything special importance. You just see it as another thing that is happening — that is a very interesting principle.

Retreatant: *Should I also use the labelling technique for positive emotions?*

Godwin: This is why I said when these unpleasant emotions are not there, be aware and know that they are not there. Then eventually you will see no difference whether they are there or not.

Retreatant: *Are there positive aspects of so-called negative emotions?*

Godwin: In other words, you are asking if the so-called negative emotions can have a positive aspect? A very important point to reflect upon. There are stories in the Buddhist text where people have had these negative emotions and they made them the object of meditation which in turn helped them to become enlightened. So no plus, no minus. States of mind arise, states of mind pass away. Just seeing them as they are.

Retreatant: *How can I handle very powerful emotions?*

Godwin: The unfortunate thing is that if you fear something or if you do not want something that can be a means of inviting it to come. Once again the solution here is not to give these particular emotions a lot of power and energy, but to see that there is no difference between these particular emotions and other emotions. Also be sure of the tools that you are using in working with these emotions. This is one point.

Secondly, it is very interesting that from the Buddhist point of view depression has a strong element of self-hatred. That is why I have been emphasising the technique of loving-kindness meditation so often. With more and more practice of this meditation, you can be almost certain that such states of mind will not arise. Even if they do arise, if you can really have loving-kindness towards them their power and energy become less.

Thirdly, by using these tools you develop more and more self-confidence. Self-confidence is extremely important. With increasing self-confidence you will come to a position where any state of mind may arise but as you know the tools to deal with them no problem is created. When that happens you will reach a state of mind in which whether these emotions are there or not makes no difference. You will experience what I would consider as a breakthrough. So this is how we should practise meditation, in this practical way.

We will do some chanting and then end the day with meditation on loving-kindness.

Day 5:
Thoughts



Thoughts

Godwin: Hopefully you can relate this topic to your own experience. Why are thoughts so important in meditation? Can anyone suggest a reason?

Retreatant: *Because they are connected to emotions.*

Godwin: Any other reasons?

Retreatant: *Because they are almost always there.*

Godwin: Exactly. From the time we wake up to the time we go to sleep thought continues. And even when we go to sleep the dreams we have can be seen as a continuation of our thoughts. So this continuity of thoughts is what happens in everyday life. And what happens to you when you are meditating? Is there any difference?

Retreatant: *Sometimes I succeed in abiding in the present moment, then emotions come up.*

Godwin: In other words, in everyday life we are unable to live in the present, but here when meditating we have moments where we can be in the present — that is the only difference. So you see how important it is to learn about thoughts, to make discoveries about them, because they are there most of the time.

Now one interesting discovery meditators make is that when they try to focus on breathing, the thoughts continue to come. The same thing happens as you are listening to me now. Do you want the thoughts you are having right now to come? What does this show about our thoughts?

Retreatant: *They just come when they want to.*

Godwin: They are just coming. They come mechanically, habitually, repetitively throughout the day; whether you are meditating or not there is no difference. This is a very interesting and important discovery, to realise that they just arise mechanically and habitually. And then what do we do? Do we allow them to just come and go?

Retreatant: *Mostly we react in some way.*

Godwin: Very, very important word — 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.

Another interesting thing we do with these reactions is that we create stories. 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.

And we are very creative, very creative indeed. 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, which we will be going into now, and how to use thoughts constructively. 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.*

Godwin: 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!

The other day, a similar thing happened. Marcus was playing football, you remember? We could have made a huge story out of that.

***Retreatant:** I thought: now why has Marcus gone out to play football? I am sure Godwin has told him he can do this at meditation time so that we can observe our thoughts!*

Godwin: So it was a short story! Suppose there was a meditator here who thinks that there are only meditators at the Centre. He didn't see Marcus previously, and so he doesn't know that there are children here. Imagine him hearing this unusual sound during meditation. "What could this be?" Very easily he can imagine so many strange things, have so many fantasies, imaginings arising from these sounds.

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.



I think in everyday life this is the real challenge we have. I'll be speaking more about it on the last day, because we realise that in a sense there is no difference between what is happening here and what is happening in everyday life in relation to thoughts. I feel that what we can work with — more than states of calmness and clarity — what we can explore and investigate in everyday life is this very interesting and important area of thoughts and emotions, in terms of how they interact and how we use them to construct stories, and then how we become victims of the stories we have constructed ourselves.

Reacting to our Thoughts

This is one very important insight, discovery and exploration we can do in relation to our thoughts. Another important discovery we can make is how to work with the thoughts we are having and our states of mind. What is more useful and meaningful in meditation is not so much to be concerned about the thoughts, but to work with our states of mind in relation to the thoughts that are coming and going.

In this connection there is a beautiful metaphor that is used in Tibetan Buddhism which I like very much. In the metaphor, the mind is compared to the spacious sky and the thoughts to clouds. That is very beautiful. In practical terms, it means you allow thoughts to come and go like the clouds and yet you remain in a non-reactive state with this spaciousness.

However, as we are still human, I am sure we will be reacting to some of them; even though it is nice to be human with some of the clouds, with some of the thoughts. As a reaction is when we use thoughts creatively, we can explore and investigate our reactions.

J udgments

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 judgements 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.

Again what is interesting is we never question the plusses and minuses we give! Where do they come from? Who taught us to be our own teachers, giving ourselves marks and so on?

Retreatant: *We ourselves, because we behave like we think we have to, or how we ought to behave.*

Godwin: So first of all we got it from society; we got it from others.

Retreatant: *Or from meditation.*

Godwin: Very good. I will speak about that. Here again what we are doing most of the time is to use the plusses and minuses in a destructive way. It is a real test, a real challenge for us to use thoughts constructively and functionally, and to know the difference when we are using them in a very destructive way, creating suffering for ourselves and others.

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! Maybe now I should go deeper into meditation. Maybe I should go to Sri Lanka or Burma to deepen and enhance my practice," and so on, and so forth.

But at the next sitting after lunch, feeling sleepy, drowsy and experiencing no calm because the person next to you is moving around, 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, especially when you compare yourself with others. One identity arises in the morning, and another in the afternoon. So this is what happens to meditators in retreats. You see how important our thoughts are, how important our plusses and minuses are.

I am sure we are doing the same thing when we judge others in retreats. We first judge ourselves, and then we do the same with others. How do we judge others in a meditation retreat? Any experiences? Think about this — do we ever question our likes and dislikes, our plusses and minuses? The danger is 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.

Exploring our Conclusions

Our conclusions? Is it easy to change our conclusions? Our assumptions? We become so fixed with them. And if someone questions them, we get another reaction. This came to me very clearly on one occasion; I just remember it now. I go to a so-called psychiatric clinic once a week when I am in Sri Lanka. It's a big joke among my friends, they say: "Godwin goes to a psychiatric clinic once a week, claiming to help the people there, but we don't know who is helping whom!"

In one of these clinics I met a young man, a law student with a very, very sharp, very intelligent, and very clear mind. He told me he had a problem with his spine. He said his spine was not correct, not straight, and that people could see it. And when people notice it, they talk about it and laugh at it. So it was really a serious problem for him. It really made him sad and depressed. Because of this problem, he didn't like to go out, he preferred to stay in his room.

I realised actually there was nothing wrong with his spine. The problem lies with his thoughts, his thinking, his beliefs, his conclusions. When I tried to tell him this, he dismissed it. Then it occurred to me to say: "Alright, shall we take an x-ray?" "Yes," he said. "Why not?" So we took one, and when the x-ray came back, it showed the spine was quite normal. He looked at it and he said: "Yes, but my problem did not show up on the x-ray!"

At that moment, I thought: "Who knows, some of the conclusions and assumptions I have, including some of the pluses and minuses that I give could all be just like this person?"

So it was clear to me that we live in a private world of our own. We have constructed a private world from our experiences, from our pluses and minuses and so on, and we are living in that private world. This private world does not correspond to reality. Again from this private world we project our pluses, our minuses, our judgments, and we gather more and more experiences into our private world.

That is why there is no communication between people. How can there be any communication if everyone is living each in their private worlds? That day one of the retreatants said it very well: “We are wearing coloured glasses.”

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. So you see the importance of being aware? Do you see the importance of being alert and awake about how our minds operate? And then slowly, gently, tenderly, as I have been emphasising very much, learning to see things as they really are from our own experiences.

I'll be talking more about this meditation that we have been trying to do, where we allow thoughts, emotions, sensations to arise, and learn to see them just as they are, without a plus or minus, and to see the difference it makes to us.

Making Discoveries about our Thoughts

Another discovery we can make about our thoughts which I suggested today is to find out what really happens when there is a thought. What is our experience when there is thinking?

***Retreatant:** Sometimes I have the feeling that at the basis of one thought or all different thoughts there is a feeling, and this feeling has been repressed very often in our lives, and this is connected with our old wounds. And then this repressed feeling is an energy source for new thoughts.*

Godwin: So we recycle thoughts. Recycling is okay when it refers to waste and so on, but recycling thoughts is not okay, because for every cycle the emotion gets bigger.

Anything else?

***Retreatant:** I think anxiety and sorrow are reasons for thoughts.*

Godwin: I am a very simple man. I will give a few simple examples for you to realise what happens in our minds when there are thoughts. Let us think about the dinner we had. What happens to your mind when you are thinking about dinner?

Retreatant: *I see an image.*

Godwin: Exactly, we see pictures. If I close my eyes and think of the dinner, I see pictures of bread, I see pieces of cheese, I see some tea. So our thoughts are mostly pictures. If you want to be clearer, these are simple examples: you can think of breakfast. And what are you seeing? What is happening in your thinking of breakfast?

Retreatant: *Like a commercial, I see a big cup of coffee.*

Godwin: I would like you to make more such discoveries. There are some very interesting exercises to do. This is what I am encouraging you to do, to make your own discoveries. 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.

This is meditation. Not taking anything for granted. I mean, we should be grateful and think how fortunate we are that we have this fascinating experience. I call it the laboratory of mind and body. But it seems that though this mind and body are so close to us, they are in many ways so very far away.

So please, generate a fascination for this, find a taste for this, and develop a curiosity for this. Find this the most meaningful thing one can do in this life, to discover what is so close to us. Feel happy about this, feel grateful about this, and feel enthusiastic about this. Because it is fascinating, learning all the time about thoughts, about emotions, about perception, about so many things in this world of ours.

It is really a blessing that we have this fascinating mind — sometimes very complicated, very subtle, but always interesting and fascinating. The only

thing is, you need to be very simple. This is very difficult. We are good at complicating very simple things. We had this when we were children. We were curious, always asking questions, but we have lost this curiosity. It is so beautiful when you talk with children, how clearly they speak, because they just speak from their heart, from their experience.

I'll just share two experiences of mine regarding this. One was with a child who was about five or six years old. She was in Switzerland, I think, and she was telling me about swimming. I cannot swim, so I asked her: "Can you teach me to swim?" She said: "It is very simple—lie on the water with courage." If I had asked a professor of swimming, he or she would have given me a one-hour lecture and I'd still be confused about what swimming is. This is the beauty of childlike simplicity. They speak from their heart, from their experience. By the way, then I asked her: "What to do if I don't have courage?" Very innocently she said: "Then you won't be able to swim!" Simple, isn't it?

Another experience took place at a retreat like the one here. But it was a weekend retreat and like the sweet child we have here, there was a young girl. The mother said she had just come for one day and asked if her daughter could sit with us in meditation. So I said: "It will be nice to have her with us." I gave this exercise of just listening to the sounds, and after that I had a discussion with them. "Now what actually happened to you when you heard these sounds?" There were about 25 to 30 people, and they all gave very lengthy, long-winded explanations. Some were even confused by the exercise. Some were not giving details of what happened but were asking me questions. And then when it came to this child, she used just one word: "Floating." She was just floating with the sounds. Just being with the sounds. Immediately I said: "Please, let us have a discussion on how we have complicated our minds." It was such a touching and moving experience for everyone present, when this little girl who had never meditated before used just one word, unlike all these other people.



So you see what I am doing? I started by talking about thoughts, and slowly, slowly I'm going on to different topics! Now let me pause and I am sure you will have questions. Please ask questions, especially in relation to everyday life. I am much more concerned about what happens in everyday life rather than what happens here. Especially working with thoughts.



Questions about Thoughts

Retreatant: *How can I be in the present moment, and also find solutions for my problems?*

Godwin: I think when you are a child there are not a lot of problems, so it is easy to be in the present moment. But when you are grown up you have serious problems. You must look after your family, pay your bills and so on. Then you think: “How can I solve my problems? I don’t see the point, how can I be silent, how can I be in the present moment, and still find solutions to my problems?”

It is a very useful question. It is interesting that when I said: “Observe your thoughts.” I never spoke about being in the present moment. Because thoughts are always about the past and the future, so the question of the present doesn’t arise. So in everyday life please forget about being in the present moment! What is important in everyday life is, as I said, that from morning till night there is a continuity of thoughts. So just find out, just learn about it. It has nothing to do with being in the present. Any other question?

Retreatant: *I do not have a question but I would like to tell an experience. I wanted to do my 'homework', so I wanted to examine where my ideas come from. I found it takes a long time for a thought to come. A thought only came when I stopped trying to examine the process.*

Godwin: A very interesting experience. I would like to say something, because it brings out a very important principle. What happens when we do not want thoughts to come and we are focusing on our breath? They come and come and come. And when we say, now let any thought come, they do not come! Why is the mind functioning in opposition to us? When a child is disobedient, we say he is obstinate. So why are our minds so very obstinate? That is a very important question to explore. The same thing happens with emotions — when we invite the monsters to come, they do not come.

I will offer a very simple explanation. This is why I have been saying: “Make friends with the mind.” You cannot tell the mind: “Do this, don’t do that”, like a child. This is what we are doing

here in meditation. We come here, we sit in an unusual position and tell the mind: “No thoughts, no sounds, no one should be moving, no one should cough.” We want something different, something special from the mind. Then after meditation when we go out, our mind can do anything it wants! It understands meditation as coming here to sit and fight the battle, and afterwards we go out. That is why I say, after the bell is the best meditation! Because you are not doing anything special, you are just relaxed.

Oh, you have to be friendly, you have to be gentle. If you want to understand a child, you cannot do that by telling the child: “Do this, do that”. To understand the child you have to create space for her and watch her in a friendly way, then you will understand — this is what the child likes, this is what the child does not like. In the same way, you should behave like this with your thoughts. This is why I have been emphasising this friendliness, this gentleness, just finding out so much.

So thank you for sharing the experience. Any other questions?

Retreatant: *I had a very similar experience once on a retreat: when I went for dinner, I was asked not to label food — of course, I did not succeed. What happened reminded me of a short story. There was a Jewish businessman, he went to his rabbi, and said: “I am pretty rich but I could be a little bit richer. I have heard you are able to make gold.” The rabbi said: “Yes, I can.” “Oh, can’t you tell me how to make gold?” The rabbi said: “It is very easy, you need a big pot and you fill it with water and then you stir it on the fire for three hours and always think gold, gold, gold ...” The man answered: “Then after three hours I have gold? It sounds so easy.” The rabbi replied: “There is only one problem: you are not allowed to think of a green crocodile.” The businessman went home, took a pot of water, stirred it on the fire. And the first thing he thinks is, “I am not allowed to think of a green crocodile!” That is what happens to me when I try not to label.*

Godwin: There is a similar story from the Tibetan tradition. The teacher told the student: “You know that to get rid of thoughts by trying is not possible.” The student disagreed with the teacher. Then the teacher said: “Alright, then go and do not think of

monkeys.” And you can imagine what happened. He was thinking of monkeys; not only thinking but he was also imagining monkeys, and eventually came the time when he imagined that the monkeys were chasing after him! So he went running to the teacher and said: “Please, save me from the monkeys!” See how a small thing, a story, a fantasy, can become so real.

I would like to say a word about the exercise I gave — listening to sounds. It shows how strongly conditioned we are by words. When we hear sounds, we feel compelled to recognise and label the sounds. And then by recognising the sounds we can create a big story. So it is a very interesting exercise to experiment with, to explore, to see what happens if you can just listen to sounds without the words, without the past associations, just the sounds.

When we see things, we give each thing a label too. It is a very, very strong habit that we have. Again experiment, just play with this. Take away the word and see things without the word. See whether there is a difference.



We do the same thing in attaching words to emotions and sensations. One of the tools I offered yesterday in working with emotions was taking away the word and just being with what you are actually experiencing. Please explore this for yourself. It is extremely difficult because we have such a strong conditioning.

Retreatant: *I have another experience.*

Godwin: Ah, very good.

Retreatant: *There are a lot of books about positive thinking. Whenever I try to do that, something negative comes up!*

Godwin: It is the same process. We have been so conditioned that it has become a habit to give ourselves minuses. It is so strong in us. So when we try to work with this and learn to give pluses, it is very, very difficult. This shows how strong our conditioning is. This shows how strong our addictions and our habits really are. So meditation is really about working with problems or habits or

conditionings. To use computer language, it means to de-programme oneself.

Retreatant: *I have a simple question: what is reality?*

Godwin: At the moment, reality is just seeing, just hearing the sounds, just the breathing going on.

After answering that profound question about what reality is, we can do some chanting.

Day 6:
Stillness



Stillness

Godwin: This morning I thought Sri Lankan weather had come back! I threw away the coat I was wearing and I embraced the weather. I wanted to go for a walk, but I was expecting a meditator. Still I could enjoy the morning from my room. Then in the afternoon the sky became cloudy and it started raining unexpectedly. In the silence, German weather had come. How does one relate this to one's practice? When the Sri Lankan weather is there, do we learn to see the beauty in the Sri Lankan weather? Can we be open to the Sri Lankan weather? And then can we do the same with the German weather? Can we see some beauty in the German weather as well? One can see beauty in the mist. One could listen to the sound of the raindrops. Sitting there in the late afternoon was a beautiful experience, where there was a complete stillness in the trees and the birds were not singing.

So being one with the German weather as well as being open to the Sri Lankan weather. You gave no plus to the Sri Lankan weather, and no minus to

the German weather. They are there due to certain conditions and it is also due to certain conditions that they are passing away. So our practice is really awakening ourselves to this duality, to be one with the Sri Lankan weather, and to be one with the German weather. As Thich Nhat Hanh says: “Feeling one with your sadness, feeling one with your joy — learning from joy, learning from sadness.”

It is to see these things, to awaken our mind to this, that we are getting up in the morning and doing Yoga, practising silence, sitting for long hours with pain, having individual and outdoor meditation, listening to discussions. All these are tools to develop such an understanding, to awaken our mind to that state or condition. Is it not a very simple, practical model? Are we clear about our practice now? The real challenge is whether we can do the same in relation to what is happening within us as to what is happening outside us. In relation to what is happening within us, how can we be open and awake? As I have been saying so often: “By learning to see things as they are.” Whether the monsters are there or not, you learn from both conditions.

A Mirror-Like Mind

Now there is a very useful metaphor that is used in spiritual traditions to describe this practice, this perspective. It is called: having a mirror-like mind. Let us try to understand in practical terms from our own experience what it is like to have a mirror-like mind. In what way can we practise to have a mirror-like mind? I have come across this metaphor in the Theravada tradition, in the Zen tradition, in the Tibetan tradition and in Taoism as well.

Now in the Buddhist tradition there are two aspects to meditation: one is called calm, tranquillity, and the other is Vipassana or developing insight and wisdom. In developing calmness and tranquillity, I would say that this is like polishing the dust off the mirror. This is what we do by practising with an object like breathing, where with the help of our friend the breath we learn to develop some calmness, some tranquillity, some space, clarity and awareness. And when the dust is not there the mirror reflects things just as they are.

I would like to share with you some aspects of a mirror-like mind for you to apply to your own experience and your own situation in life. A mirror reflects what is considered beautiful just as something that is beautiful. For example, a flower comes before a mirror and the mirror would reflect the flower just as it is. Something that we consider not so beautiful, or not so pleasant, say a spider, would be reflected just as a spider. No discrimination between the flower and the spider.

So you can see how we are trying to apply this in our meditation. When we have a pleasant experience, we are aware of the pleasant experience just as it is. When we have an unpleasant experience, or what we consider as an unpleasant experience, we reflect it as it is. That is why I have been reminding you many times, if there is a pleasant sensation, just know that there is a pleasant sensation. And if there is an unpleasant sensation, can we make friends with it? Can we relate to it without resisting it? Can we be really open to what we consider unpleasant sensations?

That is why I also suggested earlier that when the monsters are there, be open to them and make friends with them. And when they are not present, just know that they are not there. This is one aspect of the mirror-like mind, and this can be applied to all our life, and to all our experiences.



Thus the real challenge is while you may have very pleasant experiences when you are here, can you still be open to what you consider as unpleasant experiences when when you go back to your computers in everyday life? This is the challenge we have. How far can we learn from such experiences? Like learning from the German weather!

I will speak more about this as we go along, because many meditators have been telling me that over here it is very nice, wonderful and spacious. But going back is a problem. Monsters are more or less sleeping here in a retreat, but when we return to our normal lives, they wake up with a lot of power and energy. What do we do when that happens? I really wish I could create more monsters here for you meditators to practise with! And then I could

tell you: “Now here are the monsters, see. Can you make friends with them? Can you learn from them?” Anyway, this is the first point about what we can describe as the mirror-like mind.

Another important aspect of the mirror-like mind is that nothing is retained. Things are reflected just as they are. Nothing is taken in. Now this touches on the greatest problem we have in everyday life. Especially when we have unpleasant experiences, we give them minuses and then we take them in. And we are very good in collecting and accumulating these unpleasant experiences. I meet very spiritual people, good people, but when I talk to them, they are very unhappy because they do not see the positive side. What they are seeing more and more are the minuses, the unpleasant experiences. This is why I have been emphasising that although it is alright to carry these wounds, let us try to heal them by learning to let go of them. Otherwise we are just holding onto whatever experiences we have been having. It is also interesting to reflect why we cling onto them, carrying the past as a burden in this way to inflict suffering on ourselves and on others.



This matter of carrying things as a burden is shown in a very well-known Zen story. Once there were two monks who were walking together when they met a beautiful girl standing beside a river. One of the monks carried the girl across when he realised that the girl was finding it difficult to cross the river, and left her on the other side. The following day, the other monk said: "You know, you did something very wrong. You should be given a big minus because you carried that beautiful girl across the water. Don't you know that monks cannot touch women?" And the other monk said: "I have left her behind on the other shore, but you are still carrying her!"

This is what we are all doing. Our experiences, we cannot just put them down. We are really still carrying them. And I think as we are still human, it is natural that we carry them, it is natural that we hold onto them. But we should learn to look at them, to learn from them, for they can be extremely valuable experiences. So we should see what we can learn from them, and whether we can put them down. Can we heal the wounds that we are carrying? Otherwise, as I said, with these wounds you inflict

suffering on yourself and perhaps on others too. So you have to make a choice. You have to be clear. How do I work with this? Can I learn not to inflict suffering on myself and on others by healing these wounds? This is the second aspect of the mirror-like mind.

A third aspect which we can relate to in our everyday life is seeing how the mirror-like mind does not accept or reject things. It just allows, just being with whatever is happening without accepting and without rejecting.

So that is why I gave you an exercise to work with the reacting and the non-reacting mind. Again, as we are still human we have this tendency to accept, to reject, to like, to dislike, to give a plus or minus. It is natural that we like the Sri Lankan weather and not the German weather. But then we realise we have no control over the Sri Lankan weather or the German weather. So we cannot demand: "I would like to have only Sri Lankan weather and not the German weather!"

You are amused, but this is exactly what we do in life. Wanting things to be another way. My business should be working in this way. My girlfriend should be behaving in that way. I should be behaving in this way. Demanding things from ourselves, from others, from life, like how we demand Sri Lankan weather is what we do all the time. Demanding is one thing, but what is happening is another thing. Thus after demanding Sri Lankan weather in the morning, I have to work with the German weather in the afternoon!

Suppose I had identified with the Sri Lankan weather, I would be depressed by now: “Oh, the Sri Lankan weather is gone.” I would also be waiting in hope for the Sri Lankan weather to come: “Oh, when will the weather be fine again?” Can we not apply this to what happens in everyday life? Again, as I am human, it is natural that I am longing for Sri Lankan weather all the time so that I can throw this coat away. This shows the importance of reflection. I have to stop and reflect: “Now is my demand reasonable? When I make this demand, am I being realistic? Is it possible? Can we always get what we demand?”

With this kind of reflection, we realise the nature of our actions and of our demands. We need only to see this and to understand this. From such seeing and understanding, realisation can come. So I have to realise I cannot make demands. I have to see how far I can make friends with the German weather. How far can I see the beauty in the German weather? How far can I learn from the German weather? And how far can I make discoveries about the German weather? Then you realise that you can see certain things which you had not seen before because your depression has gone.

So do you realise that what we are doing with increased meditation is to create more space in our mind, to create greater clarity in our mind, so that we have more awareness and can see what we are doing? In this way, we will come to a state where we see the German weather as equally fine, nice and interesting. This is difficult, it is a challenge.

Need we go further? Is the message clear? I can speak more about the mirror-like mind, but is this necessary? Isn't this clear enough to realise what

you have to do? To understand that while you are here and experiencing Sri Lankan weather, you will have German weather when you go back. So please do not demand Sri Lankan weather then! That's it! Any questions?



Questions Concerning Stillness

Retreatant: *How can I distinguish between being able to change things, and the point when I have to accept something as it is?*

Godwin: Very good question! You should be clear what you can change and what cannot be changed. One area where change is possible is ourselves. Beginning from there, we can also see what can be changed outside. And to be realistic as far as possible as to what cannot be changed. We have a saying in this connection displayed at the Nilambe Meditation Centre: “May I have the courage to change what can be changed, the patience to bear what cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two.”

Retreatant: *What was the conclusion of your experience of this morning?*

Godwin: Aha, what is my conclusion on the Sri Lankan weather? Very good. You must ask questions of me also! As I said, this morning I was very



happy taking off my coat and waiting to go for a walk. Even inside my room I was still enjoying the weather. With the same mood and state of mind, I enjoyed life as it was. I usually take a short rest after lunch. As I woke up, I saw rain when I looked out of the window. I realised I did not like the rain. So that was a very good opportunity for me to reflect on what had happened in the morning and what was happening then. It gave me an opportunity to practise what I preached. I realised the weather can be a wonderful teaching. That is why I started the evening discussion with this. I am very grateful to the German weather. Still I would like to have the Sri Lankan weather tomorrow to be honest! Any other questions?

Retreatant: *How can I change without being under pressure?*

Godwin: You are quite right to ask this. I have met many people who put pressure on themselves to change. When I meet them, I realise they are only putting pressure on, and not really changing themselves. I was telling one of the meditators

that I have been meeting what I call “casualties of meditation” — people who pile the pressure on to change themselves because they see some problem in the mind or the body. But really they are quite okay. So the pressure to change arises in these people and straightaway some complication develops in the mind or the body. Sometimes I wonder if meditation is really helping these people, because non-meditators are much happier. I am really seriously thinking about this question, about what people are doing to themselves in the name of meditation.

I will give a simple example. Close to the Nilambe Meditation Centre there is a town called Kandy. In Kandy, noise, crowds and seeing nice food pose no problem for people who are not meditating. But when Nilambe meditators come to Kandy, they cannot relate to the noise, the crowds and they have a problem with ice-cream! So do you know what they do? They run back to the Centre! It is good for the Centre — but I thought seriously, “What am I doing here? Am I producing meditators who are worse off than non-meditators?”

This is why I emphasise so much about working with our monsters, about making friends as far as possible with them. Because, like here, Nilambe is an ideal place for the monsters to go to sleep. So I try not to allow that situation to arise. In a way, there are sometimes more challenges there than there are here. Especially when a group of Sri Lankans come. They cannot stop talking. I know some meditators hate it when they hear that a Sri Lankan group is coming. Suddenly they find two Sri Lankans sharing the room that they have been holding onto as “their” room. And I hope the newcomers would start snoring in the night. I see that as the practice.

Meditators have calm and pleasant experiences in Nilambe, but when they go to Kandy, all that is gone. This is why I do not encourage people to go into deep states of concentration. Buddhist monks come to the Centre for meditation and when they come, sometimes I encourage them to go into deep states of samadhi, because they can function in that situation with the type of life they lead. But for lay people like you who have relationships, who work with computers and live in big towns where you



hear only telephones, trams, trucks, buses, and so on, it doesn't work.

One can have deep experiences in Nilambe, but all of that is gone straightaway when one comes into such a situation as the above. But it is different if, while in Nilambe, you can really learn to work with emotions and monsters, then even when you are in big towns, you will not be taken by surprise when these things arise.

This is why I offer you many tools, and encourage you to use the tools here. When you learn to use the tools here, you can see how far you can apply them when you go back and these monsters come.

See, when I started to speak the question was not so relevant to what I am now saying, see how easily I can go on to other things! I have to be aware of my speech. Anyway, I was trying to respond to the point he made, about how we pressurise ourselves to change ourselves. This is why I have been emphasising as a first step to please accept yourself as you are, and not as you should be, or as you must

be. This is extremely important. Otherwise, we want all the time to be different from what we are. And we would be pushing and pressurising ourselves all the time to be different. One person used the word ego, so we are trying to get rid of the ego. But in this process we are creating a bigger ego! This is why I am speaking about finding a way to practise without pressurising oneself. But please realise this does not mean giving in to these things.

As I was telling someone today, one has to find a spiritual life, a meditation practice, which suits the culture here. In the culture here, you have to pressurise yourself to do well in life. You have to pressurise yourself to succeed in this culture. And in this culture you are pressurised to act perfectly. The model of perfection is imposed on you by the culture here. So do you see the connection? When such people take to meditation, they want to be a perfect meditator. As I said, they then start pressurising themselves and making demands on themselves: "I should be like this, I should be like that." And guilt becomes a great problem eventually for they start feeling guilty because they are not making any progress in the spiritual practice.

These poor meditators! They started by wanting to work on suffering. Now they are experiencing more suffering because of meditation! And with that, they start pressurising themselves more. I am really deeply touched when I meet such people because they are very sincere, genuine and highly motivated. I think this is something for us to reflect on.

***Retreatant:** How can I handle the tools without putting pressure on myself to find the right one each time?*

Godwin: I like such questions. It shows the confused way I have been teaching! I would like to meet you individually, but still I will say some general things about the question. The first point is why do I offer so many tools? This is because I know there are different sorts of people and they are in different situations.

In a retreat like this there are complete newcomers and there are some who have been practising for many, many years. So this is why I really encourage people to see me personally, because what I try to

do is to relate to people individually. And that is why I offer many techniques, and encourage you to experiment, to explore and to find out what is most helpful to you in the place you are at.



I would like to say something about this plus and minus business. In this culture I meet many people who are used to giving themselves minuses. That is why when I spoke about the loving-kindness meditation, I mentioned that you have to develop loving-kindness towards yourselves. You have to learn to see more and more plusses in yourself. It is extremely important, as I have often been saying, that we should learn to feel happy about what we are doing. We should feel grateful for what we are trying to do. With more and more plusses you really experience more joy, more lightness and so on. Once rid of the mechanism of giving minuses, you experience these plusses. You experience this joy, this lightness, this happiness and gratitude. Actually this state itself is wonderful.

But if you would like to go further you have to see that these positive experiences, that even these

plusses are also *anicca* (impermanent). And they are also in a way empty. That is, they are empty of any owner, as I tried to indicate this morning. Then you go beyond plus and minus, and you realise that both are concepts. When you realise that, you can use them as concepts when you want to, but fully realising the nature of concepts.

But let us forget about this third level and let us be more concerned about the second, where we can have more loving-kindness, more friendliness, more gratitude, more joy, more lightness. That is good enough. But while you are experiencing them, I would also like you to work with unpleasant monsters, negative emotions, so that in everyday life you are really ready for them when they arise.

This is my general answer to your question, but still I would like to meet with you individually. I have been meeting people even outside interview times; if you would like to come, you can come during yoga, after breakfast, or after dinner. So even during yoga - I like you to do yoga, but if it is really important you can come and see me then. The only

thing I would like to warn you about when you come is that it is possible there might be someone there already. It will be excellent for your practice! So I hope that happens.

Now I would like to say something about being a little more positive. There is a very positive effect in writing down everyday the good things which happen throughout the day. About this, I would like to make a brief comment. When I meet meditators in Nilambe, I do a very interesting exercise in this connection. I tell the meditators to draw up a list of all their positive qualities. It comes as a surprise to me that in most of these lists there are so many omissions. So when I know someone well I mention more positive things to that person, and sometimes this really shocks and surprises them. There have been instances where people have come with about five or six positive things on their list, and I have added about ten or twelve to it!

This is very interesting. It shows what a strong conditioning and habit we have to mostly see only our minuses. It is a most unfortunate aspect of

the human condition. It is everywhere, and it is universal. In South Africa there was a teacher who teaches parents. And she told us that in one of the workshops for parents she asked them to draw up a list of all the bad things, wrong things, their children would do. Within a few minutes they could produce a long list! Then she asked: Now please draw up a list of the good things your children are doing. It was not easy for them. They had to think. They had to ask for ten more minutes to think about it!

Now if there are no more questions, we can do some chanting, and end today's session with a loving-kindness meditation. The chanting is nice, it is improving every day.

Day 7:
Relationships



Relationships

Godwin: Unlike the previous discussions we will try to have a serious discussion tonight, because this is a very serious theme! So what I will try to do is to present the solution found in the Dhamma for problems arising in relationships. There is a beautiful phrase that is used in this connection. Even in Pali the words sound very nice: *Kalyana Mitta*, which means a spiritual friend or a noble friend. I will try to present some problems and difficulties that human beings experience in relationships which I have been hearing about so often, and then see how one can work with these problems and build up true spiritual friendships where we can really grow together.

First, you begin with yourself. How do you relate to yourself? I have been emphasising this aspect very much, where you learn to be your own best friend. So if you can really make that connection with yourself then you see relationships in a different way. Creating more suffering for oneself and others may

become less, or may not be there at all. This is the first point in a spiritual relationship.

I think another situation which human beings face when relating to other human beings has to do with what they consider the shortcomings of others. What do you do when you see someone behaving in a way in which you think they should not?

Retreatant: *Give a big minus.*

Godwin: We start with a very, very big minus, that is true. And anything else? Do we stop with a minus?

Retreatant: *Sometimes we make the minus bigger. There is a German saying: Making an elephant out of a fly.*

Godwin: Very good point. So you need only to give a very small minus, but then you make it very big. And some people are very creative. They can speak for the whole morning or the whole night about this small minus. They speak as if they do

not have any minuses themselves! This is another very interesting phenomenon. They speak from a standpoint of perfection. They forget that they are also capable of behaving in the same way.



So these are things that one has to realise. Another thing which we do is, we do not stop at assigning a big minus, we get really angry. We become really mad at the person while trying to point out their mistake. And then because we are angry and are showing it, we hurt the other person with our anger. Then what does the other person do?

Retreatant: *He gets angry also.*

Godwin: He also gets angry. Naturally, you get angry and you hurt the other person in the process and the other person tries to return a bigger hurt. So it becomes a competition, to see who can be most hurtful! If the other person doesn't become angry, how would you respond to that?

Retreatant: *You would complain: "You do not even get angry!"*

Godwin: Exactly. Sometimes people who make such comments are meditators also. After all, we are still only human. So aren't relationships very interesting? Isn't it really valuable to learn from such situations?

When you see someone doing something wrong in a spiritual relationship, do you say: "May you be well, may you be happy, may you be peaceful?" Do you say: "These minuses are only concepts, I do not use minuses?" What will a spiritual friend do in such a situation? He will speak with the other person. He will want him to grow. He will engage in some kind of a dialogue, because a spiritual friend would try to get the other person to understand his behaviour. Sometimes we just assume that the other person understands why he is behaving in this way. So it is very useful to get that person to understand or reflect on his behaviour.

And then the spiritual friend does something very creative too. When the other person does not do anything wrong, the spiritual friend points that out too! It is extremely destructive to point out only

the minuses, and only when the other person does something wrong. It is extremely important to tell the other person when they are doing something good, something skilful, something wholesome. This is a quality we need to cultivate. The other quality you do not have to cultivate, it is there naturally!



So it takes some effort to see these positive qualities, to say this with your whole heart and to really show your deep appreciation for these things. This can be very touching. There can be a beautiful communication when such a thing happens. And the spiritual friend does the same to you. It is simply sharing with each other, and not taking up a position that one is better or more superior than the other. But really just sharing together, learning together, and growing together.

Sometimes it is also important to know when it is necessary to be assertive. That is, you should know when to be gentle and when to be assertive. I will share with you what a woman in Sri Lanka told me about regarding this aspect. This happened when I was in a very remote village speaking to a

group of meditators. One of the women shared this experience with the group. She revealed that her husband would come home drunk and would start breaking the pots, plates, cups and so on. She tried so many things — practising loving-kindness, speaking to him in a very kind, gentle way when he was sober. She even spoke to his other friends, and through those friends tried to influence him to change. She would collect all that he had broken and keep the pieces in a place where he could see them. All these tools did not work. At last, one day when he came home drunk she said: “If you break one plate, I will break ten!” And that ended his days of breaking plates!

So as a spiritual friend you have to use these methods in a skilful way, and not merely always be passive. Some people understand only this language. This is another point to remember.

Another thing is to realise when the other person is closed. I have been hearing this very often since coming here. And I have also noticed the gesture that they use. Now I know even Sri Lankans would

say: “My friend is moody, he does not speak.” But they do not use this gesture. So I am very curious to know, please tell me, what this gesture really means.



Retreatant: *It means there is a shutter coming down.*

Godwin: Some tell me: “When I am open, his shutter comes down. And when he is open, my shutter comes down!” Is that correct? So as a spiritual friend, what do you do with the shutters? Very practical question. Any suggestions? Any solutions?

Retreatant: *Let the person be in peace.*

Godwin: Leave the person with closed shutters in peace. May you be peaceful!

Retreatant: *You can wait for their opening up.*

Godwin: We can wait until the shutters open.

Retreatant: *Or you can stop playing the emotional tango for a while, and after a while you try again. Perhaps if you are lucky it opens.*

Godwin: In a creative relationship, it might be helpful to explore all the above suggestions, because it is possible that the person really does not know under what circumstances it happens. He or she may not have control over it. So when two people have a connection and are concerned for each other, it is beautiful if they can explore these things by having a Dhamma discussion. And from there, see how they can slowly try to explore whether the shutter can open. Sometimes it is very useful to get feedback. This is because the one who is doing this may not realise under what circumstances it happens, or what triggers off this situation. So it is really very helpful to do such an exploration together. Then the person knows: “When my shutter goes down, my friend is not hurt by this, for he understands me.” I feel that if you can have this kind of concern and care, whatever problems that arise can possibly be worked out in some way together, rather than you trying to work them out alone by yourself. It is very, very

supportive to find someone else helping you, and to be helping each other like this.

I think another challenge we have is to try to really understand the other person from his or her position when there are differences. Again this is a skill to learn and to cultivate. Because here again, we become so fixed with our own conclusions, assumptions, idealism and ideas about things that it is extremely difficult to forget all that for a moment and see the other person from his or her position.

This is a very interesting practice. It is not easy, but try to forget your own world and understand the world of the other person. It is like playing with a child. If you want to learn how to play with a child, you have to forget your own world and enter into their world — and it is really beautiful to get into the world of the child for you can then communicate with the child. Communicate with the other individual in this same way. Otherwise, naturally the two worlds clash and there cannot be any communication. So this is another skill. So you see, how a spiritual relationship can allow us

to develop these very important skills and spiritual qualities?

What are the other challenges we have? I think another challenge we all have is that we have become so dependent on what others think of us. We have a great need for plusses from other people. I'd like to mention that this can be a very strong need indeed. But here again, if you are serious in growing up you have to work with this dependency, because otherwise it can become a problem where you are trying to please others all the time, and trying to get plusses from others all the time. In fact, when you are not getting plusses from others, you think you are not trying hard enough, and then you try even harder and this can become a real vicious circle.

What is the basis of this need to be so dependent on the plusses of others?

Retreatant: *Emotional insecurity and lack of self-acceptance.*

Godwin: Here again it means that it depends on how you relate to yourself. So you see how important it is to examine how you relate to yourself? So again, it is about this ability to see yourself as your own best friend and really become self-contained within yourself.

Sometimes I like to use this metaphor of toys. Although we are grown up, we still need these external toys. We can be changing one toy for another and still not getting satisfied with that toy. It is a case of just continuously changing toys and still not really being content, not really being self-contained. This is one of the greatest challenges we have. This is why I have been encouraging you to spend some time alone and to see if you feel lonely or bored with yourself when you are alone. See how far you can learn to be your own best friend in that situation. If that connection can be made, then you become your own toy. When you can see yourself as your toy, you'll find yourself very amusing, entertaining and interesting. You have everything within yourself.



Then something beautiful happens. When you are alone, you can play with the toy, and when you are with others you can enjoy others. So this is another challenge we have in relationships, and again using that challenge to grow spiritually. Then whether you get plusses or minuses from others, praise or disapproval from others, you become self-contained within yourself.

What are the other challenges, problems and difficulties we have in relating to human beings?

Sometimes, for different reasons, one may have to work with or to relate to someone who can be extremely unreasonable, authoritarian and so on. I regularly hear from meditators that sometimes one could have such a boss in the places where one is working. Such a boss can be ruthless, wanting things done in his or her own way, and does not believe in spiritual relationships.

How does one work with such a person? Sometimes, besides the workplace, we could have such a boss at home too. Or perhaps your neighbour

is someone like that? So how do we work with these real challenges we have in relationships? Do we leave the job, or move out of the family? Do we find another house because the neighbour is the boss?

Retreatant: *I think the best way is to try to understand the other person by having a little talk and to understand what happened in his life, and why he is the way he is.*

Godwin: Anything else?

Retreatant: *Try to send the boss loving-kindness.*

Godwin: Try to send the boss loving-kindness: “May the boss be well, may he be more peaceful, may he not create suffering for me!”

What I would like to suggest is something entirely different. Try experimenting and exploring, using the boss as your most valuable teacher. Like inviting the monsters, you say: “Now today I hope my boss will show his or her power. As I had a very good meditation this morning, I now have lot of



space and clarity in the mind So let me see what will happen with the boss.” Then you are prepared.

Some days the meditator is successful, the boss did everything possible but there was no problem. You should give yourself a big plus, and feel grateful to the boss. But as we are still human, there are days when loving-kindness meditation did not work, morning meditation did not work, and you experience hurt, disappointment and wounds. Then, what do you do? Do you give up meditation?

Retreatant: *Not go to the office.*

Godwin: Isn't it interesting how one failure and that is it! So what you can do, and this is a very important practice, is when you have failed and when you have recovered from that failure, try to reflect on it and make that the object of your meditation. Remember, this is to be done only when you have recovered from the wound that was created. And it has to be done in a friendly, gentle and kind way. And not in a berating manner — now what happened, why didn't my meditation work,

that shouldn't have happened, and so on. This is because if you beat yourself, you would experience more hatred, more guilt, and greater feelings of worthlessness.



Now this is the beauty of having a spiritual friendship with oneself. Like having a dialogue with another spiritual friend, you have this friendly dialogue with yourself: “What really happened to you, my dear? At what point did the monster arise? How many monsters came?” Here you have to be very truthful and honest, to acknowledge that this and that happened. But there is no need to give a big minus, just acknowledge and realise that this is what happened.

Or perhaps you can even give yourself a big plus: “It is okay, I am still trying, I am still human, I am still imperfect, but it is nice that I am still continuing with my practice - wonderful!” You go the next day, the next week, and see what will happen then. You will come to a state in which whether you are successful or not makes no difference because both situations have become objects of meditation.

Isn't that an interesting and beautiful way to live? Learning from our failures and mistakes.

Here again, Thich Nhat Hanh once said something very beautiful: "Compost is something that is dirty, but you can use the compost to grow flowers." So this is our compost. Learning to use this compost to grow spiritually. What is the problem? And all that is due to the very good teacher.

***Retreatant:** If we do what you tell us to, do we have to take everything as a teacher? For example, when a husband comes home and beats his wife, should we take him as a teacher? Also if I have to go to work with a very unpleasant boss and I have to go there for 40 or 50 years, I think it is better to look for another job.*

Godwin: Or in the meantime, the boss may die within these 40 to 50 years! Anyway, that important question brings up the point that we must know our boundaries. Here is another challenge in relationships and spiritual life, and that is to know our boundaries. Talking of boundaries, I have a very interesting relationship with this little guru here, this

little child. We are slowly becoming friends. When I give him something, he takes it. When I smile, sometimes he smiles. When I play, sometimes he will also try to play. But he knows his boundaries very, very well. I tried to carry him twice, but he pushed me away, showing me in his way to just be friends at a distance. This is how a child of that age indicates his boundaries. When I touched his body to carry him, his body language demonstrated he didn't want it! So this is an example of how we should be very clear about our boundaries. Like the little guru is saying: "No," sometimes you must also say: "Now it is enough. Enough with the boss, enough with whoever it is."

You have a choice: "Do I let it pass, give in to it, or do I act like the cobra?" Sometimes in relationships we need to behave like the cobra. This is a famous story that comes from the Indian tradition. It is about a cobra that was practising loving-kindness. One day this cobra was in a forest, meditating on loving-kindness: "May all beings be well, may all beings be peaceful." when along came an old woman. She was collecting firewood. She saw

the cobra and thought it was a rope. So she took it to tie the firewood together. As the cobra was practising loving-kindness, it allowed the woman to do just that. After the woman had taken the bundle of firewood home, the cobra managed to escape, but with a lot of bruises, pain, wounds and so on. So the cobra decided to visit its teacher at six in the morning for an interview. It knocked at the door, and said: "I was practising loving-kindness as you taught me but look what happened to me! Very calmly the teacher said: "You have not been practising loving-kindness, you have been practising idiotic compassion. You have to show that you are a cobra, you have to hiss!"

Yes, anything else?

***Retreatant:** Yes, I would say that if we are in a relationship, we also have to see what is the real way to help the other person. If I come back to the example with the woman and her husband beating her - if she leaves the husband then she gives him a chance to see what was happening, and what he has been doing.*

Godwin: This reflection is very, very important. So this is why I suggested that sometimes you can do these reflections together, with the people who are involved. Or if you are unable to do that, to really reflect on it yourself. This is why I have been encouraging this practice of reflection.

Retreatant: *The husband comes home and takes it out on the wife, and the wife takes it out on the children. That is possible.*

Godwin: And the children take it out on the dog! Anyway, I have been presenting some areas for you to reflect on. So now is the time to ask questions. Please ask questions about important issues in relationships, practical questions, by relating some practical situations.

Retreatant 1: *What if you have the impression that your partner was overwhelmed for a while by her emotions, and did not act for a while in a normal way, like she was quite out of control, leaving you and going to another partner? And then after some time she recognises that she was overwhelmed by her*

emotions. What should one do if after some time this person wants to come back?

Godwin: I have not thought of such a situation before, but let us reflect. Suppose you are a meditator and then such a thing happens, how does one deal with such a situation?

So I think you must try to reflect on what is happening in you. Now this kind of reflection has to be done when there is space and some clarity, and as far as possible when one can see the situation very, very clearly. Thus, the first question to reflect on is: “Why did she leave me in the first place? Was it anything I did that resulted in this?” And as I said earlier, trying to see it from her point of view. That is very, very important.

To have that kind of space to see it from her position, one has to have a lot of understanding. When that type of reflection is practised, I am sure there will be questions, and doubts will arise in your mind. And when the person returns, can you have an honest dialogue with her?

Now in this dialogue as a meditator, it does not mean that you have to always be passive and say: “It is wonderful that you have come back!” But in this dialogue one has to question her and find out why she did it, under what circumstances she did it. This kind of dialogue gives her an opportunity to really reflect on her own behaviour. If in this kind of dialogue reflection can take place, it is something very, very helpful, something very creative, where two individuals are really trying to understand their behaviour. And through that, depending on the situation, a connection may be made. Then you may be in a state to reflect: “Can I heal my wound in this situation?” And if you are unable to heal the wound, maybe you should tell her honestly: “This is my situation.”

Maybe others might have better solutions, I would like to hear.

***Paul:** I would like to share with you three tools that I have found very helpful in relationships. The first tool you mentioned before but is so important, and that is just to be there for the other person. It does not depend*

on the amount of time we spend, it is a question of quality. Just really feel the moment, sit and feel: "I am there." Thich Nhat Hanh always stresses this, he gave one talk for about two hours only speaking about this issue.

The second tool comes out of this and it is very practical. It is called 'deep listening' — just to sit and to really hear what the other person is saying in terms of what is being said, the body language, everything. Really to understand, and not just to react.

The third tool, which I found in the last months through the help of another person, is that a relationship always shows you your own behaviour patterns. Therefore sometimes it is much easier to get along with strangers everywhere else, but when you are at home all is broken because after a while your partner knows all the different reactions you have. And these different reactions show a pattern; for example, you feel some criticism, some aversion and you react.

It is very important to question what is the main problem in the relationship and what kind of pattern is there, and then try in meditation to find a sentence

like: "I will not react." It is very interesting to take this as a tool whenever something comes up that pushes you to react, and to see with awareness: "I am on the way to reacting." This changes relationship problems.

Godwin: Thank you very much. I would like to hear something from you all on this, you might have similar suggestions, similar experiences.

Retreatant 2: *I wonder why he only asked what to do if she wants to come back, and why he does not ask himself if he wants her to come back.*

Retreatant 1: *I told her, before we can meditate about this problem, the wound must be healed and this takes time, and afterwards it may be possible to move onto this issue.*

Retreatant 2: *I have another point. I think it is a shortcoming to say that the problem started when she left. I think there must have already been problems before she left. And I think that it would be very necessary to look at the relationship before she fell in love with the other person.*

Retreatant 3: *I do not agree with that. It is not always a question of the relationship. One partner can be destructive. He can change his mind or he can change his feelings. I do not believe that I always have to look at myself and to give myself a minus for the other partner's wrong behaviour. I am not always responsible for what the other one is doing.*

Godwin: Very good, very interesting.

Retreatant 2: *I just want to say it is not always a question of wrong or right. Sometimes it just does not work. I have discussed these things in my relationships and asked so much about myself and the other person, using all the tools you have told us about, and sometimes it just does not work.*

Paul: *Most of the time there is a misunderstanding of the Buddhist teaching. We are looking for keys, simple keys we can use on the door and the door opens, and everything is alright. For me at least, the Buddhist way is to use this situation to learn — it is not simply a key for having better relationships. This is a very subtle*

thing. Because always a little bit later we try to make it something very functional.

Retreatant 4: *I want to say something. I think it is very important that the relationship grows, not only the people. Because the relationship is a reflection of the whole world, and if we want to live together in peace then we should at first succeed in a relationship one to one. If that is not possible, nothing is possible.*



Day 8:
The Four Noble Truths



The Four Noble Truths

Godwin: So what we will try to do now is to explore together the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths, and to see how far we can apply them in our daily life and our spiritual life. Just using it as a model to free ourselves.

The Four Noble Truths are as follows:

the first is Suffering;

the second is The Cause of Suffering;

the third is Freedom; and

the fourth is The Way to Achieve Freedom.

Or another way of stating it is to use the medical model where we express the truths as: Sickness, The Cause of Sickness, Health, and The Course of Medicine. So in meditation what we are trying to do is to use the medicine.

Suffering

Now the first question I would like to raise for discussion is: “Why did the Buddha call suffering a noble truth?” How does suffering become a noble truth? What is so noble about suffering?

It’s because we have to experience suffering to feel the need to be free of it. Unless we know that we are sick, the need to take medicine will not arise. There are people who are sick, but they do not know that they are sick. Hence the need to find and use the medicine does not arise. We deserve a big plus that we know there is a sickness and that we are trying to discover the medicine and use it. A big plus!

Let us spend some time with this aspect of suffering. There is another word which is interesting — disease. It means that you are not at ease. So we will explore some areas and aspects of suffering or disease, not being at ease. Yesterday, we realised that having relationships is not always easy. I feel that this is the biggest disease. Certainly it is a very important area as we have discovered. And it is useful

to reflect why this is such a big disease. What are the other forms of disease in this world?

Retreatant: *Being hungry.*

Godwin: I am happy that you mentioned it because in Sri Lanka people know what it is like to feel hungry. Here I do not think that there are opportunities to experience it. Am I right?

Retreatant: *I meant being mentally hungry.*

Godwin: That is nicely put: being mentally hungry. So now we can find out which is the greatest suffering, whether it is physical hunger or mental hunger. It is an interesting area to explore. I think some of you may not even be aware of some forms of poverty. Sometimes it is good to be exposed to other cultures and different situations. Then you will realise what a lot of — how shall I put it — abundance and consumerism there is here. I will just give an example. When you come to the West, there are so many choices. I am always being asked:

“Would you like this tea or that one or another one?”
Because there are so many varieties available.

One day I was taken by a friend of mine to have some ice-cream, and there were about 30 varieties of ice-cream! And I was asked to choose. I did not know how they would taste, so I just said: “I would like this one.” In Sri Lanka there are no choices. In our Centre there are only limited choices, simple choices, like: do you drink water or do you drink tea? For breakfast there is only one meal. If you do not like it ... That reminds me: there was once a Western monk staying there and I always used to say to people: “Try to eat the food here as if for the first time — that is the way to survive here.” But the monk said: “I eat it as if for the last time!”

So because of this affluence, in these affluent countries there is a disease which I call affluenza! Have you heard of this disease? It is very interesting to see the rest of the world suffering due to a lack of things, and here the suffering is due to affluence. I would like to say something about this on the last day, because I feel this is something important for

you to reflect on. So this is one form of suffering. Anything else, any other forms of suffering?

***Retreatant:** There is suffering because of loneliness; and relationships are sometimes a cause of suffering.*

Godwin: You speak of it as though from experience. It is quite true. Actually in Sri Lanka I meet both types of suffering. There are people who are single and alone, old and so on. This can really be a cause of suffering. And when there is a war going on, there is so much violence, tension and unrest around that it is certainly not easy to live. It is neither pleasant nor satisfactory.

So these different types of suffering exist, but there is a very subtle kind of suffering that is presented in the Dhamma. Not to get what you want is certainly a source of suffering. But what is more subtle is that even to get what you want can also be a sort of suffering. Isn't this an important point for us to reflect upon?

Here you have so many toys; even grown-ups have so many toys! You feel you would only be happy, content and satisfied if you can get this toy or that toy. Perhaps one such toy is to travel around the world. Thus you may long for that, and you get it, but at the end of it there is nowhere else to go!

This is why I said one has to have a very deep sensitivity to be aware of these conditions and situations. It shows that the dimension of suffering has so many facets and aspects. It is interesting that the Buddha started with this. Suffering is a fact. It is a fact that every human being can experience and has experienced.



The Cause of Suffering

Now the second noble truth is not so easy and clear. Because here you are told that the cause of suffering is your own models, your own expectations, your own ideas, your own assumptions, your own desires, your own wanting things to be only your own way. This is the cause of suffering.

I feel that the second noble truth is extremely important because it is only when you realise it that the third and the fourth noble truths can follow. So we will spend a few minutes just reflecting on the implications of the second noble truth.

One point is that when you see this, you have to take responsibility for what is happening inside yourself. This is not an easy teaching. To have complete self-reliance and to say: “I create my own suffering and therefore only I can free myself.” This is because there are some easier teachings where you are told: “I will help you, you have only to trust or surrender to me and everything will be all right. You do not have to do anything, only have trust,

faith, belief and so on.” Hence this second noble truth is an extremely radical teaching. It is not an easy teaching.

What is also difficult and subtle is for you to fully realise this truth. Take the example I gave this morning. Someone had stolen from you what you consider as extremely precious, something that is more precious than your own life. And when you were sad and suffering, someone asked you: “Why are you sad? Why are you suffering?” So you said: “That person took my most precious possession.” When we are angry and are sometimes asked: “Why are you angry?” we answer: “This person hurt me. He did such and such to me, that is why I am angry.”

Freedom from Suffering

3

So you see the second noble truth is something very subtle to realise. When a person's precious possession has been stolen, he says he feels sad because this man stole it. But can the person respond differently with something other than that reaction? Can he let go of his identification with what he considers as something very precious? If he can do that, then he will realise there is no suffering. So this is a very hard medicine. In fact, some medicines are not very pleasant, and not very sweet. So this medicine that is presented is also not very easy.

176

Once I met a Tibetan monk and I asked him: "Did you suffer when you were tortured? According to the Dhamma, how do you see that?" And he said: "I knew that it was because these people were torturing me that I was suffering. But as a meditator I had been practising very hard with physical pain, sitting for two or three hours at a stretch. So when they were torturing me, I was trying to see how far I could work with the pain rather than hate the person torturing me. I tried my best to use the

Buddha's medicine when I was suffering. Sometimes I was very successful and I had real gratitude for the Buddha's teaching for I saw that the medicine was working. And when the medicine was not working and I was suffering, I thought: May I be able to practise more."

I read a very moving account which was similar to this, but it was recounted by a Christian priest. I do not know all the details. He was being tortured in a prison, to get a confession out of him. But the priest was quite calm and silent. So the man who was torturing him said: "Why don't you speak, don't you know that I can kill you?" He answered: "Don't you realise that my body is already dead?" This is the medicine. It is difficult medicine, it is hard medicine, but it is based on an interesting principle.

The Way to Achieve Freedom

Now I would like to say something about what we do with the medicine, because we are all here trying to take the medicine and to taste the medicine. But we can also be doing other very interesting things with the medicine.

For instance, we can read all about the prescription without taking the medicine. I know of scholars in Sri Lanka — we have outstanding Buddhist scholars — who know the medicine from A to Z. When you listen to them speak, you feel that they have really taken the medicine. But they have only spoken from books. I was a librarian and I also considered books as my toys. This can be a trap, where you are accumulating knowledge about the prescription, about the medicine, and talking to others about the medicine, but you have never tasted the medicine yourself.

Then there are those who like to give the medicine to others but they have never taken it themselves. These people are sometimes meditation

teachers! They are very good at getting others to take the medicine, saying: “It is wonderful, it is great,” and so on.

So you see, there are many traps to fall into. I will mention a few more. Another one is to take the medicine for some time and when you realise nothing is happening, you try to change the medicine. Here in the West you have many medicines, sold in what I call spiritual supermarkets. You try one medicine for a few days, then maybe after seeing an advertisement, you start trying another medicine. You continue changing them without really giving any of them a chance, or really making a commitment to a particular medicine.

Then another thing some people do is to take the medicine only on meditation retreats. They say: “In everyday life I cannot take the medicine. It is just impossible. So I am waiting for retreats to take the medicine.” Hence they do one retreat after another! This is another way of taking the medicine.

Yet another very subtle way of using the medicine is to use it to do just what you like to do. I will give one or two examples of this. One medicine that is offered is you must learn to be kind to the body. So in everyday life you say: “Getting up at 6 o’clock to meditate is not very kind to the body. Getting up at 8:30 or 9.00 is good enough.” What is dangerous is that you are using the medicine to do only what you like to do.

Another very dangerous misuse of the medicine is to do anything you like to others, because according to the second noble truth people create their own suffering. That is a very dangerous medicine. The Buddha had warned against that. He said it is like catching hold of a poisonous snake at the wrong end. In a relationship, such a meditator can inflict suffering on another person and then say: “Are you suffering? You create the suffering yourself. You hurt your own mind. I am just doing what I should be doing.” Very easy! You see how complicated human beings are. The medicine is meant for healing oneself and others. But here one is using it in a very

destructive way. So once again, one has to be very clear and sensitive.

This brings up the importance of having spiritual friends around. You should be very grateful for the feedback you get from them, because we sometimes have what are called blind spots where we cannot see things clearly ourselves. But with all these difficulties, with all these blind spots, if you can really take the medicine then you realise that the medicine is really helping you.

In practical terms what does it mean to say that the medicine is working? In simple terms it is when you realise your suffering is becoming less and less. Or to put it more positively, you discover you have more loving-kindness. Symptoms from the sickness will arise as the monsters will still arise, but you are very clear about the medicine and you have the confidence that the medicine is going to help you, because you know it through experience.

I am reluctant to speak about stages, but what I would like a meditator to achieve is such a state

where he or she can say with complete self-confidence that there is no problem when the monsters arise that he or she cannot deal with because he or she knows the medicine that works. Then the meditator comes to a state in which whether the monsters come or not makes no difference. Why? Because he or she knows what to do when they are there. And when they are not there, he or she knows that too.

Another very important sign that the medicine is working is having loving-kindness towards other people. When you see people suffering from the same sickness, and you realise that the medicine is working for you, you engage them and say: “Please try this.” I think this aspect — to be able to give to others, to be able to help others — is very important in our practice. I was very happy to hear from the yoga teacher that her own teacher would say in the morning: “Now whom can I help today?” You can ask yourself the question during the whole day: “How can I help other people?” And then do it.

This is a very good medicine, because otherwise, as I said on the first or second day, one of the dangers

is that when you take to meditation, self-awareness and introspection, you become so self-centred and preoccupied with yourself that you have no regard for the people around you. This can be another danger of the medicine. So it is extremely important while helping yourself to help others also. In fact, it is a very effective medicine because otherwise with our problems, suffering and wounds we can really be preoccupied and overwhelmed by them, to the extent we haven't any regard, concern or sensitivity for others. Hence this is an effective way to forget your worries and concerns by seeing how far you can relate to another person.

I would just like to share an experience of a meditator at Nilambe. She had some deep wounds, deep problems. So being in isolation she was with them most of the time. As this is a meditation centre, a retreat centre, you have a lot of time by yourself and you can really become stuck in this inner world that you have created. So sometimes I encourage meditators to go and help people so as to see the suffering of others, because in Sri Lanka there are so many opportunities to witness different forms

of suffering. She went to a home where there are retarded children, disabled children, and when she saw them with all their suffering, her own suffering was forgotten. She forgot her problems and picked them up and cared for them. There was an immense change in her.



Questions Concerning the Four Noble Truths

I think I will stop now and if you have any questions, any disagreements, please present them. It is a very important theme.

Retreatant: *Can there be suffering because of the desire of others, for instance when someone sexually assaults another person?*

Godwin: I am happy you mention sexual assault, because I have been trying to help some people who have been sexually abused, and people who have been raped. So I will share very briefly how the medicine can be given in this situation.

One thing I realised from the victims was that they were very angry at the person who was responsible for that incident. When I worked with them, I did not tell them about the second noble truth. I told them: “Yes, you are suffering. All this has been created by the other person. I can

understand your anger.” As I said on a previous occasion, I would tell them: “Please go somewhere and show your anger, express it and bring it out.”

Another thing I experienced with them was that they felt guilty. They felt responsible for what the other person did to them. Here again I would tell them: “It is natural that you feel guilty. But let us work slowly, gradually, gently to find out how far you can let go of the guilt.” I did not tell them that the guilt is their own creation. I said: “It is okay that you feel guilty, but see how far you can forgive yourself. It is not easy and it takes some time, but slowly, slowly the medicine may start to help.”

Another thing I realised was the way they related to their body. Because of what had happened to their body they hated their body. Sometimes they felt alienated from their body, as if it was someone else’s body. So when they told me: “Well, I feel as if this body is not mine,” I did not say to them: “This is the Buddha’s teaching, this body is not yours.” I told them: “It is natural that you should feel this way.” And I have some exercises I give to people to work with the body.

So this is the beauty of the medicine. It is so flexible that it can be used in a very creative way, used according to where the person is. For such people I do not give a lecture on the Four Noble Truths!

Any other questions?

Retreatant: *Can people be harmed by their education?*

Godwin: I do not see a difference between sexual abuse and educational abuse. I meet both types of individuals. I meet individuals who have been abused by educational conditioning. Their whole lives have been programmed by it. So again it is a matter of using the medicine very creatively so that the other person can realise how he or she is affected by the coloured glasses of their education. And slowly, slowly to see whether they can catch glimpses of what happens when they do not wear these coloured glasses.

Retreatant: *Is suffering caused because of desiring itself or because of what you desire?*

Godwin: It is your desire, your identification and your wanting that cause suffering. When I spoke about the Second Noble Truth, I said it is very subtle and that it is really not easy because you have to take responsibility. But when I meet a child or a sexually abused person, I would never say: “You have to take responsibility.” When I work with children, I never use the words ‘meditation’ or ‘Buddhism’. As I said, this is the beauty of the medicine. You have to see what medicine is appropriate to give, when to give it and how to give it. You should read the life of the Buddha. How he used the medicine with different people is very touching. I will tell a very touching incident that is mentioned:

A child maybe five or six years old suddenly came to the conclusion that her doll had died. She was urging her parents to invite the Buddha for the customary ceremony because the doll had died, and she would like the Buddha to come and officiate at it. I can visualise the scene:

The man went before the Buddha and said: “Please come for a ceremony.” The Buddha replied: “What is the ceremony for?”

“My daughter’s doll has died.”

“What can I do when your daughter’s doll has died?”

“Yet my daughter would like you to come and officiate at the ceremony.”

“Okay, I will come.”

This is the beauty of it, that the Buddha can come down to the level of a child. I can relate many such stories which bring this out very well. He did not tell the Four Noble Truths to the daughter, or stress the Second Noble Truth.

Any other questions please?

***Retreatant:** Why should there be different medicine for one person and for another?*

Godwin: There are some people who have the space, the clarity, the understanding to use the medicine for themselves. Then there are those whom you meet who attend the so-called psychiatric clinics,

where I would not speak about the Second Noble Truth. With different people, a different kind of relationship and connection have to be built.

I must say honestly this medicine of self-reliance is not what we want. You have to be really mature for it. But this is the beauty of the Teaching. In the Dhamma there is teaching for people at all levels.



Day 9:
Everyday Life



Everyday Life

Godwin: I would like to present some very practical and simple suggestions about meditation in everyday life.



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. But if the same conditions are not available in everyday life, how can one expect similar states of mind? That is why I have been emphasising very much while you are here to work with emotions, to be open to unpleasant states of mind like the monsters, and so on.

The next point is 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, ranking maybe first, second or third among those 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.”

Here what might be helpful is to find out whether you really like meditation, whether you find it interesting, whether you can develop a curiosity about it, and whether you have clearly developed a taste for it. Otherwise how can you have a commitment to meditation, be motivated towards it, if you find that it is such a big battle, very unpleasant and requiring a great effort when you are practising?

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.



However, the real challenge we have in everyday life is when facing anxiety, stress, anger, and all the other monsters, how can we find them interesting? This is why in this retreat I have been emphasising very much that they should be your objects of meditation. 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. So this is another very interesting perspective to have in relation to meditation in daily life.

Now one thing I have heard from the meditators here, especially those who have jobs, is that they are really exhausted and tired at the end of the day, as they have to work from morning till late in the

evening. And it's the same routine everyday — they go home tired, they eat something and then go to sleep, and early next morning they get up and they go to work again. So how can such a routine allow them to meditate, even if they would like to meditate and have some interest in it?

So I would like to suggest one or two practical things for such people. Because what happens to them is that there is a build-up during the day with more stress, more anxiety, more work so that by the end of the day they are really stressed out. And they honestly tell me in that situation it is not possible to have awareness, for this is a fact of their experience.

One suggestion I would like to offer them is what I call toilet meditation. Do not laugh, because in the main text where the Buddha describes the development of awareness or mindfulness, in the *Satipatthana Sutta* — this is a very important text for meditation — it is said that when you are in the toilet you should practise mindfulness and awareness. Now you can use that from time to time during the

day. So take a few toilet breaks during the day! How many breaks can you take in a day? Three breaks? More? Good, the more the better! So when you go to the toilet you have a very nice sitting posture!



The Breath

Now what is important to do — and this is another thing which I have been emphasising — is to have a connection with your breath, connecting with your breath as you would to a friend. I have been emphasising two aspects about the breath. One is to use this friend to stop all that build-up and just for a few minutes to be with the breath, and be in the present moment. Thus I would like to repeat that you need to build this relationship and establish this connection with the breath. No sooner than you think of your friend, there is space. You then find yourself in the present, and are centred within yourself.

Another thing I have been emphasising is to find your own way concerning how to use the breath to develop friendliness and loving-kindness. You must make this connection so that you can use the breath for five or ten minutes in this way, and this should, if you go on practising, create space in your mind, and create a break during the day. Then when you go back to your work you should be able to start your work feeling fresh and renewed.

Relating to Things Around You

Another practical suggestion that I would like to offer which you can do while you are working, and which I have also been emphasising, is to pause and just spend some time looking at what is there in the room. Looking at things with a curious mind, as if you are seeing them for the first time, and without making any past associations. So when you look around, you might see computers or telephones. What else do you see in your office?

Retreatant: *Plants and flowers.*

Godwin: Flowers, that is a good point. So if someone doesn't have flowers in their workplace, please take some with you on Monday when you go to work. I mean, this is why I was emphasising relating to nature. In a poem by Mother Theresa she said: "Find life a delight." I have joined two words together to express this — gentle delight. They are beautiful words, even when you just hear them. I do not know how they sound in German.

Retreatant: *Sanftes Entzücken.*

Godwin: That sounds beautiful too.

So for just a few minutes, please have this gentle delight in seeing the flowers or the plants that are there, and also learn to have a little gentle delight when you see the computers. I am emphasising the need to feel grateful. After all, you are working with the computer in your job, it is a very useful friend. I mean, this is a very interesting idea, to have a connection with the things that you are using. There is a beautiful book of Zen poems. The title of the book is *One Robe, One Bowl*. It is a collection of poems written by a Zen monk who had only one robe and one bowl, and some of the poems describe the connection he had with his robe and bowl. It is really touching. In one poem he had forgotten where he had left his bowl, and when he remembered he went back and said: “Oh my dear poor bowl, I am sure you have missed me, I missed you!” So when you go back after this retreat to your computers, say: “Poor computer, I am sure you missed me — but to be honest I did not miss you! But still I am happy to be back.” This is what is called gentle delight.

Please see that this gentle delight can come not from special or extraordinary experiences, but from simple things. This is another point to remember: that 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.



Okay Meditation

Here's another meditation for you to consider: what I call the okay meditation! I got a few plusses when I gave that guided 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."

One day Paul mentioned the non-reactive mind. I think even before that we had an exercise to see the difference between the reactive and the non-reactive mind. So this is another interesting tool to work with in everyday life, to remember to think: “How far can I not react to the stress? How far can I not react to the anger that is arising?” when difficult situations arise.

Now another tool which I have been emphasising very much is to explore, investigate and find out. That means if stressful states of mind are arising, see if you can explore and investigate them as they are arising. See if you can find out and make discoveries about them. If you can do this at that moment, you get a hundred out of a hundred, a big plus! But most of the time you may not be able to achieve that because it is not easy.

Reflection

Yet another tool which all of us can relate to is to reflect, to take your mind backwards and find out more about the reactive mind. You can try this at some point after going home or during the weekend itself. Again, you earn seventy-five marks out of a hundred. That is a big plus! This is a very useful tool, and in this way we can learn from any experience we have had, even unpleasant ones which we think were failures.

But what is important in this exploration is that you need to have a very gentle and friendly connection with yourself. You need to do it in a very gentle, very friendly way, and not as though wielding a stick, to find out why you behaved in that manner. The important thing is to explore what has happened without attaching a minus to it. So it is like saying: "It is okay that you did this but let us find out what really happened to you."

As I was saying, we can have others as spiritual friends, but you can also have yourself as a spiritual

friend. In the same way you have dialogues with spiritual friends, what you can do is to have a really friendly dialogue with yourself, which you can really enjoy and find interesting or amusing: “Why did you get angry with your boss last week? Now I remember the way you were looking at your boss. It is really interesting, the way you looked at him. Normally you do not look at people in that way. Were you really angry? What made you so angry and caused you to look at him in that way? Alright, it is okay, let me see how I look at him next time.”

Aren't our mistakes and failures beautiful? You can really use the person who creates problems for you as an object of investigation and meditation. Has anyone heard me talking about the lawnmower principle? Maybe some of you have not heard of it before. It is related to this point, so I will say what I mean by the lawnmower principle.

When I was in South Africa there was a very big meditation centre, much like the one here, 300 acres in all. On one retreat I led there was a very intense group, a very serious group — so I didn't

enjoy it very much! During one sitting session a gardener was mowing the grass outside. So after that session one of the meditators went running to the centre's director and said: "Please stop that man using the lawnmower." So the centre's director came to me and asked: "Now what do we do?" I said: "Please continue with the lawnmower!" In that evening's discussion I said: "Now tomorrow we will still be hearing the lawnmower, and when we hear the lawnmower, let us all make that the object of our meditation. Forget about your breath, forget about loving-kindness, and forget about all the other objects, make the sound of the lawnmower the object of meditation. And when we hear the sound of the lawnmower, let us all see how far we can make friends with it. In the evening, the man who had earlier objected to it said: "I would like to share with the group that I have now made friends with the lawnmower!" On the last day he even had a photograph taken of himself with the lawnmower, and he sent me a copy. This is what I mean by the lawnmower principle. And it is a very useful principle in everyday life.

Another point I would like to mention about sitting in daily practice is that it is a good thing if you can do it, even if you can only sit for a short period in the morning. Therefore if you normally wake up at six in the morning, please make a commitment to getting up half an hour earlier. During that half an hour you can start with some yoga or bodywork, followed by meditation on the breath, and end with a meditation on loving-kindness. If you are unable to do that for some reason, please do not think: “This means that I cannot meditate, my meditation is over.” This is why I emphasise that if you cannot sit, try to use some of the suggestions I offered for practice during the day.

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 until 10 you were not angry! 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.

That is why I suggested earlier that you learn to relate to yourself as a plaything, as a toy. This is because if you can relate to yourself as a toy you can find yourself amusing and entertaining. With toys normally we either become dependant on them or we change from one toy to another. But here with

the different connections you can have with this toy,
you become self-content and interested in yourself.



Setting an Example

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, like volunteering for social welfare work. It is a good thing if you can participate in such projects, and the Centre here is very much involved in such projects — but in the above way, compassion and loving-kindness become a way of life.

Now I remember someone asked me this: “Suppose my friend is not a meditator and I am

a meditator now. How do I get my friend to be interested in meditation? How do I get a child interested in meditation? What should we do?” Sri Lankans also often ask this question. Sometimes the husband is a meditator and the husband would come and say: “My wife is not interested in meditation, how can I get her to be interested in meditation?” This is what I suggest to them — show in your own behaviour to that person that with meditation, with the taking of this medicine, there are some changes taking place in you. Then that person will realise that you are so different now. He or she will discover that previously you had moods, but now you are smiling most of the time!

Or as an example, a husband may say to his wife: “Now what you cook is much better. It has a very nice taste!” Or maybe a friend comments: “In the past you gossiped about other people, now you do not gossip at all! What is the secret, what are you doing?” “I am doing what is called meditation, would you like to try it?” “Yes, yes, please teach me because I would also like to smile like you. I have this bad habit of gossiping. I would also like to stop

gossiping.” So it is by example that we can affect and influence others. And this is what we can do with children too.

When I say this I am reminded of a Tibetan story. In this retreat, I have not been relating many stories. Usually I relate more. This story shows how the behaviour of a person made another person reflect. There was once a very pious and saintly monk who lived in a certain place. He had a devotee who was a very rich woman. She was very impressed and inspired by this monk so she wanted to present him with something very special. She told the goldsmith in the village to make a bowl out of gold. Now this news that a golden bowl was being made for the monk reached the ears of the chief thief in the village. The robber thought: “Ah! There is a wonderful opportunity coming, let me wait till it is finished and I shall see what I can do.”

Receiving news that the bowl would be presented on that day to the monk, the thief went to the temple. When the monk saw the robber, he knew why he had come. So the monk went in, took the

bowl and threw it in the direction of the robber. This really confused the robber. “I was waiting all this time to steal this bowl and when this monk gets it he throws it away! What kind of person is he?” thought the thief. He was very curious to know. So he walked up to the monk and said: “Please tell me how it is that you are able to throw this bowl away as soon as you saw me?” He replied: “I meditate and I am unattached.” The thief asked: “Can I also learn to meditate?” The monk answered: “Yes, of course you can.” This confused him even more because earlier whenever he went to spiritual teachers they would tell him to first change his profession and become a spiritual person, before he can meditate. He said: “You are the only person to tell me that I could still be in this profession and practise meditation as well. That is very interesting. Please, tell me more about meditation and what I can do.” The monk said: “Hereafter, when you do some action, just be mindful of what you are doing, and just reflect why you are doing it.” The thief thought: “This sounds simple!” So he said: “I will try to practise and I will come back to you.”



After some time, the robber thought: “Now it is time to practise my profession, but I must also remember to practise meditation.” So, as the story goes, he wanted to break into a house, but then he remembered the words of the monk: “Just reflect about the action that you are going to do. Reflect with mindfulness.” So the thief thought: ‘Now what am I about to do?’ Immediately he realised the implication of what he was going to do and he could not proceed any further. He went back to the monk and he said: “Now I will practise only meditation and not my profession.”



Questions about Meditation in Everyday Life

I would like to stop now because I am sure you must have many questions. So please present your questions and your difficulties, and say when in everyday life you cannot use meditation, or ask how one can use meditation in facing a real-life situation. If you have any examples of such situations, we can try to explore them and see what can be done.

***Retreatant:** What do you think about physical aches during meditation, not in the legs, but in other parts of the body – these aches only come 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.

I have discovered that sometimes the pain can have a physical reason, and sometimes certain pains and tensions can be due to a psychological reason. If it has a physical reason, you can work with the pain in this way for some time and then change the posture.

However, in relation to pain 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. Thus in meditation what we are trying to do is not to get rid of the pain but to learn to see even when pain is there, how far we can relate to the pain without necessarily suffering as a result of the pain. So if you can come and see me tomorrow, I would like to find out where your pain is and perhaps we can explore the pain together.

Any questions about everyday life, or meditation in everyday life? Challenges we have? Difficulties we have? Problems we have...?

Retreatant: *You know I am a computer programmer. You have talked about computers. For me, the problem is not that the computer is not my friend, it is a case of perhaps being too much my friend! And the problem is that I bring the work home, here in my brain. Every time I sit in meditation, I take one in-breath and one out-breath and then I start thinking: "Oh, there was this problem in programming," and I start thinking about the programming, and I am very concentrated on it. It is no problem for me to spend half an hour programming in my meditation, without having any other thoughts!*

Godwin: So the thing is, however much you try to be with the breath, it is just not possible? I can really understand that. So here again, one can make programming the object of meditation. One suggestion I would like to offer is that when these thoughts about the computer come during your meditation, try to focus attention not on the

thoughts but on your state of mind. Can you at least have a non-reactive mind for some time with these thoughts coming and going about the programming? So the emphasis is more on the non-reactive mind. And you are just being with that, thoughts coming and going about computers and programming and all that. Does that make sense? This is why I have been speaking a lot about thoughts, because we all have thoughts from morning till night, so it is very important to learn to work with our thoughts. So this is one suggestion I would like to offer.

Another suggestion is you might have to slowly, slowly break this habit of bringing your work and office to your home. It shows that either you are really enjoying your work very much or that in relation to your work you are very creative, so that you are always trying to find new programmes and ways. What do you think may be the reason why you are so preoccupied with computers and programming?

Retreatant: *I like it so much, I am very enthusiastic about writing programmes.*



Godwin: That is very nice, it shows that you are really enjoying your work. It is rare that people have this enthusiasm and interest for their work so it is very nice in a way.

Retreatant: *It takes away room for many other things. That is the problem. It is also very exhausting.*

Godwin: Yes, and so what do you do when this has really become a strong habit? How do you break this habit? To break this habit, you have to be very alert and awake to work with the habit. So this again is about working with your thoughts. The thought of the computer comes and you have to catch it and let it go. You should try doing this not only when you are sitting but even before that.

This is one suggestion. Another suggestion is to trick the mind. Try this during our next sitting. Think: “Now I am going to sit and I am going to think only of programming. Come on, come on, thoughts” — and see what happens!