Opening Talk

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:16:59

Welcome to our retreat here at this beautiful space. It's such a lovely space. We're actually really fortunate to have such an intimate setting with the twelve of you here. One of the early retreats I sat was about this size, and it remains one of my fond memories—having the container of the retreat be so intimate. So it's really lovely to have you all here with us.

I'm Andrea Fella. I've been teaching for a number of years now and teach at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts, at Spirit Rock in California, and at various places around the country like this one who invite me to come. My dear friend and colleague Greg and I pretty much met when we were helping create a retreat together in Burma. We've got a lot of history together and time spent together, both teaching retreats and managing retreats. Greg also teaches at the Insight Meditation Society and in Burma. He's an international meditation teacher now, teaching all over the world. So we're very happy to be here with you for this retreat.

I'd like to say a few words about the schedule. There are a few of you here who have never been on a meditation retreat before. The schedules are posted around various places on the bulletin board. It's a regular schedule. We have a system of bells, and for those of you who aren't familiar with our retreats and the bell system, it's pretty simple. If you hear a bell in here when we ring it at the end of the sitting, it means it's time to go walking. If you hear a bell out there, it means it's time to come back in here. Around the meal times, you'll probably know it's around the meal times—your body will tell you. So it's pretty simple, and you can actually see if you can renounce your watch, renounce looking at your watch, and just settle into the container and the support that's provided here to structure our time together.

We're pretty much sitting and walking, practicing sitting and walking meditation all day, punctuated by our meals. There are three particular events each day. At the 8:30 sitting in the morning, we'll have instructions and some time for questions after that. At the 3 o'clock sitting in the afternoon, we'll have a metta practice, which is a guided loving-kindness, heart-opening practice. Then in the evening at 7:40 we'll have a talk. That's the structure of the day.

During the week, we will offer practice discussions, meetings with you individually. We'll both have opportunities for regularly scheduled meetings with you as well as a few spaces for sign-up interviews if you'd like some extra time to speak with us. We'll start those on Sunday. Tomorrow will just be a day to settle into the rhythm of the place and the schedule, and then we'll talk more about the individual practice discussions on Sunday.

I wanted to say a few words about basically what we're doing here. I'd like to start by recalling how I felt

as I came up here today. I was on the Twin Hearts shuttle driving up through the gorge. It's beautiful in the gorge—the landscape is beautiful, and it's just so lovely. The raw beauty of the desert touches me so much. There's something about the desert that very deeply resonates with me. And then coming out of the gorge onto the plateau, it's just such an opening. Moving into that space, the vastness of the desert becomes so apparent. The vastness of the sky, the expansiveness of the sky. I felt like my heart just expanded with the land.

So there's this container of the environment, the desert that we're in, the raw beauty of the land, the expansiveness of the view, the space. We can look out quite a long way, especially if you walk a little bit up the hill. And then there's the sky and the purity of the air. It's just amazing. This kind of container that we're held in can support us. The beauty of the place, the expansiveness, the spaciousness can support us. If we feel like we get contracted in our minds or struggle and feel tight and held in our mind, we can go out into the space and just recognize that there's more to life and the world than our own internal struggles.

And then there's the container of the retreat itself—the silence, the simplicity. We'll be in silence here.

Just hold our days in silence. We'll talk—we'll be talking—but largely, you will be in silence.

Now, when you come into the interviews, the practice discussions, the meetings with us, it's fine to speak. You don't have to write out a description of your experience and hand it to us. If you're in your yogi jobs, it's fine to speak to Surya and to communicate functional speech. So it doesn't have to be a strict kind of silence in that way; we're not clamping down on our mouths for a week. But we are moving into a place of noble silence where we are looking at our minds, with the support of the silence to encourage us to move inward as opposed to outward. Letting go of this talking actually encourages us to move inwards. So the silence is one of the aspects of this container.

The simplicity—the schedule is pretty simple. We sit, then we walk, then we sit, then we walk, then we sit, then we eat, then we sit, then we walk. It goes like that. And so the simplicity here... I mean, our lives are not simple. Our lives are full of busyness. They're full of computers and gadgets and meetings and partners and excitement and the whole show of our lives. And here we have an opportunity to really let go of that, to let go of the busyness of our lives and settle into something really, really simple. Simplicity is a huge support for our practice.

The schedule is also an aspect of the container. It supports a kind of sustaining of this awareness, a sustaining of the attention. We practice. We learn that we can practice more continuously. We learn how to practice more continuously. This also greatly supports our settling.

And then there's the support of each other, the sangha support—another aspect of this container of the retreat. I think you'll find, and those of you who are experienced with retreats know this, that it's so beautiful. The silence is wonderful, and the fact that we're together in silence is really wonderful. The

support that we offer each other in the silence is quite profound. We don't have to make eye contact. We don't have to gesture or communicate in any way. I've spent whole retreats where all I've looked at is people's socks and shoes and not looked up and looked at their faces.

While it may seem a bit awkward—for those of you who are new on retreat, it may seem a little awkward not to be making eye contact—it will also support this settling into the container of the retreat. We mention this partly because for some people new on retreat especially, it seems odd that people aren't looking at you, and you feel like this is really strange. I remember on my very first retreat, I felt like I didn't know if I was okay unless I could make eye contact with people. But by the end of that retreat, I really appreciated the fact that you're left alone, that you're with a community but left alone to just meet yourself. There's no need to be anything for anyone. It's a huge gift that we offer each other.

And the practice that we do is a support for each other. There have been times I remember—when I'd look across at somebody who was moving very mindfully. I remember getting up and walking out of the meditation hall one day and seeing somebody move their hands to shift their posture, and it was so clear to me the person was completely present. It just took me into a whole new realm of possibility for being mindful. So just seeing how we practice—and sometimes we can struggle, we feel like we're struggling, and we can see somebody just doing walking meditation, and there can be a sense of, if they can do it, I can do it. We support each other in this way. It's a very beautiful thing.

So allow yourself to be held by these containers: the container of the desert, the spaciousness, the beauty, the silence of the desert; the container of the retreat, the silence, the simplicity, the stillness, the support that we offer each other, and the schedule. Allow yourself to be held by these containers. If we just came here and allowed ourselves to be held by the container of the desert and were in silence and simplicity—that's all we did for the week—I think you'd probably find there was actually quite a bit of settling that happened.

So just the container itself can provide a place where the mind settles down. But we can actually go much further than this. The mind settles through simplicity, but we can also train our minds to settle more deeply—through letting go of our habitual tendency to think about the past and the future, and even about the present moment. We sit here thinking about the present moment as well. We find our mind running in commentary about what's happening right now.

Just letting go of these habits of mind to think. Not that thinking is bad—it's not so much that thinking is bad, but thinking does tend to take us out of the present moment. It is possible to be aware while we are thinking, to be mindful while we are thinking. But it tends to be that our thoughts send us shooting into other worlds and times and places. Whole worlds get created in our minds, and then we lose track of where we actually are. We lose track of our lives actually, of what's actually happening—the direct lived experience of the moment.

And so over and over again we let go of this tendency to think and come back to the lived experience of

the moment. Over and over again we come back to this lived experience with a quality of kindness and friendliness to our attention. These two pieces—the coming back, the letting go of thoughts, and this friendliness, this kindness, this sense of open-hearted willingness to meet what's happening—these two pieces really allow a settling of the mind. They support an opening of the heart and a quieting of the mind.

That process then opens us to an even deeper possibility, a more profound opening to begin to learn and understand about our own minds. And this is really where this practice is so powerful. The settling is wonderful, actually. You'll find it can move to places of peacefulness and ease through the settling down of the mind. But this practice of mindfulness, the vipassanā practice that we do, is profound in that it allows us to explore how our minds respond to the world. And we find that our minds actually respond to the world in some not so helpful ways a lot of the time—very reactive. We have habitual ways that we get caught in reactivity.

So we learn through observing—and we'll talk about this during the week—learn through observing how our minds do what they do. And gradually through this observing, this watching, the mind starts to release and let go around these patterns, lets go of these habits. We also begin to understand, as we watch what's happening in our minds, that the usual perspective we have on the world is limited. It really kind of boxes us into a very narrow view. And not only is it limited, but many of the ways we view the world are actually completely mistaken. There's a fundamental misunderstanding that we have around how the world works, how our minds work, how things work.

One of the key ways that we misunderstand is around where happiness is to be found. Our usual notion is that happiness comes from getting what we want. This is one of our main notions. And as we move into more and more letting go of the things that we want, the more we practice, the more we see that a lot of the things we used to want have begun to fall away. But then we start to want particular meditative states. So the pattern actually keeps replicating itself. It's a deep pattern, deeply conditioned—that having what I want is the way towards happiness. Very deeply conditioned.

Another way that we think happiness comes is from being in control of our experience. Whether or not things are pleasant, if I feel like I'm in control, there's a sense of, "Okay, this is good. This is okay when I'm in control."

These are beliefs. "Happiness comes from getting what I want." These beliefs are deeply conditioned by our culture, by our upbringing, and also, I think, encouraged by evolution. Some of the ways evolution has unfolded have actually encouraged this notion: get what I want, that's where happiness lies.

Very deeply, we do know at some level that having a particular thing—while it feels good to have something that we want—we know that that is not the be-all and end-all. But we do seem to believe, deeply believe, that what happiness means is over and over getting the next thing that I want. That constructing a life strung together with getting things I want—that's happiness. And it's so deeply conditioned, so much a part of our lives, that we can't even envision happiness coming in any other way.

It's just so profoundly conditioned.

So there is a happiness in getting what we want—I want to acknowledge that. There's a sense of pleasure in the having. There is a kind of happiness that comes from that. And the Buddha acknowledged that. He actually acknowledged that there are many levels and layers of happiness.

He talked about wealth that was righteously gained. Righteous wealth righteously gained is a happiness of a householder, of a person who has to be in the world. Money acquired by wholesome means, by skillful means, by right livelihood, is a happiness because we can then support our families, support the things that we love, support causes that we find important. We can use our resources as a kind of sustaining thing to support what we think is important, what our priorities are. So this is a happiness. The Buddha did talk about this as being a happiness.

But the flaw really comes in the strategy around having what we want, and over and over again having what we want. There are a couple of flaws to this strategy. One is that some measure of the time we don't succeed in getting what we want. And we think, because happiness comes from getting what we want, that somehow when we don't succeed, we're a failure. That something's wrong with us. That it's a problem. Rather than it simply being a natural part of the condition of the world—that sometimes conditions come together so that we get what we want, and sometimes they come together so that we don't. So we take it personally often when we don't get what we want.

There are various levels of this in your life. It may be that you don't get a chocolate bar that you like because somebody else took the last one. That's a small one. But you don't get the job that you really want—there's a little more investment in that, a little bit more suffering around that.

If we do succeed in getting what we want, there can be an anxiety at times, a fear that it will go away. So there's a kind of having to shore that thing up. Oh, I've got what I want. How do I keep it? And so there's a continual process around keeping it. Those are two aspects of this strategy that are mistaken in our minds in a way.

But the really fundamental mistake in this strategy is that while there is a happiness that comes from getting what we want, a lot of that happiness comes not from the fact that we have this thing, but from the fact that the feeling of wanting has gone away. For a few moments we have a release from that feeling of wanting something. That's actually quite significant. When we start to recognize it, it's quite a strong part of the happiness of getting what we want—the happiness of letting go of the wanting.

Wanting itself is not pleasant. We don't actually, until we start to pay attention to this experience, even think to look at the experience of wanting, because we're so focused on the idea of having the thing. We're projecting into the future, thinking about how great it's going to be to get that thing. And that idea, that fantasy, is pleasant. It obscures for us the actual unpleasantness of the state of wanting.

As soon as wanting comes up in our experience, there's a feeling of lack, a feeling of insufficiency. And we

mistake this because we're focused on the idea of the having. We don't see this feeling of lack. We don't see that this is a fundamental state that we're actually encouraging by being on this cycle of wanting something and getting it—the wanting and then the getting and the having. By being on that cycle, we actually encourage more of this wanting. It actually encourages us to be in this state of lack, of insufficiency. It's quite amazing that our minds do this.

So when the feeling of wanting goes away, the feeling of lack goes away, the feeling of insufficiency goes away. This is one of the explorations that we make in this practice. We start to see that a lot of our struggle, our unease, our unhappiness comes because we are not satisfied with things as they are. We're always wanting things to be just slightly some other way. Things are just not quite the way we want them to be.

In that state of wanting things to be other than they are, we're kind of out of line, out of alignment with reality, out of alignment with the actuality of experience. So the practice begins to put us in alignment with truth, with alignment with reality.

Now sometimes, often actually, when I talk about wanting like this, people ask about desire. Is all desire bad? What about the desire to take care of my family? That doesn't seem like a bad thing.

In the Buddhist teaching there are two different ideas that are both often translated in similar ways. One is often translated as wanting or craving, and the other is often translated as desire. Wanting or craving is this term—the Pali term is *taṇhā*. And it has a real stickiness to it. It has a sense of needing to have things be a certain way. So it's often got a sense of stickiness to a particular result.

So that's this craving, this wanting that is not helpful for us. It's kind of like we're setting ourselves up to project into the future and say, "This is the way it has to be in order for me to be happy." And if it doesn't happen that way, what happens? We don't have that scenario come up. We struggle, we suffer, we feel dissatisfied, we feel like we have to fix things, we feel like we're a failure.

Then there's another side—the Pali term is *chanda*, which is often translated as desire. This is a neutral kind of desire. It can be flavored by whatever else is happening in the mind. So there can be an unwholesome kind of *chanda*, unwholesome desire that maybe is focused towards pleasure. It's not going to be something deeply wrong, but it's skewed towards pleasure. That's the first of the hindrances: *kama chanda*, the desire for sense pleasure.

But this *chanda*, this kind of desire, can also be associated with wholesome, beautiful qualities of mind like kindness and compassion, and letting go. This is actually an exploration we make during the week—to see when we're choosing to act. Are we choosing to act out of kindness and compassion, or are we choosing to act out of greed and aversion? The desire, the wish that comes along with kindness and compassion and letting go—that's a wholesome wish. We want to encourage those explorations.

So there's really a theme here that we're cultivating this week. There's a two-sided thread of awareness

and wisdom, understanding, that comes from the practice of mindfulness. And then there's the kindness and compassion. Actually, the practice of mindfulness can be completely interwoven with this kindness and compassion. When we really start to resonate with the practice, we see that it is one of the most compassionate things we can do for ourselves—one of the kindest actions we can take by being present for ourselves.

I'd like to welcome you for my part as well. It's great to be here. It's a beautiful place, this lodge, and it's so quiet here. I just came back a week ago from spending a month in Burma—or Myanmar as it's called these days—which is a place that's dear to my heart. I've done a lot of time practicing there. I lived there as a monk for a time some years ago. I've gone there almost every winter since 1997 to help with the retreat that Andrea mentioned.

It's not quiet there. A lot of the meditation centers, if this were Burma, there would be music playing and a lot of action going on outside—dogs barking. So we're really lucky. We have great conditions here to have this kind of real quiet.

Before I begin talking about the Refuges and Precepts, which is the next phase of this evening, I just want to acknowledge that it's great to have this small, intimate group. And it's an interesting group because we have people who have never been on a retreat before, who've maybe almost never meditated before. And some people have been practicing for nearly twenty-five years or more. So it's a real range, and that's great.

It made me think of my first retreat. My introduction to meditation practice was a ten-day retreat, and I had not meditated for even a second before I went to it. It was all really new, and it might be kind of how some of you are feeling. I'd never heard any of these words in this Pali language.

I remember hearing the word *metta.* There were these helpful little notes all around the place that said things like, "Don't bring any food into the meditation hall," signed "Metta." Or "Please be on time for the sitting," signed "Metta." And I thought there was some helpful busybody on the retreat whose name was Metta who couldn't help but leave these nice little notes around.

I survived that ten-day retreat. So if some of you are wondering if you might make it through the week, I think you probably will.

There will be a lot of words in this Pali language—spelled P-A-L-I. It's a variation on Sanskrit, an ancient language that exists because of the teachings of the Buddha. It's not used for anything else these days. The teachings were preserved in that language, and we'll be using some of the words. Try not to assume that you know them all.

And so I did pass out these chanting sheets. This is really the formal entrance into the retreat—taking the

refuges and precepts, it's called. It involves doing some chanting in this language. We'll do it call and response, so you can get through it without any trouble. For some of you, this may be something really familiar, and for others, no doubt it's brand new.

This really is the beginning of the retreat. Andrea spoke about containers—the container of this place, the container of the silence here. You could say there's a container of our shared aspiration, whatever it might be that would inspire us to come on a retreat like this. This is not something that everybody does. You could have all gone on vacation, or you could have headed up to the mountains and gone skiing—I think there's a pretty good base up there. But instead, something got you to come and sign up for this retreat. So there's that shared inspiration. You could say it's the inspiration to explore what it is to be human, to undertake this cultivation of kindness, of love, of wisdom for this time. And then there's this container that we create through undertaking the refuges and precepts.

I want to say a little bit about these things. We don't think of the word refuge too much in our daily lives. Maybe some of us do, but we don't talk about needing a place of refuge that often. We might ask ourselves or look in our lives and think about what that word means. It's a place of safety. You could say a safe harbor. Sometimes it's said that refuge is likened to a safe place where we could rest our hearts, a safe place to put our hearts.

We might ask ourselves: What would be a place of safety, a place of real refuge in the world? In an uncertain, changing, unpredictable world, what's safe? What would be a true refuge? What do we turn to for refuge? It's really important to think about this and to make it real for each of us, for ourselves.

I'm not going to offer something that is then a system of belief to put on, a mantle of belief to adopt. That's not what this practice, what the teachings are about. There's this word, *ehipassiko*. It's one of the descriptions of the Buddha's teachings, of the Dharma. The word translates as "come and see for yourself." It's a really important aspect of what we offer here—this invitation. Try it on, put it into practice in a sincere way, and see: Does this lead to things that are helpful and useful? Does it lead to good things, to freedom, to peace, to ease in our lives? Or not? There's that invitation.

When we think about refuge, I was thinking tonight when I came into the hall and bowed to this statue here. You'll see me do that—when I come to the hall, I'm going to bow. And what would that be about? You might start asking, "What's up with that?" And you might be worried that you're going to be expected to start bowing to this statue back here. Don't worry about it—you're not expected to do that.

You'll see us put our hands in this posture called *anjali*, in this prayer posture at the heart. It's said to represent the bud of a lotus flower. It's a gesture of respect. You may see us gesture at the Buddha statue with that hand posture. And some of you might be concerned that by doing this chanting, you're becoming a Buddhist. I'd just like to let you know that neither one of us has any agenda about turning anyone here into a Buddhist if you don't want to be one. It's not about that. That's not something that's important. The Buddha wasn't a Buddhist—it's good to remember that. He was a human who lived and had a certain

experience and then taught about it in the best way he was able to.

It's interesting to think that for hundreds of years after the Buddha's life and death, there weren't these statues. These came about when the Greeks came into northwest India and said, "You have no statues of your gods"—and they were used to having a lot of statues. So the early Buddha images were modeled after the god Apollo.

They look very Greek. And prior to that, there was either an empty seat or sometimes a pair of footprints. The Buddha called himself the Tathagata—the one thus gone. It wasn't about an image of a being. That wasn't important, and it came along much later.

So when I bow to this statue, what's that about? There's nothing holy or intrinsically wonderful about this casting in terracotta back here. We may find it beautiful, but we bow obviously to what it symbolizes. Maybe that's stating the obvious, but it's important to really think about what that might symbolize.

Traditionally, we could say it symbolizes what's called the Triple Gem—Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. These three things are what we take refuge in. So then, what would be refuge in Buddha?

It's interesting—the word Buddha, *budd* in this language, means wakefulness, awake. After his awakening, his enlightenment, the historical Buddha was walking down the road and he looked pretty good. He was glowing, and he had a striking appearance by all descriptions. He was cruising down the road and someone saw him—a wanderer, an ascetic wanderer—and said, "Are you a god? What are you?" The Buddha said, "I am awake." This was his description of his state: awakened. The awakened one. Buddha.

So we can take refuge in wakefulness. We might think of the historical Buddha as a human who had this experience, who left this body of teachings for us, who said, "If this were not possible, I wouldn't ask you to do it." We can look at that and say, "Oh, okay—if he could do it, maybe I can do it too." This was the teaching: that it's possible for beings to have this understanding, to wake up in this way. We can take refuge in this possibility, in each of our own possibility for wakefulness, for wisdom to arise. That's real. That's the refuge in Buddha. And we can have this refuge—this is a place of safety no matter what's going on, no matter where we are. We can find a place of safety and wakefulness in the moment.

Then there's the refuge in Dhamma, or Dharma. This word has a few different meanings. It's used for the teachings—Buddha Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha. It means law, natural law. You could say the law of nature, because of natural conditions, the way things are, because of this and this. It also means the truth of things in any moment.

We can take refuge in that, because no matter what's going on, no matter how wild and crazy things are, in any moment we can know: right now, it's like this. The way it is now. We can know the truth of the moment. We can wake up into the truth of the moment. This is the refuge in Dharma—another place of safety for us. Another thing that is safe no matter what. We can always know it's like this right now. We can place our hearts on that.

And then there's the refuge in Sangha, the third aspect of the Triple Gem. In the most traditional sense, Sangha refers to the ordained community of nuns and monks. The reason we have these teachings at all is because of the nuns and monks who were alive at the time of the Buddha and memorized them. They weren't written down for several hundred years—they were memorized and passed down orally. And so they've been carried through time in this way, and then eventually written down.

Then we have those who practiced what the Buddha taught and realized what he was pointing at and show us the way. So there's that aspect of Sangha.

There's also the community of those who practice together—this is called the Sangha. We're creating Sangha here. It's like a shared aspiration, a shared vision. A teacher of mine once said that we create Sangha like windows looking into a common room. We each look from our own place, our own window. We look through our own conditioning, our own upbringing, our own backgrounds, our own understandings, whatever they may be at any moment. But we're looking into the commonality, the same room of this possibility of understanding. We're looking into what's universal and true for all of us.

So we create Sangha here—we're creating this as we come together for these days. And I also see Sangha as being, for each of us, our highest aspiration. Whatever that might be in any moment, and that might change over time. But we have an aspiration to understand, to cultivate love and wisdom. Some way that we relate to that, that would get us to come to retreat. And that's no small thing in the world—to hold even the possibility of any intention around cultivating love and wisdom. This is rare and beautiful in the world. And this is an aspiration that we can touch at any time. So that's another place of safety, a refuge.

We have the refuges, and then we have these precepts. The word here is *pañca sīla*. The word *sīla* is usually translated as ethical conduct, or moral conduct—some people don't like the word moral. This is stressed throughout the Buddha's teachings as the very foundation that the practice rests on. If we don't have some relationship to an ethical way of living, our practice will never unfold.

There's a simple way we can think of this. There's a beautiful teaching in one of the suttas that speaks directly to it, in a collection called the Aṅguttara Nikāya. The Buddha's attendant, Ānanda, was his cousin. He served as his attendant and also had this great memory—he memorized most of the suttas. Anything he heard, he had a kind of photographic memory.

Ānanda asked the Buddha a question once. He said, "What, Lord, is the benefit of virtuous ways of conduct? What is their reward?"

And then the Buddha went through this list. He said, "Virtuous ways of conduct have non-remorse as their benefit and their reward. And non-remorse has gladness as its benefit and reward. And gladness has joy as its benefit and reward." And so on—joy has serenity, serenity has happiness. He went through all these stages that led eventually to the highest understanding: joy and serenity lead to concentration, to dispassion, to letting go, to disenchantment, and to the greatest peace. And so he said, "In this way,

Ānanda, virtuous ways of conduct lead step by step to the very highest."

When we undertake living in a way that's as harmless as possible, this leaves us in a state of mind, of heart, that is free of remorse. We're not worried that we're harming others. We're free of remorse and worry. This leads to greater tranquility and ease in our lives and allows for our meditation practice to unfold and progress.

It's important when we undertake these precepts that we have a sense of what's meant by the word precept. They're not commandments or laws. They're not "thou shalt nots." They're training rules, you could say. They're an exploration. They're something that we undertake as an exploration for ourselves, in the same way of this *ehipassiko*—come and see for ourselves. We see for ourselves what happens in our minds and hearts when we live a life of care, a life based on kindness and non-harming.

So we undertake these as an exploration, realizing that it's really hard, if not impossible, to live without harming some living beings. There are a lot of really tiny ones that probably get worked over every time we take a breath or every time we step, even if we're totally careful.

So it's intention that is the key here—to not intentionally harm, to not intentionally cause harm.

And this commitment to living as harmlessly as possible, to sincerely undertaking an ethical way of living, leads to one of the greatest of all possible gifts that we could offer to the world. That's the gift of fearlessness. If we can offer this gift—that other beings don't have to fear us because they know that we will not intentionally harm them—this is a huge gift. To be fearless in the world is a wonderful thing we can offer to one another.

So I'll just quickly go through the list of the precepts. The first one is *panatipata* in Pali—undertaking the training to abstain from harming living beings. This includes all kinds of living beings, including little ones that might like to bite you. This time of year we don't have mosquitoes, but there are ones that we just tend to disregard or see as getting in our way. We respect the right of all beings to live, and we try not to intentionally harm any beings.

The second one, *adinadana*, is undertaking the training to abstain from taking that which is not given, that which has not been offered. As part of the safety here at this place, we respect one another's property and we don't take things that haven't been offered to us. We could say we don't steal, but we also use care with the things that are offered. We look at how we use things. We respect what belongs to someone else, even if it seems harmless, even if it doesn't really seem to matter. But it lets us look and see—what's our motivation before we take something?

The third one is *abramacharya*. For us here on retreat, in lay life outside of retreat, the words are *kamesu michachara*. This precept has to do with sexual energy and our conduct around sexuality. For the time of the retreat, we undertake celibacy—that's our commitment for this time. It gives us a chance to really look at this energy that's so powerful in our lives in the world, that can lead to such connection and good

things, and also causes so much harm when it's not dealt with mindfully. We get a chance to really look at this energy and how it manifests, how it operates in our lives and in our hearts and minds.

Outside of retreat time, *kamesu michachara* is the precept to refrain from causing harm with our sexual energy, to really be mindful of how this energy manifests. It can be in so many ways—just simple flirtatious energy and where that comes from. But here on retreat, we undertake the training to abstain. It's not a judgment about it, nothing like that. It's just part of how we create this container of safety here, and a chance for us to really look and explore what this energy is like and how it manifests in our lives.

The fourth one is *musawadah*—the training to abstain from false speech. The very simplest way you can think about it is to not lie. It's not a huge issue here because we'll be in noble silence and we're not going to be talking a whole lot. But it's really an interesting one to look at, the way we use speech in our lives. We can look at it here in terms of other ways that we might communicate, really refraining from anything that's not necessary to support one another in the way of noble silence. Putting away our cell phones and computers and things like that if we don't need them.

And finally, *sura meraya majapamadatana*—refraining from the use of intoxicants. Here it says intoxicating substances. Often it's phrased as substances that cloud the mind and lead to heedlessness. We're cultivating heedfulness here, mindfulness. This, of course, doesn't refer to prescription medications, anything that you might be taking for your health. You don't let go of those. But we let go of intoxicants and substances that lead to lack of clarity, to heedless behavior.

So these are the precepts. We've gone on a little longer than we planned, and it's late, and some of you have traveled a long way to get here, so we'll do the chanting now. At the end, I'll just mention there's a final dedication that really points to the fundamental and foundational aspect of these practices—of the refuges and the precepts as being the basis that our practice rests on. This dedication to undertake this, may it lead us to the highest and greatest understanding, to the knowledge of the path and its fruit, which is one way that the realization of the fullness of the Buddha's teaching is expressed.

Things are done in threes a lot in the Theravada tradition, so you'll notice we do things in threes. When we come to the refuges, I'd like to do them in both Pali and in English. We'll do the Pali, and then we'll speak the English together so that we really bring to mind in the language that we're used to what it is we're doing with these practices.

[The traditional chanting of the refuges and precepts follows]

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Abrahmacariyā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Idaṃ me sīlaṃ maggaphalañāṇassa paccayo hotu.

And we usually end this by saying *sādhu, sādhu, sādhu* three times.

Now let us speak the precepts in English, so that we bring them fully into our hearts and minds:

I undertake the training to abstain from harming living beings. I undertake the training to abstain from taking what has not been given. I undertake the training to abstain from sexual activity. I undertake the training to abstain from false speech. I undertake the training to abstain from the use of intoxicating substances.

It's late, and I know some of you are ready to call it a day, but let's take a few minutes in silence for a short guided meditation. First, let's stand up for a minute and stretch our legs, or at least shift posture, because we've been sitting for an hour already.

I'll mention that because it's a small group, there are enough places on the floor and chairs that you may have access to both, which is a rare and wonderful thing, especially for those of us who are aging. There is no stigma of any kind attached to the decision to sit in a chair. Avail yourself of them as needed. It's good to sit in more than one posture during these long days.

So we'll have a short and sweet session here to begin the retreat. Find a position that feels comfortable, where you feel the body at ease, the posture upright and alert but relaxed, with the natural curves of the spine present. Settle into the simplicity of the posture.

The simplest instruction I could give you would be to sit and know that you're sitting. Just feeling this whole body, knowing it's sitting. The feeling of the posture, the contact with the earth, the touching and pressure there. Earth sitting on earth.

Take a moment to run the attention quickly through the body. Notice the top of the head. Notice if there are places of tension or holding that you don't really need, especially perhaps the forehead and eyes. Sometimes we can find we're holding tension there. Let the eyes relax, soft in the sockets. We can find we're looking around even with our eyes closed. Let the eyes relax, the area of the cheeks, the jaw, the mouth, the back and the sides of the head.

Notice the neck and the throat. Let the neck be long. Feeling the shoulders—often we hold tension in our shoulders—just letting them be heavy and dropped. Let the intention go to the upper back, middle back,

and lower back. Feeling this upright, alert, relaxed posture there in the spine.

And back to the shoulders and the upper arms. Down through the elbows to the forearms. And into the hands. Just let the attention rest in the hands for a moment. Whatever you notice there. Maybe the hands are touching or resting on the knees. Feeling of touching, warmth or coolness. Pressure, tingling, whatever you notice.

And coming back to the torso, the upper part of the torso, the chest, down through the ribs and the belly. Let the belly be soft and relaxed. You might notice the movement of the breath there, the diaphragm, the breath moving in and out of the body, this rising and falling movement. In and out, expanding, contracting as the breath comes in and out of the body. Down to the pelvis and the hips. Notice if there's any holding in the hips, the buttocks, through the hip joints, into the upper legs, thighs, and knees. Down to the calves and lower part of the leg, the shin, into the ankles and the feet.

This whole experience of body sitting. The simplicity of that.

Notice the mood of the mind. Notice if there's any mood there—feeling of anticipation or worry, or just dullness or tiredness that might be there. And coming back to the body and that simplicity of sitting posture.

Notice the breath moving in and out of the body. You might notice the sensations at the nostrils, the touching sensation as the breath comes in and out at the nostrils or the upper lip area. You might notice it in the back of the throat, or in the chest as the lungs expand and contract. You might notice the movement of the abdomen, the rising and falling or expanding, contracting movement there. Whatever way you can easily connect with the breath moving in and out of the body.

Receiving the breath. Letting it be natural, not looking for any particular special kind of breath, just however it's showing up.

Take a moment here, before I ring the bell, just to bring to mind some of your good qualities. Reflect maybe on some good deeds, some acts of generosity or kindness that you can think of. Or just bringing to mind your aspiration to come on retreat and to cultivate understanding and kindness. It's such a beautiful, good thing. Or the goodness of undertaking the training of the refuges and precepts.

The precepts—this is no small thing. If everyone in the world made even a half-hearted attempt to keep the precepts, we would have a golden age. There is a beautiful, great goodness in this. We can bring this to mind. We all have this goodness. We can bring it to mind and delight in it. The Buddha said one should frequently reflect on one's good deeds, one's good qualities.

We can dedicate this great goodness, the power of that, for our own awakening, for the happiness and liberation of all beings. May our practice be for the benefit of all beings.

I wish you a good night and deep, restful sleep and sweet dreams. The first sitting is at 6:15, and someone's

ringing a wake-up bell—thank you to whoever's doing that. We're not going to take a roll for that first sitting. Please come if you're awake. It's been a long day for some of you traveling, so I'm giving you permission to sleep in a little bit. Tomorrow only. But don't miss breakfast.

That's one of the high points of the morning.

And if you happen to be awake, this room is always open. You can avail yourself of this place to sit any time.

So have a good night.

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