Retreat Opening Part One

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 17:17

I've been teaching meditation retreats for about fourteen years now and been meditating—I can't even remember exactly—twenty-three, twenty-four years, something like that. I started meditating when I was in the Peace Corps and very quickly was drawn to long retreat practice. I loved the long retreat practice, which was a surprise to me because when I first started practicing, my entry into the practice was through daily life practice. I was not interested in meditating at all. In fact, the friend who sent me the book about meditation told me she had been attending a daylong retreat, and I thought she had joined some kind of cult and had gone off the deep end. And then I came back from the Peace Corps and immediately started attending long retreats, so I joined the group.

I met Sayadaw U Tejaniya in 2005 and very quickly felt that his style of practice, his style of teaching was so resonant for me. And so that is the kind of teaching that I'm sharing on this retreat.

I met Anna when I was teaching the 2010 IMS three-month course, I believe. So we've known each other for about ten years. We've worked together quite a bit on the long retreats at IMS and then started working together individually in the last six years or so. I nominated her for the Bodhi College Teacher Training Program, so she'll be assisting on this retreat. I have a lot of confidence in her. She'll be doing the groups and some guided meditations and also participating in some of the teaching sessions, offering some teachings. I think many of you already know Anna, but I'll give her a few minutes to say hello and introduce herself.

Anna speaking:

My name is Anna and I am located in Espoo, which is a city on the south coast of Finland, right next to Helsinki, for those of you who are not familiar with Finland. I'm one of the lead instructors of Nirodha, so I've been sharing the teachings here in Finland for some years now and will be doing that in the future too.

My first Vipassana retreat was almost exactly sixteen years ago. It was such an experience for me that it really changed my priorities in life. I became a dedicated practitioner right after my first Vipassana retreat.

I feel really honored that Andrea is here with us, our special guest, first time in Finland. She is such a popular teacher in the US that we had to actually invite her three years in advance so that she could find the time to come here. And now the time has finally arrived.

I've been hearing Andrea's teachings a lot, but I keep getting so much out of them. I can honestly say that

Andrea sees the processes of the mind with so much clarity and is able to teach about them and describe them with so much clarity that it's really amazing to me. I think it's very rare amongst the teachers in this tradition. So this is a great chance for all of us to learn from her deep wisdom and all that clarity.

The managers of this retreat, Aini and Anu—I know both of them and I've worked with both of them before, and I have full confidence in them. I know that you will be in very good hands during these five days.

I've been practicing different styles of Vipassana, but for me, Sayadaw U Tejaniya's style is my favorite, and I feel it's a style I've benefited the most from. So it's especially great for me to be involved in this particular retreat with this style and with this teacher.

Andrea and I were teaching a retreat for the Swedish group a couple of weeks ago, because Andrea was supposed to visit both countries on her first visit to Northern Europe. I could really see the power of this practice in that group. People were really appreciative and grateful at the end. It's a very easeful and relaxed style of practice, but it's also a very powerful way of bringing a lot of awareness into your life. I find it a great combination, a powerful combination. I'm very glad to be here.

Andrea speaking:

Thank you, Anna. I've been pronouncing your name incorrectly for so many years. I think I might not pronounce your name correctly still.

Just a few logistical reinforcements to mention. The two teaching sessions that I'll be involved in are the morning instruction session at 6:30 in the morning and the evening session at 7:00 in the evening. The morning will primarily be a guided meditation instruction with a little bit of reflection at the end. The evening session will be...

a little more teaching, some more elaboration on the instructions, or perhaps what looks like a Dharma talk, followed by an opportunity for questions. These are the two sessions that I'm able to be involved in, given the timing and time difference, and these are the two sessions we ask you all to attend each day.

We know that there may be internet glitches and things like that, so the recordings for those sessions will be available hopefully not too long after the sessions themselves. The recordings will generally be posted in the morning time each day, your time. The hall needs to go down for a short time after the morning session in order for the talks to be uploaded.

Each day when I'm asleep, Anna will be offering group practice meetings—most days at 9:30, though the first day will be at 4:30 in the afternoon. These are optional groups, but they will be pre-assigned based on the form we sent out asking whether you wanted to participate. Those group meeting times will be posted and available for you to see.

Anna will offer a guided meditation at the two o'clock sitting in the afternoon. On that first day, this

guided meditation will largely reinforce the instructions offered this evening and tomorrow morning, reviewing them in Finnish. On subsequent days, that guided meditation will be in English with an opportunity to ask questions at the end, where Anna is happy to translate questions asked in Finnish.

The community sittings are also optional. Largely the practice will be in your own rhythms, but we do have these structured sitting times to support your practice. I find this helpful in the online format—to have a little bit of a check-in, to be with the community. We don't have each other together to be inspired by each other's presence, so these times are there to support your practice.

The hall is open for the whole day but will go down for a short time each day so the talks can be uploaded, which will happen after the morning session. When the session goes down, you'll be briefly kicked out of the meeting, but you can log back in immediately following that.

During the evening sessions when there's an opportunity for questions and responses, there are a couple of different ways to submit questions. One is through the form—some of you have already found your way there and submitted questions or comments. That's one way to submit questions for that afternoon session, and you're welcome to submit them in Finnish; Anna will translate. If you can submit them in English, I would appreciate it, but if it's easier to ask in Finnish, that's fine. You can submit those questions in advance anytime, as the form is always available.

During the question session itself, we can take questions either through the chat or by raising the blue hand. If you click on the participants icon, you'll see a place where you can raise your hand. That's the easiest way for us to see that you've raised your hand with two screens. Sometimes if you're raising your physical hand within the camera and you're not on the screen we see, we may miss you, but we'll try to keep track of that as well.

For the sake of the recording, we'd like to start the Q&A sessions with questions through the form, then open it up to chat and live participation. We'll break the recording at that point so that the live question session can be available for you but would not be posted publicly on the Naroda website at the end of the retreat.

For the Q&A, you'll be able to unmute yourselves. And if you walk away from your computer at any time, especially if there are other people in your house, turn the camera and the mic off. We've had situations in previous retreats where people didn't turn their camera and mic off, and then members of their family walked into the room unaware that the camera was on. Who knows what can happen in that situation. So it's really useful to turn your camera and mic off when you walk away from the computer.

There was one question around what to do during the breaks in the schedule when there's no sitting marked—the possibility of doing walking meditation, or more sitting, or lying down, or standing, or just your daily chores, or interacting with your family if you're in that situation.

I'll talk more about that tomorrow morning. That's a good part of this practice—a kind of curiosity about

why you would sit, why you would walk, why you would do anything, for that matter. Just to be curious, to be aware in all activities.

You are welcome, if it feels unfamiliar to have an unstructured schedule, to create your own schedule. If you're doing a more intensive, secluded kind of retreat, you're welcome to create your own: sit, walk, sit, walk, sit, meal, sit, walk, sit, walk, sit, meal. You're welcome to do that.

But it's also a valuable exploration to sit until the urge to stop sitting inspires you—and then look at that urge. Be curious about it. Maybe let it arise and pass once or twice, and then follow through on it.

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