Keys To A Long Retreat

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 58:43

So in beginning the dharma talk tonight, I just wanted to mention something that Carol referred to last night, which is this is the 10th anniversary of September 11th, 2001, the bombing of the World Trade Center. I wanted to acknowledge for a few moments the significance of that event and this anniversary, because I know for everyone who lives in America, it has affected us profoundly. And I think probably for those of you from Europe or other parts of the world, it has affected you too.

So I think we all share in holding this event and this memory with a lot of sadness and also, hopefully, with a lot of compassion. Because I think the one way that we can use events like this in the deepening of our dharma practice is to let the pain of the world really touch our hearts and let the heart move into compassion evoked by what touches us from that situation.

Many of us, I think, probably knew somebody who was touched by that event, especially those of you who live on the East Coast. Sally and I were at home that morning—I think it was a little before 8 o'clock California time. We got a call from a friend telling us about it because we hadn't turned on the news that morning. Our friend said that she was on the phone to someone who was working at the World Trade Center when the first plane hit, and it hit their building. So that brought the reality of it home to us really strongly and just made me imagine what it must have been like to be in that situation.

And then we became aware, as you become attuned to this possibility, that life in America would never be the same again after an event like that, because our country had been pretty removed from war on American soil for a long, long time. And then you realize it's not like that for a lot of the world. So we start to use events like this to link to the experiences of other people.

I have a friend who has family in Sri Lanka, and she mentioned that people in Sri Lanka have been used to this kind of event happening for a long time. That was a shock to think about—that around a lot of the world, things like 9/11 happen almost as a matter of course.

Sally and I were in Mumbai a couple of years ago, and a friend there took us to the hotel where, after the terrorist attacks of 2008, the terrorists had hidden after they had killed a bunch of people in the hotel. We were walking across this beautiful white marble lobby, and our friend told us how after the attacks, when they had been able to go back in, that lobby was awash in blood. It was a shock because it was a five-star hotel—it used to be the Oberoi.

So this event links us to the pain of violence that takes place throughout the world. That can not only deepen our compassion, but also broaden it to help us realize something of our human vulnerability—that

things like this have been happening forever across the world, and it really connects to our fragility and our exposure at any time. So that in itself is a painful but I think really worthwhile dharma reflection: that we share this tragedy with all those around the world who are touched by violence through all kinds of war or terror or physical violence in any form.

Then there's the question of how we respond. As practitioners, how do we respond to an event like this? One of the groups in California said that as they considered this question, they came upon what felt to them a very meaningful form of action. It's something that you all did last night, which was to restate their commitments to the refuges and precepts—to acknowledge where true refuge is in this uncertain world, and to restate our own personal commitment to non-harming and non-violence.

We don't know what the rest of the world is going to do. The rest of the world doesn't live by the five precepts. We can imagine what a different world it would be if everyone did, but we can. And in doing that, we make our own personal commitment to making this world a place of safety for everyone we come in contact with. So I found that a very beautiful reflection. And I love the fact that we will take the precepts regularly through this retreat and restate our own personal commitment to living in that way of non-harming.

The last thing that I think we can all take from this is to generate the intention—the intention out of compassion—to end hatred in our own minds. This is a real human possibility, and this is the purpose of our path, one of the purposes of the path that we're walking. To be able to show through our lives and through our dedication that it's possible to put an end to hatred, anger and violence within our own minds is, to me, a really inspiring direction and intention and statement. And that's what we're doing here.

I can't think of any more effective way to do that than to do what we are doing here for these six weeks and three months. So in a way, I feel this is our collective response to 9/11. This is our memorial of those events: to refrain from violence and to work to end hatred. I hope you feel that this is something you can personally feel connected to. I think it's where we're all aiming, and we can make it our conscious intention and really the gift of our community—one of the gifts of our community to this world.

So a long retreat is a very powerful thing to do. In my view, it's one of the greatest things that we can do as human beings. It has so many terrific benefits. It's wonderful to practice in some parts of Asia because there are whole cultures that revere this as the highest human activity. When I practiced in Thailand and Burma, I felt that. I received the support of the people there because they valued what I was doing as a monk as one of the highest things that a human being can do.

Of course, in our culture there's not that general understanding. What we're doing looks kind of weird from the outside. You're going to take your vacation time or three months of your personal leave and you're going to sit quietly and not talk to anybody?

It looks kind of out there. The closest thing I can relate it to is doing some extreme sport, like skiing off the

top of a mountain or gliding in those suits across the mountain faces in the Swiss Alps. It's something like that.

I have a friend who used to be a Navy SEAL. We don't connect on a lot of cultural events. He's more into rodeo and hunting, and I'm more into sitting quietly. When I came back from Burma, I came back and my head was still really mostly shaved. And of course, I told him what I'd been up to. He wasn't so impressed by the shaved head and the taking of robes and eating one meal a day. That kind of stuff didn't impress him. But he was impressed by the fact that I sat still without moving for eight hours a day. He kind of got that that was a hard thing to do. He didn't understand the reason I was doing it, but he knew it was difficult. I could see my respect level went up a notch because of that.

But of course, if this was easy, everybody would do it. Because the benefits are so wonderful, but you know it's not easy. This is really a challenge. There are so many things that come out of an experience like this—things that I believe will guide you for the rest of your life. I feel that after a six-week retreat or a three-month retreat, many of you already know this, the development of qualities that come stay with you for a long, long time. Some of the specific experiences, meditative experiences won't, but some of the qualities that you build will. I'm thinking of things like equanimity, peace of mind, understanding, a degree of healing of old hurts and disappointments, opening to qualities of love and compassion, development of patience, and just overall the amount of freedom you feel in your heart and mind can stay with you forever to some degree.

So tonight I want to talk about how best to use your time here, because this is such a rare opportunity and one of so much promise and so much power. I want to focus on two aspects. We're going to talk in a lot of detail about how to practice mindfulness, so I'm not going to go into that so much tonight. But I want to talk about two things in particular. One is the attitude that we bring to a retreat like this. And the second is what it means to live in such a simple way with such a level of having given up or renounced so much of the world.

We will be giving you a lot of instructions over the next couple of weeks. We'll give a standard set of sequential meditation instructions. We'll refine them. We'll work with you through interviews and questions in the hall on more detail. But as you follow the different techniques, maybe even more important is the attitude of mind with which you approach them. It's possible to take hold of a technique, any meditation technique, and cling to it very strongly and go at it rather fiercely. This can have certain results—I'd say somewhat limited, but it can have certain results. But our approach is going to be to start from the very beginning talking about how you use the techniques and how you approach meditation in general. Because our trust is that if you come from the right place, it doesn't so much matter what technique you use—the retreat will unfold in a great way for you.

So we want to talk about this basic way that you move into meditation and how to do it most skillfully. One teacher expressed this approach or this attitude in three words: relax, observe, and allow. And I hope

you can take these and work with them as something of a touchstone over the length of the retreat, because I can't think of a time when they're not useful. In a way, they kind of describe the whole of the practice. Relax, observe, allow.

So I want to talk about each of these just a little bit this evening. When Sally was giving the instructions this morning, she really stressed this factor of relaxation and how important it is. And by putting it first in this list, we also want to stress it. Relax means, as far as you can, you make the body soft and you make the mind soft. So however you can move into doing that—and of course you can't always relax completely, either the body or the mind—but to the extent that you can, we encourage you to start from there.

In the beginning of every meditation, even right now as you listen, you can practice with this a little. Let the body be soft. Let the mind be soft. That creates a kind of receptive and open attitude to your experience. Also, when we can relax, it sends a strong signal to the brain. It basically says to the brain, "You can chill. Things are okay. Things are all right. Nothing really has to be fixed because I can relax into the way things are. Things are okay just right now."

This is a very liberating place to come to in meditation—recognizing that we don't have to change anything. Things are okay. This quality of relaxing expresses a state of mind that's really central in the Buddha's teachings. In English we could call it a quality of trust. We can trust in this moment because we can relax and drop into it. Synonyms for this are faith or confidence. We can think of it as faith in the Dharma. We can think of it as confidence in ourselves. The moment is okay. I can trust it.

This term in Pali that we're translating as trust is *saddha*, and it literally has the meaning of "to place one's heart upon." So it's a way of saying, what can we place our hearts upon? There is something that we can have faith and trust in and have our own confidence in.

So what is that? What is that quality that we can have faith in? The world is uncertain. As we learned from this reflection on 9/11, the world is uncertain and things can happen to us at any moment. We can't necessarily place our faith in changeable external conditions. But maybe what we can place our faith in is the essence of our own heart and mind. That we trust that there is already within us some quality we might call the seed of awakening or the ground of awakening. This quality that the Buddha brought forth under the Bodhi tree on the night of his enlightenment. That seed, that potential is already in each one of us.

This says there is some kind of essential purity in each of our hearts and minds that if we let go into it, it will hold us. It will support us. It will carry us. It's almost like saying when we trust in that, the Dharma will carry us on this path. It's not that we have to force every step, but as we relax into this essential quality, which has a flavor of peace, then the Dharma can carry us.

I think of our practice in this way. We can't push our own unfolding, but if we relax and trust in it, the energy of the Dharma will carry us through healing, through difficulties, into understanding, into love and

compassion and into awakening. The Dharma is there in each of us and will do its job when we ask it to, when we let it do that work.

I don't want to get too worldly about this, but you can kind of see this in good athletes. I love to watch tennis, and a lot of you probably know the last couple of weeks the U.S. Open has been on in New York, and there was a great semifinal match yesterday with my favorite current player, Roger Federer. I'm not going to tell you the outcome, because there may be one tennis fanatic who's taped it and is going to watch it when they go home, which I might do if I were in your place.

Federer is an amazing athlete and a great tennis player. If you watch him in the middle of a very intense match, he can go into relaxation in about one half of a second. He'll be running all over the court, high energy, sprinting, and then an easy shot will come along, a kind of easy volley put away, and his whole body will just settle, and he'll just do a tap. Right from the high voltage, immediately—tap.

When we are relaxed, our best responses come out of us. You'll see this in meditation. You'll see it in your own life. When we can relax and feel that trust, feel that confidence, then what comes out of us is the right response, the right movement.

Another way to talk about this is a phrase that Joseph uses a lot, and I love it because I find it very evocative physically. Joseph uses this phrase, "settling back into the present moment." You have this sense from the phrase of an attention that's been drawn out, kind of getting involved with activities that are happening outside, and the energy kind of moving out. As you feel into that phrase, it's like bringing the energy back into the body and settling it lower down. You get that sense of relaxing, calming and stilling because when we settle in, we still the body and that brings a kind of stilling of the mind. This phrase for me evokes a beautiful place of practice which has a quality of relaxation, peace and ease.

As we play with this factor of trust and the ability to relax, we find out the moment doesn't have to be perfect for us to relax. Sometimes we think, well, I can't really meditate right until all the aches are out of the body and the mind isn't distracted by random thoughts and I don't have any movement of aversion going. We don't have to wait for that. All the moment has to be is kind of good enough. Our average kind of moment is good enough.

So we start to learn that we can trust and relax in most of our moments. The more we do that, the more that flow of the Dharma can carry us. We don't actually have to do so much when we can relax into the moment.

So then the second part of this little formula is observe.

We relax, we're in the present moment. Observe means we get interested. What's happening? Okay, I'm relaxed, I'm in the moment, what's up? So this is the alert, you might say the slightly more active part of the meditation. We simply tune in: what's my experience in this moment? When we can get interested in that, then again, the meditation kind of takes care of itself.

This word observe sounds a little clinical or detached, so some synonyms are to pay attention, to be aware. This is really what's pointed to with the phrase "be mindful"—notice, watch, or one I especially like: feel. Feel your experience in this moment. Feeling brings you into closer contact than watching does. I like this word—feel the experience. This is really the quality of awakeness.

I'm sure you know that the word Buddha means "one who is awake." That was his central quality—one who is awake. So this is our awakeness, our entry into awakeness. When we get interested, then that interest and the energy of it starts to burn off the fog.

In the first days of retreat, usually there's a lot of fog. You may have come in from a busy life, maybe just a little tired when you get here. A lot of the sittings in the first couple of days can be very sleepy, drowsy, foggy, hard to see clearly. This interest starts to burn through that.

The other thing it cuts through is this kind of distracted tendency where we just wander off into past and future in our thoughts a lot, and we miss the present moment. We miss this contact.

There was a cartoon in The New Yorker I like a lot for this. It was in three panels about a guy's life and what he's thinking about his life. In the first panel, he's at work at his desk, typing on his computer, and the thought bubble is a picture of himself on the golf course. So he's not really with his work—he's thinking about being on the golf course.

The second panel shows him on the golf course, about to drive the ball, and the thought bubble above his head is a picture of his girlfriend without any clothes on, just to make it a little more energized. So he's golfing now, but he can't stop thinking about his partner.

The third panel is him at home, making love to his girlfriend, but the thought bubble is of his computer at work. So wherever he is, it doesn't fully satisfy. The mind is somewhere else. A lot of people live this way.

Our training is really to let us be fully with whatever it is that we're doing. We learn to be fully with something as simple as sitting and breathing, sitting and hearing, walking and feeling the earth, chopping vegetables, cleaning a toilet. When we learn to be fully present with that, it's much easier to go home and be fully present in things that are really compelling.

This is a training that goes on a long time and has lots of benefits. We learn not to drift off so much into thinking or fantasy or figuring it out or rehearsing conversations or analyzing. We're just awake here and now, and we feel the life of this moment. This has so many beautiful and beneficial qualities. It's so opening.

Somebody came and visited the Buddha and his community of monks and nuns during his lifetime. I think it was a king—I can't remember exactly, but I think it was one of the high-placed figures in the world at that time. The visitor was struck by the appearance of the community. Here they were living really simply. They didn't have the riches that he had or that the people in his court had. They were just eating probably

one meal a day and wearing these simple robes.

But the visitor said, "Your community seems so happy. In fact, they look radiant. Why is that?"

And the Buddha replied, "They're radiant because they've learned to abide in the present moment."

This abiding in the present moment brings a great sense of lightness and relief, because the present moment is usually pretty uncomplicated, just like now. This is a pretty good present moment. We're in the company of like-minded people, and we're turning our attention toward the Dhamma. Your butt may be a little uncomfortable, or you may have an aching shoulder from apple picking.

This is not a bad moment, if we can just be here fully in this moment, and most moments are like that.

Henry David Thoreau, who lived just about an hour from here in a little hut near a pond called Walden in the 1800s, wrote: "I feel a little alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily without getting there in spirit. What business have I in the woods if I am thinking of something outside the woods?" This is a beautiful sentiment. When you go for a walk in the woods, you might think about that. Can we just be in the woods when we're walking in the woods?

One of the insights we get in Vipassana practice, which is actually really freeing, is that only the present actually exists. The past and future don't exist on their own. They're only thoughts if we call them up. It's not like the past is hanging out back there somewhere. It's gone. It's over. It's not like the future is waiting for us up there somewhere to arrive. It hasn't happened yet, and our actions in this moment will change it. So the past and future don't exist. All we have is this present moment. And that insight supports the concentration just to be here fully now.

So we come into the now with that relaxed observation. We start to tune in: How's the body responding? And then, how am I relating to the body? How's the mind responding? And how am I relating to the mind? How's the environment around me in this moment? And how am I relating to that? We're always feeling into both halves of this relationship. How's the world—my experience—and how am I relating to it?

This is where our meditation really takes hold, because especially we want to understand in this relationship: How is it that I suffer, and how can I free myself? In relation to bodily events, in relation to mental events—and when I say mental, I include emotional too, heart and mind together—and in relation to environment, other people, the world in general. We observe: How do I get caught? How do I get free?

So then allow. The third part of this attitude practice means from a meditative point of view, whatever happens, we let it be the way it is. We allow things to be the way they're coming through in our body, in our mind and heart, in our environment. Normally, this is not our natural habit of mind, just to say, "Oh yeah, this is groovy." Normally, we're wanting things to be a certain way and not be another way.

But part of wisdom is we start to see that everything that comes, comes from past causes and conditions. The present moment as it's arising right now couldn't be arising any differently. And so if we get in

conflict with it, it's like being in conflict with reality. The present moment has happened because of many, many past conditions. Here it is. If we don't like it, who's going to win that fight—reality or us? Reality always wins. We'd like to have it be a certain way, but we can't affect that a lot of the times.

One of the practitioners at Spirit Rock, a student of Sylvia Boorstein, had a really nice comment. She said when somebody asked her how she was, she learned a skillful response. She said, "I couldn't be better," because that was strictly true. I couldn't be better in this moment, the way it's presenting itself. This is as good as I can be. If I knew how to be better, I would, but this is how I am right now and I couldn't be any better. What a great response. No matter how you're feeling, "I couldn't be better."

We start to see that this tendency to make things different is not just a random or occasional turn of mind, but it is a deeply conditioned habit that pervades our normal way of relating to the world. It's a little bit alarming when we start to see the size of it, the frequency of it, the unceasing style that it's in. What we're always trying to do in these different forms...

Our sense of self is always engaged in this activity—increasing pleasure and decreasing pain, moment after moment. As you start to get quiet on the meditation cushion in this quiet atmosphere, you'll begin to see these habits of mind over and over again. This current will become very familiar, this tendency to fix things. In the beginning, we might think this is just a minor little habit of mind, but it's not. It actually has profound implications.

You know this term samsara, I think. Samsara is the Buddha's term for how we've taken birth many, many times—countless times in the past, he says. We've lived lives, we've died, and then we've taken birth somewhere else to live another life and go through all the trials and ups and downs of that existence. We've died again and taken birth again. This is also called the wheel of cyclic existence. In the Buddha's teaching, this process of going through birth, life, death, birth, life, death goes on and on until we figure it out.

You may not believe in the rebirth image that he was pointing to, but in similar ways, we take birth through our many different modes of mind throughout a day, throughout a week, throughout the many years of our life—from being children to adolescents to adults. We take birth in different forms, and each of those has its own way of passing away. We can get that sense of the ongoing nature of birth and passing away, even in that model.

The Tibetans say that the motive force behind this wheel continuing is trying to correct. This energy to make things better is the motive force behind samsara. This is a big deal. So what if we stop trying to make things a little bit better? This is the function of wisdom—to stop just trying to make these little adjustments and go to the root. Then there's the possibility of coming out of samsara, and coming out of samsara means discovering nibbana, this place of peace that's not shakable, not conditioned.

That's why this allowing comes to be so important. It's really the entryway into peace. We don't have to

struggle with the way things are when we develop this capacity to allow them to be.

Now I want to say that I'm talking here about the inner attitude in meditation. This is not meant to apply as a blanket statement to life in the world. In life in the world, sometimes we need to take action. It doesn't mean allowing everything to be when people are being harmed, when things are being done that are not right. But in our own inner relationship, this is how we can discover peace in our own hearts and minds.

You can see this in people like the Dalai Lama, who spent basically sixteen lifetimes perfecting this practice. Someone asked him, "You have so much responsibility. Things are so difficult for the Tibetan people right now. How do you stay cheerful?" And he answered, "It's my profession." It's our profession, too. Our profession is to stay cheerful, all of us here. I hope you'll find that in this retreat and discover how to do that—that this is part of all of our potential.

One of the great supports for being able to open in this way is the lack of busyness here. It's really the simplicity of this life that lets us relax. We're not being constantly bombarded by requests from friends or from work or from partners or from children or from parents or from the world. In that lack of stimulation, we can just let the mind settle. And if we let it, it will settle. This tendency of relax, observe, allow leads to settling. We create the simple environment for the mind to be able to settle into itself, to find calm and a natural kind of peace.

But in coming into this really simple environment, we create another problem, which is all the things we leave behind. It's not easy to leave behind your friends and your home and your preferences for food, the internet and your Facebook account and your family and your television and your bookshelves—all of that you've given up to be here. That's not an easy thing to do.

The Buddha talked about this quality of—you could call it renunciation, simplicity, letting go—as one of the ten paramis, one of the ten beautiful qualities to develop on the way to awakening. But he also talked about the sorrows that come with this life of renunciation. Moving into retreat, it seems to me that often we go through a period of homesickness. As we adjust to living our life here, making our life here, we go through a letting go of the things that we've left behind that has pain in it. It's not easy to say goodbye to the things that made up our outside life.

As we're going through this adjustment and settling in for a long retreat, many different emotions come up for people in this transition. I just want to name some of the common ones that are happening at this stage, often for people.

There can be an excitement about being here and starting this big adventure. There can also be an element of nervousness, not knowing what's coming, or even a fear. I remember starting one long retreat at the Forest Refuge. I was getting instructions on work meditation on the opening evening, sitting in a chair in the dining room, when all of a sudden I was gripped by this fear. I thought, what have I gotten myself into? And that fear lasted for about half a day. It was still there when I woke up overnight, still

there as I went through the morning meditations. I was just kind of gripped by this fear. And then I just kept practicing, and it went away.

So don't worry if there's some nervousness or fear. Watch it. Relax, observe, allow it to be there.

Other feelings people often have at this point: feeling exhausted, coming from a busy life; feeling inspired by the beautiful potential that is in this form; a sense of self-doubt—I don't know if I'm capable of this; or a sense of regret—Why did I sign up for this course? Where's the exit line here? Or you might feel very confident—I can do this. I can be with my experience. I can make it through and I'll grow and learn. There might be a sense of loneliness, a sense of depression—It's so hard. Or it might be a strong sense of determination—I don't care what comes. I'm going to just put one foot in front of another and meet it directly and deal with it as it comes. I can do this.

This is from Thoreau in Walden: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach me, and not when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

So in living with these essential facts of life—sitting and walking and eating and sleeping and being in community—we really learn how to live in so many ways. And I think you will feel that when you've been through a retreat of this length. Many of you know this: that you have something with you that will also be there at the moment of your death. In many ways, you could say our whole path is preparing us for that moment. And learning to live and learning to die are not so different.

So the Buddha talked about the challenges of the renunciate life, but he also said that the way to overcome them is to develop the joys of the renunciate life. Because this style of life opens up levels of happiness that we never knew were possible from a busy daily life, at least for most of us. There are levels of stillness and peace and love, wonder, awe, compassion and insight that for me were totally new to discover in meditation that I hadn't touched outside. And all that potential is opened up by the simplicity of the life we're living here. It's really beautiful when that starts to unfold.

We appreciate this quote from the Buddha, from the Dhammapada: "If by renouncing a lesser happiness, one attains to a happiness that is greater than the wise pursue that happiness, which is greater." And that's what a retreat like this is for. There is happiness in daily life, but the possibility is that there's a greater degree of happiness here, one that can truly satisfy. A lot of times the happiness of daily life is beautiful, but kind of fleeting, and it changes. And here we find the possibility, we start to glimpse the possibility of a satisfaction that doesn't go away.

So I want to talk a little about the details of this renunciate life that we're all involved in. Here we've also left our homes and our familiar places. The basic spirit for all of us in the renunciate life is to accept what's offered. And in the life of a traditional renunciate, this is in the area of what are called the four requisites, the things we really need to live: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

Those are fairly simple here. The food will be offered three times a day. The lodging has been provided—a fairly simple single room for each of you. The clothing is just what you've brought with you.

And the medicine will be whatever you need. The office will help you take care of that.

In Asia, you really get the flavor of this kind of simplicity. Most of the monasteries I practiced at, we ate only one meal a day in the morning. If you haven't had a red fish curry at 8 a.m., you haven't really lived. Then that would be it for twenty-four hours.

In Zen, they put it this way: the mouth of a renunciate should be like a furnace that can burn the finest sandalwood or dried cow dung with equal ease. So there won't be dried cow dung on the menu, I can assure you. But there may be things you don't like, so you just think of it as fuel. It's okay.

At Spirit Rock, the cooks put up a sign that says: "When we prepare a delicious meal, that's our practice. When we prepare an undelicious meal, that's your practice." So please hold it in that sense.

We make a commitment to noble silence. We don't get in touch with our friends and family outside. We don't communicate with the other yogis who are here. If you have to write a letter, the office can help you with envelopes and stamps. Just do what is really necessary, please.

We give up reading. We give up journaling. Just part of the simplicity to keep the mind out of the realm of concepts. We want to keep the mind in the realm of direct experience.

And of course, there's a whole new level of renunciation in about the last five years with smartphones, tablets, and netbooks. Because then it's like you're never out of touch. So email, texting, instant messaging, contact through the web, Facebook, Twitter—all this stuff, sometimes it's really hard to leave behind. It's not so hard for people my age, because we didn't grow up with it. But for young people, it can be really hard to unplug because this frequent, incessant contact can become pretty addictive.

Nielsen is an American company that used to measure how many people watched a television program. Well, now they measure a bunch of other stuff, including internet usage and texting. Nielsen did a study and reports that teenagers, on average, send and receive over one hundred text messages a day. Teenagers—that's hard to give up.

So we teach a young adults retreat here, and one of the main teachers is Rebecca Bradshaw. She wrote me an email last year and said that young people on retreat seemed more afraid of the silence and solitude than in any other year. When they unplug, they report feeling a lot of fear of the emptiness.

So this may happen as you unplug. We really ask you to do it—to unplug from your smartphones and texting and instant messages and web and so on. And there may come kind of what feels like a loss of identity in this. That's okay. You can let go of that identity. You'll find a new identity here that's not so dependent on continually connecting with other people. That's where our independence and freedom comes from. But it may be a little bit of discovery. It's a little bit like Descartes has been updated. Descartes

said, "I think, therefore I am." The new one is, "I phone, therefore I am."

So feel free to give your cell phone or smartphone to Elizabeth. She will guard it safely and won't send any spoof emails on your account.

In addition to not communicating with friends and family back home, please don't communicate with one another. It may seem innocent, it may seem minor if you're the communicator, but when that lands in the mind of someone who has gotten still over a few days or a few weeks or a few months, a communication can go off like a bomb. And I have seen when a yogi writes a critical note to another yogi—it might be something as simple as "Please don't wear that rustly jacket into the meditation hall. Remember the manager asked us to wear silent clothes?"—and they're always signed "Metta, a fellow yogi."

But when that lands and your heart is open, you just feel like the world has turned against you.

Continue beautifying this talk (part 9/10). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

And it takes people days to recover from a note like that, from criticism that comes from a fellow yogi, because it breaks down the sense of safety and trust. We all go through this incredibly delicate process of opening here because of this field of trust. It's a great gift that we give one another in not violating that container of silence and trust that holds each of our open hearts. It's such a big thing.

If there's a problem with another yogi, please tell one of us. We will confer among ourselves. We know either you or the person you're talking about. We'll figure out how to work with it. But please bring any problems to us and let us handle them. Please don't communicate with another yogi, especially critical things, but even friendly things. It's just simpler if everybody can be in their own experience.

Communicating by gesture, by movement, by walking near someone, sitting near someone, eating near someone can all be forms of communication if that's your intention. Please just be simple. Stay in your experience, let others stay in theirs.

We don't say don't make eye contact because that feels a little too frozen to us. It's not that you shouldn't make eye contact because sometimes looking at other faces in the middle of a retreat brings a lot of caring and a lot of compassion. My heart's been opened many times being on retreat and feeling into where my fellow yogis are. You'll develop really close bonds with people.

So looking at people's faces is not forbidden, it's not prohibited, but don't use it as a way to try to engage them in a connection or a relationship. Let each person have their own space. That will really support their practice and your practice.

The purpose of all this living simply is so that the mind becomes kind of bare. When we're not involved in outer activity, we see the mind's basic nature so clearly. It's like in another month, when the leaves start falling off these trees, then you'll start to see the outline of the limbs. The limbs are there, right? But you can't see them now because they're all covered over by the leaves. As the leaves fall, you start to see what

supported them. You start to see the limbs.

In the same way, when our outer activities fall away, we see the tendencies of mind that are behind them all. That's really what we're here to see—those tendencies of mind. So let that bareness come to you.

This is from T.S. Eliot: "Quick now, here, now, always, a condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

I love this—a condition of complete simplicity. Anytime we come completely into this moment, that's where we're at. We're in a condition of complete simplicity, just open to what is, nothing extra added. What does that cost? Not less than everything. That means basically letting go of our past and future. That's what identity is built on. Coming into the present, inhabiting the present, we come into our true self, our true richness, our true fullness, letting go of identities that aren't quite real. We find a real identity, a real self in that experience.

So what can we trust in this process and in this part of our journey? At home, we might trust in our thoughts. In the beginning of the retreat, we might trust a lot in our thoughts. When I first sat a long retreat, I figured, "Well, I'll think all I want, and eventually I'll run out of things to think." Never happened. Six months in, I was still finding plenty to think about.

So you might as well give up the thinking now as far as possible. Not so easy, but when you have a choice, you can give it up now because what we really want to trust in is not so much this conceptual mind that turns things over and tries to figure it out. You want to trust in your intuition. It's the intuitive knowing that brings breakthrough insights, that discovers new ways of seeing things, that discovers new ways of understanding the world and ourselves. This intuitive insight operates best out of silence.

So let's say there's a problem in your life that you'd really like some guidance with from your deep meditation. Rather than trying to figure it out while you're sitting, trust in this quality of quieting when you have the choice.

Trust in the quiet. Let that take your whole awareness into what I would call a deeper level of your being. You come from a deeper place, a more intuitive place, a more integrated place, a more heartful place. It may come from your gut. It may come from your heart. It doesn't so much come from your head. That is the place where some of the difficult problems of life can get understood. But it comes more through intuition than through concepts.

This is from Walt Whitman: "There is that in me. I do not know what it is, but I know it is in me." This is our awareness, our intuition, the beautiful riches that are there.

And this is from W.S. Merwin, who until recently was the poet laureate of this country, lives in Hawaii and is a beautifully spiritual person. In one of his early poems, he made this comment: "Now all my teachers are dead except silence."

Silence is always a teacher for us. Trust in the silence, listen in the silence, open in the silence.

I'll end with this quotation from Bhikkhu Bodhi, one of the great American teachers and translators: "Liberation is the inevitable fruit of this path and is bound to blossom forth when there is steady and persistent practice. The only requirements for reaching the final goal are two: to start and to continue. If these requirements are met, there is no doubt the goal will be attained. This is the Dhamma, the undeviating law."

So you've started. All you have to do is continue.

At the end of our talks during this retreat, we like to just have a minute or so of quiet to let the words settle. So this evening, we'd like to sit together for a few moments in quiet.

[Silent pause]

The only requirements for reaching the final goal are two: to start and to continue. This is the Dhamma, the undeviating law.

Thank you for your attention on this first night—not the easiest time to pay attention. We have forty-five minutes now for walking meditation on the schedule. The last sit will be at 9:15, and we'll begin with a period of chanting that James is going to lead. I really encourage you to come to it. James promises it won't be as long as it says on the schedule tonight, so you can come, learn the chant, and you won't have to stay until ten o'clock. If you have some energy, I hope you'll come give a listen. It's a beautiful and uplifting chant.

So lovely to see you here. Thank you for your apple picking and other good work this afternoon. I hope you enjoyed connecting with one another. We look forward to seeing you in the morning. Please rest well.

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