Entering the retreat: refuges and precepts

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 56:47

This evening we're going to make the formal entry into the retreat space, and the full noble silence will start tonight. We normally make this entry with a short ritual—one of the few rituals we do here—called Taking of the Refuges and Precepts. We'll do that tonight as our way of entering the space.

I want to recognize and remember the events of September 11th, 2001. This is the 15th anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center. There's much observance in New York City today, of course, and I imagine many of us have felt the memories of that day and its impact on our lives and in the world. So much sympathy for the people who were killed, much sympathy for the lives that were touched, and for all of us who were affected by that event.

The Buddha was asked many questions after his awakening. One time a being approached him and asked, "Venerable sir, how did you cross the flood?" And that means the flood of existence with all the stormy waves that life brings. The Buddha replied, "I crossed the flood by not tarrying and not hurrying. When I tarried, I sank. And when I hurried, I was swept away."

I think this is really good advice for starting on a long retreat. This is a good attitude to set. You don't have to hurry in this practice, but you also don't want to tarry. Take it at a steady, continuous pace, and that is the way that the floods of existence will be crossed—one step at a time, one breath at a time.

Tonight we'll make the first entry by taking together the three refuges and the five precepts. In this evening's talk, I want to discuss what those are for us. I'm sure you've all taken these a number of times. For many of you, you've taken them countless times and are very familiar with these reflections. I just want to amplify things we often say at the beginning of a retreat.

So I'll start with the question: what does refuge mean? When we say "I take refuge," what does that word refuge mean? What comes to my mind is that it's a place where we feel safe—a place of safety for beings.

One of the nice things in the walks around here is that you'll see much land that's been designated as wildlife refuge. That means that hopefully all the animals who enter those terrains will feel safe, because there's no hunting and no fishing allowed in the areas of wildlife refuge—a place where the deer can relax, where the turkeys can make all the noise they want, even around Thanksgiving, and no one will shoot them.

In old Hawaii, there were places of refuge. The Hawaiian name was *Pu'uhonua*. There's still a quite famous one on the Big Island, which is also a great snorkeling spot if you get down that way. The place of refuge was a place where, if a person was considered to have committed a crime—and a crime could be

something rather small, like for a common person to let their shadow fall on a member of the nobility—then that crime was often met with the penalty of death. Once a person was considered to have committed a crime, their death was fairly assured, but they had one out. If they could get to a place of refuge, then they couldn't be captured or killed from that spot.

In addition, it was considered sacred space. The places of refuge were sacred space, and there were priests there who could hear the person's confession, absolve them of the crime, and consider them purified. Then they could be released back into society.

For us, IMS works a little bit like a place of refuge. We come here, we remember some things we wish we hadn't done. We get a little scrubbed clean with mindfulness and then we get sent back into the world. All is forgiven. So the center is a place of refuge for many. I hope it will feel that way for you.

One of the other implications of refuge is that the world in general is an uncertain and sometimes dangerous place. We need places of safety because not every place is safe. Sometimes our health is at risk. Sometimes our body is at risk. Sometimes our emotions are at risk. Sometimes our very life is at risk because the world is uncertain. Of course, this is a key teaching of the Buddha's.

We all need places of refuge at times. And retreats often remind us how uncertain the world of body and mind is.

We can't control what happens in the body. We can't control what happens in the mind. And on retreat, this becomes very clear—sometimes it's delightful, sometimes it's difficult. A long retreat especially has a way of taking us somewhat near the limits of what we are comfortable with. It could be with physical comfort. It could be the comfort of emotions that arise—sometimes loneliness or hopelessness during long retreats, or fear. It can be where our thoughts lead us, into memories we'd rather not revisit or projections about the future.

This uncontrollability of events, the uncertainty of our experience, often comes through clearly in a long retreat. And in times like this, when we're getting close to the edge of what's comfortable or what we think we can bear, we all need to recall what is our refuge. We all need to find refuges in times like that.

Of course, traditionally in the Buddhist teachings and all the Buddhist traditions, there are considered to be three genuine refuges. Among them are not a lot of money, or a comfortable home, or a position of power or status in the world. But the three true refuges are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These are what we want to talk about tonight.

In our lineage, we often talk about "taking refuge"—we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, or Sangha. But the literal translation of the Pali is "I go for refuge." I go to the Buddha for refuge. I go to the Dharma for refuge. I go to the Sangha for refuge. That's the meaning of this word *gacchami* in our chant—"go to."

This ties back into ancient Indian culture, where the uncertainties of life—which poor people were

exposed to a lot back then—could be defended against if one came under the protection of either a powerful political figure or a very wealthy landowner. People talked about "going for refuge" to those persons. If one came under their wing, so to speak, one had a better chance of dealing with everything that life brought. It's a little bit like taking refuge in Barack Obama, for instance, who I think actually is a great refuge for many, many reasons.

So we understand that we can find some real sense of safety in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. And as we start to turn to these refuges more and more often, we find they provide another element, which is giving direction to our lives. We don't just turn to them in times of need or uncertainty, but we start to recognize these are the reliable avenues for a human life. We start to orient our life choices and our life direction around the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, because these represent three really important values for us as practitioners. They tell us how we should orient our life—our thoughts, our speech, our actions, our choices, our values, our direction.

So I want to talk about all three tonight, and then we'll take the refuges together. Then I want to talk about the five precepts, the five lay precepts, and we'll take those together. That will be our content for this evening.

First, the refuge in the Buddha. We often say that the refuges have two meanings—one is outer and one is inner. With the Buddha, for instance, the outer form of the refuge is taking refuge in the historical person: the historical Buddha who lived 2,500 years ago in northern India, whose given name was Siddhartha Gautama. The clan that he was in was the Sakya clan, living near the border of India and Nepal, near a town called Kapilavatthu.

You know his life story. He grew up in a life of luxury, sometimes said to have been a prince, but I think that's an overstatement. There was a king in the area, but that was not his father—his father was wealthy. So he grew up in a life of luxury, at age 29 left home as the Bodhisattva to discover the path to freedom, discovered what he was looking for at age 35, and then taught for 45 years until he died at 80.

I was brought up in the Christian tradition. Actually, I was brought up Presbyterian, which is kind of to say with as little religion as possible, but a touch of religion. I studied the Bible a bit when I was growing up. As I recall, in my edition of the Bible, all the teachings of Jesus occupied maybe 30 or 40 pages in my King James Bible. So when I started looking into Buddhism, it was really interesting to find that the words of the Buddha occupy about 20 volumes in the Pali Canon. Even though it happened 500 years before Jesus, there was much better recording apparatus—which was memory at that time. And because he lived such a long life and had so many teachings, they were remembered and later written down. So there are 20 volumes about the historical Buddha and his teaching. We're able to get a much fuller portrait of him that I believe is reasonably accurate.

It's not a hundred percent accurate, but I believe it's reasonably accurate. Based on the stories I know from those readings about the historical Buddha, I consider him the most amazing person who's ever

walked on the face of the earth. And what I want to do this evening in talking about the historical Buddha is to talk about some of his qualities that made him so amazing.

In the West, we have tended to present the Vipassana teachings without a lot of historical overlay or cultural overlay. But in fact, there is a lot there if one becomes interested. So the way I see it is that for a lot of Vipassana practitioners, we grow up without a strong sense of connection to the person of the historical Buddha. My connection to that figure became much deeper after reading many volumes of the recorded teachings. He has become a very inspiring and important figure for me in a very personal way, and I want to talk some about that tonight—what I appreciate about him.

It's fine if you don't have a connection with the historical figure because there's also an inner refuge that is equally important. But if you get connected to the outer figure, it can be a great source of inspiration and faith and confidence.

The Buddha taught and died somewhere around 500 BCE, 500 years before the Christian era or the common era. The teachings spread from northern India really throughout Asia, so that at one time or another virtually all of Asia was entirely or mostly Buddhist. It's very interesting if you look at the history—from Afghanistan, do you remember when the Taliban blew up those two big standing statues? That was the extent to which Buddhism had traveled west, and it happened a long time ago. It was very influential in Afghanistan, and then moving eastward through Pakistan, northern India, quite a bit in Nepal, spread of course to Tibet through the Silk Route, Southeast Asia—Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia—and even Indonesia ages ago was largely Buddhist, and then up into Korea, Japan and China and Taiwan. Mongolia too. That whole reach of Asia was mostly Buddhist at one time or another. Now it's shrinking a bit. But that shows the effect of one person's impact in this world.

For those of you who've traveled to Asia, I'd ask you to reflect on the quality of the cultures you've been in that were under that Buddhist umbrella. The places I've been that have a big Buddhist imprint, I find myself really enjoying the culture. I find a lot of kindness and compassion—places like Thailand and Burma, for example.

After his awakening, the Buddha totally devoted his life to teaching others. He didn't have any other interests or activity. Forty-five years was just service and giving and teaching.

So what was he like as a person? This really interests me. One of the traditional meditations in Asia is to reflect on the wholesome qualities of the Buddha. It's a good meditation because we realize that all those qualities are within ourselves also—they just need to be developed or grown up. So reflecting on those qualities can be a reflection that really brightens the mind. Oh, this is really possible for a human being because it's really clear the Buddha was simply a human being like you and me. He made it very clear he was not considered to be a god or an angel or anything like that—simply another human being who developed beautiful qualities that are there within all of us.

One Pali chant expresses these qualities in a very short form. It says, "The Buddha endowed with such excellent qualities whose being is composed of purity, transcendental wisdom, and compassion." So if you're looking for a short form to understand who the Buddha was, I like this expression: purity, wisdom, and compassion.

The purity part meant that his whole mindset was just wholesome. He had ended greed, he'd ended hatred, and he'd ended confusion in his own mind stream. So that just allowed all the beautiful qualities to come through. That's the purity.

Through that opening of his awakening, he opened the door for what's called transcendental wisdom. This can be understood in two ways. One, he understood the wisdom that transcends suffering. He understood the cause of suffering and he understood how to abandon the cause of suffering and come to the end of it. So he had transcended suffering.

The other way to understand transcendental is that he had touched this unconditioned element called nibbana, in which the direct realization uproots unwholesome qualities. It's a quality that transcends the sphere of the six senses. So that is the wisdom piece.

And then compassion. Once he had awakened, he never stopped working for the welfare of other people. He just continued teaching really until the day he died. Even on his deathbed, he continued to teach and give advice. His life wasn't about anything else.

Some of the great qualities that he manifested when he was alive out of this mind of purity—one was great determination. You really see this in his practice life as the Bodhisattva. He spent six years doing nothing but intensive meditation practice. For us, six weeks is a long time, and it is a long time.

His time scale was a little bit bigger—six years until his awakening. And he tried everything that he could think of and that others recommended. So you probably know that at that time, the ascetic practices were very strong in Northern India. And people thought, oh, if you starve the body, you'll release the soul. So he tried really starving the body. He said that he took to eating just once every two weeks, and he became so thin that his hair was falling out. And when he touched his belly, he felt his backbone. There was nothing between his skin and his backbone left. But then he saw that that wasn't leading anywhere. Finally, he took food and that was what helped him awaken. Great determination.

Even after his awakening, he lived with complete simplicity. After his awakening, he had many wealthy supporters and donors. The two biggest kings in the north of India, King Bimbisara and King Pasenadi, were both students of his. They offered him gifts. They offered him tracts of land for the community. They supported him in many, many ways. If he had wanted, he could have retired to a palace, been given great food and lived very comfortably for the rest of his life. But he chose not to do that. He continued living in the forest, which is not an easy life through the seasons of Northern India. There's winter, there's rain, sometimes it's very cold, close to snow.

So they asked him, why are you living in the forest still? He said, for two benefits. I see a pleasant abiding for myself here and now, and I have compassion for future generations. He wanted to set an example for future practitioners because he considered the simple lifestyle to be the most conducive for waking up.

So 2,500 years later, we have our version of living in the forest. It's much more comfortable than his. We actually have mattresses, we have roofs, we have heat in the winter. But our life is really simple here. So the way the Buddha lived, even after his awakening, is still a model for us, is still an inspiration for us in our practice. And that was his compassion.

There's one story that really touches me. It's just a small story. It's not like a huge teaching story. But, you know, he used to walk around northern India. He made many trips all by foot, sometimes going hundreds of miles to give teachings in one spot or another. So on one of these trips, it was close to wintertime, and someone who was living locally was walking out in the morning and found the Buddha sitting on a pile of leaves—it was not very thick—on the ground, which was covered with frost.

And this person approached, the Buddha recognized him and said, "Bhante, did you sleep well?" And the Buddha replied, "Yes, I slept well. I am one of those in the world who sleep well."

And then this lay person said, "But Bhante, the winter nights are cold. It is the time when snow falls. The ground trampled by the hooves of cattle is rough. The spread of leaves is thin. The leaves on the trees are sparse. Your ochre robes could leave one cold and the gale wind blows cold. Yet the Blessed One says, yes, I slept well."

So he says, "Well, then let me ask you a question. Suppose a lay person has a house with a peaked roof plastered inside and out, free of drafts, with shutters closed, a couch spread with robes, blankets and covers, and an excellent cover of hides with a canopy above and red bolsters at both ends. Would he sleep well?" And the lay person says, "Yes, of course."

And the Buddha said, "Oh really? What if he was tormented by wanting? What if he was tormented by hatred? What if he was tormented by confusion? Would he sleep well?" And the lay person had to say, "No, he wouldn't." All those luxuries would be no guarantee that he could sleep well.

And the Buddha said, "Well, for me, the fires of lust, hate, and delusion have gone out."

Therefore, I sleep well. Even on frosty ground, even just covered with his three robes, he sleeps well.

The Buddha, as you can imagine from some of the stories, had a very strong presence. And I think it came from the combination of stillness and complete attention in the present moment. If you've met people who have this combination, they radiate something very powerful.

Thich Nhat Hanh used to come to Spirit Rock once every couple of years before we built our retreat center. The retreat center is on a hill that provided a kind of natural amphitheater, and now that amphitheater is filled with buildings and walkways, and he didn't come anymore. But before that time, he

would come and we'd build a platform for him and a loudspeaker system. And he would talk to about 2,000 people filling the hillside and the land around there.

I don't know if you've ever seen him speak, but he has one of these kinds of presence. He's very still. When he speaks, there's almost no movement of his body. And his words are coming from a place of deep wisdom, reflection, and stillness—concentration. When he spoke, it was as though he could cast a spell of stillness over those 2,000 people just by his presence, his stillness, and the Dharma that he talked. It was really something amazing to see. So I think that was a small indication of the power that the Buddha had.

One of the things that was clearly communicated in the Buddha's presence was his loving kindness. There was a physician to one of the northern kings. The physician's name was Jivaka. The king asked him to attend to the Buddha when the Buddha had a health problem. Jivaka was very strongly drawn to the Buddha's presence, to his personality. What he said about the Buddha was: "Just like there are some said to be in the Brahma realms who abide in loving kindness, so the Blessed One abides in loving kindness."

This was the physician's main read on the Buddha's character, on his personality—that he abided in loving kindness and greeted the people who came to him with that kind of friendly attitude.

In his teaching, he obviously had a very strong transmission power. Again, I don't know if you've met teachers like this, but their words and their presence can spark insight really directly. In the first discourse that he ever gave, called "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma," he gave it to five old friends who he had been practicing with. One of them was partially enlightened from that discourse. Then he had them all practice for another couple of weeks. He gave another discourse. All five of them were fully enlightened by that discourse.

A while later, he was in the company of a group of yogic practitioners. Today we would call them Hindu practitioners, but that word wasn't really applicable back then. They were yogic practitioners who followed a path of fire sacrifice. If you're going to talk to yogic practitioners of the fire sacrifice, what topic should you talk about? Well, fire might be a good idea.

So the Buddha invented a Dharma talk on the spot, which has come to be known as the Fire Sermon. The gist of the Fire Sermon is that the world is on fire. The senses are on fire. The heart is on fire. The mind is on fire with greed, hatred, and delusion. At the end of that discourse, it said that there were a thousand practitioners in front of him and all thousand became awakened from that discourse. So he clearly had this amazing transmission quality that I think was based on his wisdom, his stillness, and his way with words.

Another ability he had that was quite amazing is he could be in a group and just by tuning into people's vibes, he could tell who was close to awakening. He would then direct his teaching to that person and lead them step by step. He would sort of understand where they were and lead them step by step with just the questions and instructions that they needed to bring them to the point of waking up. Then he would give

that pointing and the person would awaken. So he seemed to know the right teaching to give for each person whom he met, which is an incredible quality that I wish we had—but not yet.

He never seemed to be afraid. He was about to walk someplace on a mountain path near where the killer Angulimala was known to be hanging out. Angulimala had killed 999 people and was going to kill one more. The Buddha was about to walk that way. All his friends and all his advisors said, "Don't go there. The bandit's going to come out of that mountain refuge and he's going to come and kill you." And the Buddha said, "Don't worry about that. I'm going to walk there."

He walked there. Angulimala tried to kill him, couldn't do it, instead asked the Buddha what he taught, was converted on the spot, later became a member of the Sangha, practiced, and of course awakened.

So this is just a bit of the historical Buddha and the qualities of his heart and mind. What I think is important to understand, and this is what leads into the inner teaching, is that all of us have this potential. We have this potential for awakening and freedom, just as the Buddha had it. I think these qualities that came through the Buddha are not particularly personal to Siddhattha Gotama.

They are aspects of the human mind that get unlocked by the depth of our own understanding and freedom. So the wisdom, the purity, the compassion are waiting there for the veils to drop away, for those deep treasures of the heart and mind to flow out. And you will feel this day by day and moment by moment on this retreat. As the clouds lift, more of those beautiful qualities start to come through.

So this is not a personal unfolding. It's a universal human unfolding that the Buddha happened to develop to a really high and beautiful degree.

For me, one pointing to what the inner meaning of the refuge is about is this awake quality. The word Buddha means awakened one. So this awake quality that we can bring in any moment—when you bring this attention in a fresh way into the present moment, that is activating that refuge, the refuge in the Buddha. This is the direction. Anytime you feel close to discomfort in body and heart and mind, remember that awake quality is always available. When that awake quality meets the present moment, something special happens. This is how, step by step, awakening takes place. So our practice is just to return to that refuge of this awake attention moment after moment. This is the refuge in the inner Buddha.

The refuge in the Dharma in the outer sense means the teachings of the Buddha. They're often called the Dharma. So one of the beauties of the long retreat is that we are really steeped in the teachings of the Buddha day by day through the instructions, the discussions, the meetings with teachers, the evening talks. The Dharma is really all we're hearing, so it just starts to permeate. These teachings start to permeate as they go in really deeply below the surface, so that they become more and more available and more and more of a refuge.

When I turn to the outer meaning of refuge in the Dharma, I like to reflect on—well, if you had to sum up the teachings of the Buddha in a really short and simple way, it might be the teaching on impermanence.

This is always helpful to reflect on in times of discomfort. Everything changes, nothing stays the same. So whatever difficulty you're in, it's going to pass. When we're in the middle, the hindrance tells us it won't. The hindrance says it's going to be permanent, but it isn't. So this reflection on impermanence is a short way to recollect the outer refuge in the Dharma.

In the inner refuge, Dharma means truth, or nature, or law—or I like "the way things are." The Dharma is the way things are. So when we talk about practicing the Dharma, we mean practicing with the truth of things. When you combine the Dharma as truth with the inner Buddha as awareness, attention, then when the inner refuge in awareness meets the inner refuge of the truth of one's experience, that's where freedom comes from. That's the key that unlocks things.

Ajahn Sumedho has a nice way of phrasing this. He says, "The Buddha knows the Dhamma." I used to think, of course the Buddha knows the Dhamma, he made it up. But really what it's pointing to is that inner Buddha of awareness meets the inner Dhamma of our direct experience, the truth of our experience. That's where freedom comes from because we see the way things are, and it's seeing how things are that liberates the heart and mind. And that alignment can happen in every moment. Refuge in the Buddha meeting refuge in the Dharma can happen at any time.

The Sangha. I want to talk about two meanings of Sangha. Traditionally, the word Sangha has two significances. One is the monastic Sangha—those women and men who have committed their whole lives to the path of awakening through taking on the robes and renouncing all the aspects of lay life, considered a refuge for us due to the strength of their commitment and the development of their practice through that form. The second meaning in the traditional sense is the community of awakened beings, those who have partially or fully awakened, sometimes called the Noble Sangha or Ariya Sangha. And they are appropriate grounds for refuge because of the depth of their understanding and degree of freedom.

In the modern sense, Sangha has come to mean the community of all of us together who are practicing and committed to the path of awakening, journeying together with commitment on this path to waking up. So we'll use Sangha in all three ways here.

We especially appreciate as we're practicing together in this community aspect how much support we draw from one another. If you thought about doing these six weeks or three months on your own, it would be really daunting. But because you're doing it with ninety other people, that support is always there as a felt thing, and you support them as well as you practice. So we support each other through this outer representation of Sangha.

In the inner Sangha, what I like to think about are the qualities that we manifest as practitioners.

What are the qualities that you draw from to inspire you when you see one another? What are the qualities that you manifest that can inspire others as we practice together?

A few qualities that come to mind are determination—understanding that this is the path to freedom and

manifesting that through our actions. Courage to keep sitting when you may not want to sit, to keep walking when you may not want to walk. The compassion for one another becomes very sweet at times, in the way you look upon each other. You don't have to do big things—it's probably best not to—but you'll feel that kind of intimate connection to each other. The compassion and loving-kindness are present abundantly as the community grows together.

These are all facets of the awakened mind that emerge from the falling away of veils and the arising of wisdom and compassion.

Having gone through the refuges, let's chant those together to begin. I hope you picked up a sheet from the front. We'll chant the refuges first. Later I'll talk about the precepts and then we'll chant those as well. With the homage and the three refuges, I think we'll chant them in unison since quite a few of you know these. When we get to the precepts, we'll do call and response.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa

Buddham saranam gacchami
Dhammam saranam gacchami
Sangham saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami
Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami
Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami
Tatiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami
Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami

Now I'd like to say just a few words to introduce the five precepts. We'll take just the first five tonight. We'll talk about and offer the eight precepts in a few days, but for this evening we'll start with the five.

Of course you understand the five precepts are really about non-harming. They're an outward expression of what the compassionate or loving heart would do in its actions in the world. They're not moral commandments—they're considered training rules. The way they work is they train us to keep our conduct fairly straight so that we don't have cause for regret.

The Buddha said that when our conduct is proper, we enjoy freedom from remorse. The benefit of that is gladness. The benefit of gladness is joy. The benefit of joy is happiness. The benefit of happiness is concentration. The benefit of concentration is knowing and seeing things the way they are. And the benefit of knowing and seeing things the way they are is liberation.

This is the foundation: keeping the heart and mind clear from regret, confusion, conflict, and disturbance, so that the deepening of meditation can take place, leading to happiness, insight, and freedom.

You're probably quite familiar with these five precepts. I'll mention them briefly.

The first is to refrain from taking life. Anything that lives—we respect that it wishes to live just as deeply as we wish to live. For all beings, their life is their most precious possession. When you look upon beings with a heart of kindness, you recognize their attachment to their life and do everything you can to honor that, not taking the life of any living being.

The second precept is framed as not taking what isn't freely given or freely offered. For you as yogis here, that probably mostly comes down to things like food. We take food when it's put out and offered from the kitchen, and we don't take it when it's not put out and offered.

This sounds simple, but it hasn't always been observed that clearly here. One evening about midnight—this was when I was on staff—one staff member walked into the kitchen and noticed that the door to the walk-in fridge was slightly ajar. They went and opened the door and found one of the three-month yogis in the walk-in fridge with their hand in a box of figs. The staff person, being compassionate and thoughtful, said, "Can I help you?" The yogi looked up and said, "Oh, I was looking for the maintenance office."

To avoid that kind of embarrassment, simply don't take what isn't freely offered. In terms of yogi needs, if you take things from the closet, pay for them. Don't borrow other people's cushions, blankets, and so forth. Really stick to what is yours.

The third precept in the context of retreat is not engaging in sexual activity. This is not so much a non-harming precept, although it has that implication too—not to disturb another yogi's meditation—but also not to become distracted through activities that don't support the basic move toward present-moment self-sufficiency. It's contentment with what already is here. This is the direction of the practice: not looking for more than that.

The fourth precept in lay life is not saying what isn't true. Here we observe that and extend it to include noble silence.

Noble silence, as I think Sally and Bonnie talked about this afternoon, is not meant to be a cold or distancing or isolating thing. It's meant to be actually the creation of a warm and safe container that allows each of us to go through our own journey without interference. So being able to settle into one's own process and realize, I don't have to communicate to anyone else. I don't have to try to be pleasant or say something funny or endearing. I can simply let my process be the way it is. It really simplifies things and that's what's ennobling about it. It lets us get deeper into our own journey.

So I think of noble silence as we give up unnecessary talking. If you need to talk to Roberta about anything

logistical, if you need to call on Jared or John, feel free to do so. Of course, you'll talk to your teachers in the practice meetings. That's all completely appropriate. But please don't talk to one another. Please don't make contact with one another through notes or conversation. I think Sally and Bonnie mentioned that this afternoon also. Please don't write notes to one another. It can be very disturbing in the sensitivity of a long retreat.

And then it extends, of course, to telephone, emails, text, internet. If you need to use the internet for a plane reservation or a medical situation, please talk to Roberta, who might ask you to check it out with your teacher. And we can work out if there is an actual need. But otherwise, we ask you to renounce those activities. Just on a recent retreat I taught, someone had really intended to renounce communication, happened to turn on their smartphone, got one text from a partner that was very upsetting, and it blew their meditation out of the water for several days. So please keep that container really clear and firm for yourself. It will really protect your practice.

Sometimes people come on retreats with a partner or a really good friend. And sometimes couples like to support each other during the retreat by hanging out together. It might be sitting together at meals. It might be walking side by side in the walking meditation. And I really recommend, if you're here with your partner as part of a couple, that you really try not to have contact like that. Because what usually happens, because I've talked to a lot of couples on retreat, is that one partner starts to want less contact than the other. Ever seen this dynamic in daily life? It happens on retreat also. And if you're not speaking, it's very hard to work that out. So one partner starts withdrawing, the other partner starts feeling very insecure or rejected, and then things become tense, and it's difficult for both.

So the simplest thing, if you're here with a partner, act like you don't know them. Sally and I have sat a lot of retreats together, and if you came in and were sitting with us, you'd never know that we were a couple. So pretend you're not while you're here, and that will be simplest for you. And it will also keep from stirring things up in other yogis, like, oh, I wish my partner was here. I wish I had a partner who was connected with the dharma. I'd like a little company from time to time. So let it be the individual experience for each one of us here.

Now, in terms of the renunciation of devices, we're going to have one more meaningful ritual in a couple of days, and that's what we call the cell phone renunciation ceremony. That will be on Tuesday morning. You will be invited to actually turn in to the manager your cell phone or tablet or laptop so that it will be removed from temptation's reach for the duration of the retreat. And we'll put more details out tomorrow about how to do that. And Tuesday morning, we will actually have a little ritual in here to celebrate the renunciation from those who wish. It's not obligatory, but it is a great support. And it's a really happy thing to do. It lifts a lot of worry to do that.

The fifth precept is not to use recreational drugs or intoxicants while you're here. The meditation process does enough mind shifting that we don't need to cloud it with other intoxicants. So please refrain from the

use of alcohol and other drugs. If you're on prescription medications that your doctor has recommended, please do continue with those. We're not asking for you to give up drugs that you need for your health and well-being, only recreational drugs. So please continue with the medications that you've been advised to take.

These precepts create a condition for a lot of simplicity in our life together as a community. And what that simplicity allows is the revealing of what's underneath. So it's a little bit like when autumn comes, which it's already starting, and the leaves start coming off the trees, you can really see the structure of the limbs and branches.

The leaves fall away and everything else is exposed and becomes really clear. So when these external activities fall away, what we're left with is the workings of our own hearts and minds. That's what we see. The external situation is fairly simple, but what gets added to it—or layered on top of it, you might say—are our own emotional and mental reactions. And that's what we're here to learn about.

We don't need to learn about how other yogis are doing. We're here to learn about how our own hearts and minds relate to the situations of life. So when things become really simple, that's exactly what gets exposed, just like the bare branches of the trees. And that's what we want to learn from.

So that is the short explanation of the five precepts, and now let's take these together. Because these are a little longer, let's do these in call and response. I'll say a phrase and then ask you to repeat it back to me.

Panatipata veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Panatipata veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Adinnadana veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Adinnadana veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Abrahmachariya veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Abrahmachariya veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Musavada veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Musavada veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Sura-meraya-majjapamadatthana veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

Sura-meraya-majjapamadatthana veramani sikapadam samadhyami.

And then the dedication, call and response:

Idam me silam magga-phala-nana-ssaha.

Idam me silam magga-phala-nana-ssaha.

Thank you all for your attention and participation. With that, the retreat is formally underway, and we've entered into the period of noble silence, which will continue for the remainder of the retreat until integration time, either at six weeks or three months.

Just one announcement this evening: At the nine o'clock sit, which will happen every night, we'll begin the chanting tomorrow night. So tonight there will be the nine o'clock sit, which will be led, but there won't be chanting tonight. The formal instruction will start tomorrow night as well.

Time for walking, then nine o'clock for the next sitting.

Thank you for listening.

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