Morning Instructions

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 42:57

As Sally mentioned yesterday, we have offered the essential instructions for this part of the retreat. The teaching is quite simple: rest in empty awareness. While we've explored many details about how to arrive there and what it all means, the basic meditation instruction remains elegantly simple—rest in empty awareness.

Sometimes the mind complicates this because, as one of the quotes in the study guide says, it's so close you can't see it, and so simple you can't believe it. But that's what this practice is about.

Twenty years ago, Sally and I, along with a few friends, went to visit a great Tibetan master in Kathmandu. We had arranged to see him for four days of teachings while we were there, which was very fortunate because his time was extraordinarily valuable. Toward the end of the four days, he said, "You'll notice I'm repeating myself a lot. There's really only one thing to say. It's just like a field mouse—he runs across the field and the only thing he says is squeak. I'm just like the field mouse. I only have one thing to say to you."

So that's where we are in this retreat: rest in empty awareness.

The important thing is to trust that. This trust takes time to develop. Very often in this practice, especially in the beginning, people wonder, "Is this it? Is this what they're talking about? Is this the awareness? Am I seeing the emptiness? Have I really got it?" There's no way to figure that out conceptually.

You've surely tried many different ways of turning to recognize empty awareness. Some of them may even give you slightly different results. When I think about the instruction of big mind—the image of a vast empty sky—that leads to a different experience sometimes than asking the question, "Am I aware?" This is perfectly fine.

Whichever means you find that gets you in touch with something, trust what you get. Trust what comes from that pointing and put your chips on that. This means believe in it, trust yourself, follow it, develop it. What you'll find is that as you do, it deepens, it clarifies, and it becomes more apparent what's happening.

Even if the different ways of entering, the different methods of turning, get you slightly different experiences, over time those will converge. As they deepen and develop, they all move in the same direction.

Don't worry too much about whether you've got it. We have a word for this in the Vipassana world—it's called doubt, and it's not particularly helpful. Recognize when doubt is present and simply trust. Trust what you get when you turn and stay with that. Let it develop in its own time, in its own way, and you'll be

doing just fine.

So that's the squeak for today: take what you get and trust in that.

Now, for this past week we've been talking almost entirely about the awareness practice, resting in empty awareness. But remember that as you move through these days, take time to integrate with your mindfulness of breathing and your practice of the Brahma Viharas. These practices are very supportive of resting in awareness.

As a reminder—and I've probably said this before, as has Sally—when the mind tends to be distracted or caught in the middle of some clinging, it might be simpler to turn to one of the object-oriented practices, breath or metta. When the mind is open and uncluttered, then awareness is usually more accessible.

One thing you'll notice is that it doesn't necessarily take very big clinging to make it difficult to access awareness. In the Tibetan system, they say that a thumb in the right place can block out the sun. So a very small obstacle can block this opening to awareness. When that's the case, either let go if possible, or return to a simpler practice—one that you know well.

I know that the end of retreat starts looming in people's minds at this point. You don't need to start preparing yourself yet. We will have a plan for that transition.

easing you out of the silence and back into activity. You don't need to do it yourself ahead of time. We'll tell you when it's right for it to start happening.

So really take these days to devote yourself as fully as you can to being here now. When thoughts about the future beyond these days come up, it's a good time to say, "not now." Not now to those thoughts. There will be plenty of time when the time comes.

Do you have any questions this morning?

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.