Tranquility and Insight

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 50:31

The subject of the talk tonight is tranquility and insight.

I want to say first that I've really been touched coming into this retreat to feel the atmosphere that you all are holding. Normally when I come into a retreat, I feel like I'm more settled than the meditators are. Coming into this retreat, I get the feeling you all are more settled than I am. So I'm one of the people coming from outside who's probably going to stir you all up with my worldly energy. I've just really appreciated the people I see walking slowly and sitting quietly. The whole retreat feels very settled in to me at this point. So it's a lovely atmosphere to come into.

You all have been practicing unification of mind for ten days. As I'm sure you know, that's a synonym, probably the most frequently used synonym for the factor of concentration or samadhi. Often when I teach these retreats, I call them concentration retreats. But in some ways I think the language of unification might be more helpful for people. There's something about concentration that seems to evoke striving, as though we have to reach a certain level and qualify to get our gold badge for being a concentration yogi. But actually what we're doing in practicing for concentration is we are collecting the attention and unifying the mind, usually around a chosen focus.

In your case, for most of you, it's the breath. For some, it might be body or sounds. This concept of a primary anchor really supports the collecting because in every moment, we kind of know where we're meant to be. What that does is highlight the times when we're not there. When we don't have a chosen focus, we just assume meditation's going great, and we don't notice how many mind moments we're spending away from the present. So choosing this anchor is very helpful. It does collect and unify the mind.

When the Buddha talked about meditation, he talked about two primary outcomes that happen as meditation develops. One is tranquility, and the other is insight. In Pali, these two are called samatha and vipassana. Both are really important, and in fact, they really influence and strengthen one another. As tranquility develops, vipassana comes more alive. As vipassana deepens, it leads to a tranquilizing of the mind. So the two work well together.

Tranquility is closely related to concentration and unification. When the Buddha described meditation progress, he said that tranquility leads to happiness. Do you feel that? As you've gotten more tranquil, more settled, have you felt a growth in happiness? That's the first immediate benefit of a practice that aims for this factor of samatha.

As you've gotten happier, do you find that makes the mind less distracted? It can, because we're finding that there's fulfillment in the present moment. This term sukha, sometimes translated as happiness, can also be translated as contentment. It's one of the jhanic factors that I think Winnie probably talked about last night. This term for contentment really says, the mind says, "Oh, I'm quite happy where I am. I don't have to reach out to the past. I don't have to reach out to the future for something different." So it really calms those restless movements into past and future. That's what allows the energy to collect into the present moment, that lack of distractedness.

With that base, we can choose or not to direct the attention to wisdom. That's what's indicated by the term vipassana or insight. Insight is really for the purpose of developing greater understanding or wisdom and is primarily about what leads to happiness and what leads to suffering. That's what we want to learn. We're here not for meditative gymnastics. We're here to find out how to bring greater happiness and less suffering into our lives and the lives of those that we touch. It's really wisdom that leads to that understanding.

So tranquility by itself, concentration by itself is very good, but it's not the end of the road. You see this in the life story of the Buddha. You've probably heard that his first two teachers, when he left home and was wandering for six years, were concentration adepts. They trained him to two deep places in what are called the formless attainments.

These are states that are beyond the four jhanas, continuing to develop into areas called formless attainments, sometimes called formless jhanas. They're deep states of concentration. The Buddha's first two teachers taught him the attainment of nothingness and the attainment of neither perception nor non-perception.

Actually, I shouldn't call him the Buddha at this point. He was the Bodhisattva—he had not yet awakened. He was on the path to awakening, truly the Bodhisattva. And so the Bodhisattva was invited to teach with these two concentration masters, the most deeply experienced meditators he could find in India at that time. And he said no. He said, "I'm not really interested in that because it doesn't go all the way. It takes you to a place of great concentration and peace, but it's temporary—it fades."

This is really the limitation of concentration attainments. They're temporary because they're conditioned and they will always fade. I'm sure that's not disillusioning news for you at this point, but they will fade. However, they still have an important role to play in the overall development of the path.

It's interesting because I don't know exactly how the Buddha came to benefit from those practices, but I believe that he did. Later on when he was meditating, he recollected an experience of the first jhana, which is a lower attainment than either of these, and he was able to access that quite easily. So I suspect that the concentration states he'd reached early on in his wandering supported his ability to reach the first jhana and then to open beyond that.

So he reached deep states of concentration, but it wasn't yet what we would call right concentration or samma samadhi. And that's because it wasn't yet surrounded by the factors of the Eightfold Path. There's this beautiful description in one of the discourses where the Buddha says, "What is noble right concentration?" Notice there's a distinction from just concentration. "What is noble right concentration?" And he says, "Unification of mind, equipped with right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness." Do you recognize this list? It's the Eightfold Path.

So concentration becomes right concentration when it's supported by the other factors of the Eightfold Path. When it's not supported by the other factors, it may be concentration, but it's not the concentration that leads to liberation. You all, having practiced before, understand concentration as being supported by the other factors of the Eightfold Path, and that's what allows it to be liberating—right concentration.

But somehow the Buddha took this skill, which he had developed early, recollected through the first jhana, and then opened up into the greater possibilities of awakening.

I want to point out this book while I'm speaking. I suspect many of you know this—it's called the Middle Length Discourses. The Pali name is the Majjhima Nikaya. It's a collection of the Buddha's discourses that are middle length. There's another collection called the long discourses, and then other collections that are shorter discourses. This is middle length.

If you were going to take one book to a desert island, this would be a good one to take because it contains all the core teachings in depth of the Buddha, in one handy volume. It's really a great treasure for all of us. I sometimes do retreats at home, and when I do a retreat at home, I add in an element of study. Last winter, I reread this book. I'd read it twenty years ago and reread it while I was on retreat. It was very touching because I discovered a lot of things on the second reading that I hadn't discovered when I was younger.

One of the questions I was looking to understand is: in his discourses—and these are a very representative range of teachings that he gave—how often did he talk about liberation? What I found was that in almost every discourse in this collection, there are 152 of them, in almost every discourse he talked about liberation. So it's clear that this is really the heart of the message that he wanted to present. And in about half of those discourses, he talked about concentration because he considered it such a fundamental base for the development of wisdom, for wisdom to arise. He was talking about concentration all the way through these 152 discourses.

So I'll just read one passage which...

continues to strike me and move me. He's talking about the night of his awakening.

And he says, "When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, wieldy, and steady, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints."

The taints is one of the terms that he uses to describe unwholesome states of mind, the states that cause us suffering and torment us. "I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is: this is suffering. I knew as it actually is: this is the origin of suffering. I knew as it actually is: this is the cessation of suffering. I knew as it actually is: this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering. I knew as it actually is: these are the taints. I knew as it actually is: this is the origin of the taints. This is the cessation of the taints. This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints. When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the taints. When it was liberated, there came the knowledge: it is liberated. I directly knew the holy life has been lived. What had to be done has been done."

The Buddha's account of his own awakening under the Bodhi tree, based on the concentrated mind being bright and purified.

And I like this term, "wieldy," because when the mind becomes concentrated, the wieldy part means we can direct it where we want it to go. In the Buddha's case, this was to the destruction of the taints, which was ultimately liberating. At other times, he directed it to the recollection of past lives. He directed it to seeing beings dying and being reborn according to their past conduct. So there are different ways that it can be directed. This is really the fruit of the cultivation of concentration, of samadhi.

So I started off talking about tranquility and insight. Tranquility is a different term. The Pali is samatha. The term for concentration is samadhi. It sounds like they should be related, but the words aren't really related. But they are similar in meaning. So people will sometimes talk about samatha practices. They'll sometimes talk about samadhi practices. And they tend to use those, a little colloquially, interchangeably, synonymously. The words are different, but people describe the practices somewhat the same.

So as the mind becomes tranquil, it does become concentrated—less distraction. And then when it becomes unified, that's when it's said to be concentrated.

So I've been looking for a long time for a good definition of concentration overall and came upon one that's from the Samyukta Agama. The agamas, you may know, are collections from early Buddhism from a slightly different tradition. They were passed on in Sanskrit and then translated into Chinese. So the agamas generally have roots in the Chinese translations, but they come from early Indian Buddhism, just a different school than the Pali school.

So I think this is a really nice definition: "What is right concentration? It is reckoned to be the establishing of the mind in the absence of distraction. It being firm, collected, tranquil, concentrated, and mentally unified."

I like this because it pulls together all the ways that we think about concentration and the ways that we talk about it. So look into your own experience with each of these. The absence of distraction. Was that in your experience when the mind was concentrated? Firmness. Did you feel there was a strength, stability when you were concentrated? Collected. Collected into the present moment. Tranquil. So the element of

peace is there.

Concentrated and mentally unified—all these qualities are joined together in this definition. What I appreciate about this description is that these are all experiential terms. Concentration isn't just one thing; it has all these different aspects. As we become more familiar with it, we can tune into all these aspects and start to recognize the concentrated mind by these different flavors. The more familiar we become with this state and feel all the different ways that it comes to us, the more our access to it will grow.

Some of this may have been explored in previous retreats, so please bear with me if there's some repetition.

I want to mention something important from my experience: there are times in practice when the mind is fairly concentrated, but it's not tranquil. Concentration and tranquility tend to go together, but sometimes you can be in a concentrated state and be impacted by a very strong experience, causing the mind to become stirred up.

This happens classically when the understanding of impermanence really ripens and comes front and center in meditation. Deep insights into the profound truth of impermanence are often unsettling. The mind can become anxious and stirred up, but this only happens from a place of concentration.

Another place this can be seen is when coming out of a period of stillness and returning to activity. Your friends who left the retreat today likely experienced some concentrated mind meeting the outside world, which probably led to some stirring up. Concentration meeting activity sometimes results in a loss of tranquility—not surprising.

I want to address something about tranquility in relation to healing. I've found, and many people I've spoken with have found, that the experience of retreat and the deepening of meditation can be profoundly healing for different psychological states we've grown up with in our conditioning.

People who have experienced trauma—whether from early childhood, accidents, injury, or abuse—carry that deep injury in their body and mind. It leaves a mark. Many come to meditation retreats like this as a way of healing from that injury, and we've found it very effective in doing so.

If you look into the Buddha's teachings, however, he doesn't explicitly address this kind of healing. He compares himself to a physician, saying the illness we all have is greed, aversion, and delusion, and the remedy is the Eightfold Path. He does see himself as a physician healing the suffering of the world, but these specific kinds of patterning or mental habits that we develop from injury aren't directly addressed in the teachings that I've found.

What does point to this, I believe, is the development of samatha. When the Buddha talks about developing tranquility, he speaks of it in both bodily and mental terms—and when I say mental, I include the heart. In the discourses, the word citta refers to both mind and heart.

What has been stored in the mind-heart and what has been stored in the body tends to be agitating when trauma is at the base. As tranquility develops, it can only develop if that agitation can come to the surface and be somewhat released. So I read in the development of tranquility a real pointing to the activity of healing in our meditation practice.

You can feel this. When the mind becomes collected and the body is settled, it feels like a whole, healthy, or healed place. You can check this out in your own experience.

This quality of samadhi is somewhat contagious. You're all picking it up from each other as these days go on. I'm coming in and picking it up from you, and the new yogis who will be joining us in a couple of days will come in and pick it up from you as well. It's a very shared, communal experience as we develop it.

This became really clear to me some years ago when we had a visit at Spirit Rock from Thich Nhat Hanh. Sally and I live near Spirit Rock, so we've spent a lot of time there teaching and serving on the board. When Thich Nhat Hanh came, it was quite popular—we had about a thousand people come onto the land for this day-long event. A thousand people don't even show up for Jack Kornfield, but they showed up for Thich Nhat Hanh.

It was an outdoor event, as we couldn't hold it inside. This was actually before the current meditation hall was built. The meditation hall, if you've seen Spirit Rock, sits at the top of a hillside, so the land slopes away.

below it.

There's a creek that runs down to one side of the meditation hall, and then the land slopes up above the creek. Both above the creek and on the other side are hills, and the creek runs down the middle.

So we set up a platform for Thich Nhat Hanh to speak on the far side of the creek, and then the meditators filled in the hillside that's now below the meditation hall. We were mostly sitting, some were standing, and a thousand people fit on the meadow.

He sat on the platform, his voice amplified. Maybe the Buddha could talk to 500 people, but I don't think Thich Nhat Hanh could without amplification. As he talked, I felt this spell of samadhi settling over everybody on the hillside. His body language and speech came from such a place of stillness that everybody felt it. A thousand people just settled as he was speaking.

Then, in the afternoon, he led a walking meditation. There's a path that goes from near the meditation hall to the end of the property, just a dirt trail. He took everybody who wanted to go—at least 500 people joined the walking meditation to the end. There was this very long line. There's still a photo of that somewhere at Spirit Rock. It was very beautiful. But you could just feel the impact of his samadhi in his speech and through his body. It was very tangible.

When we think about the development of samadhi, as you know, ten days here is a lot of work. I trust that

at this point you feel it's all been worth it, because there's more work to come. But the work that's to come, I think, is easier than the work that you've done so far. You've done the hard work.

I want to talk about two benefits of the work that you've done. One is when that tranquility develops, when the concentration develops, it feels good, doesn't it? To me, this is one of the most striking and immediate benefits of Dharma practice.

I was at a board meeting yesterday, just down the hill. There were about fifteen of us in the room and another seven or eight online. We did one session in the afternoon that was more about personal sharing to get to know each other better. I was in a group with three other board members, and at some point I posed the question—I was just curious getting to know them—what really drew you into meditation? How did you get so committed to this practice and this center?

One of the other people in the group said the same thing that I said, which was that in our first retreats, we experienced a level of peace that we'd never known was possible. It was so satisfying and rewarding and fulfilling that it changed our lives. My friend said it transformed his life, that experience on the first retreat. A lot of it was because of that degree of peace.

When you feel something like that—maybe that resonates with your experience—it becomes a beacon. It says, this is what the path has to offer. For myself, I wanted to bring that more and more into my whole life. Not just a rare occasion on a cushion in the middle of a long retreat. But if the mind can go there, why not bring it more into life? So that became very motivating for me.

One of the things I noticed as the years went by: I came to greater and greater levels of that peace. The depth of peace available through our practice, I think, is truly unlimited. Unlimited. So that has always been an encouraging and motivating sign for me, the discovery of this incredible peace that I didn't know about before.

That's the first benefit. It feels good and it's inherently satisfying. But the second piece is, it doesn't stop there—it leads on to insight.

This degree of peace and concentration becomes the best foundation for the mind to wake up. And of course, this is where the wisdom comes in.

When the Buddha talked about these two factors of samatha and vipassana, he didn't ever say, "Now do this practice and you'll develop samatha," or "Do this practice and you'll develop vipassana." The way he presented it, in my understanding, is that mindfulness leads to both samatha and vipassana, which I think is true.

But over the centuries, different commentaries and traditions started talking about specific practices: if you want to develop concentration, do these practices; if you want to develop insight, do these practices. There's a fifth-century meditation manual from Sri Lanka called the Visuddhimagga, which has greatly

influenced our tradition. So many meditation instructions and details are laid out there that are still carried out today. It's really been kind of a guiding light in some schools of our tradition.

In that section on developing concentration, the author, Bhikkhu Buddhaghosa, talked about forty different objects for developing concentration, of which the breath was one and the Brahmaviharas were another. The others included things like kasinas, which are colored discs that one then visualizes and focuses on; recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; reflections on death; reflections on a corpse. There are many ways to unify and concentrate the mind.

But here at IMS, we tend to use two: the breath or loving-kindness practice of the Brahmaviharas. We regularly teach in the long retreats, both here and at Spirit Rock, for those who wish months or six-week stretches of concentration on those objects. Very, very fruitful for the people who engage.

So now having developed this base of concentration through this past week of retreat, we can use that to open up to vipassana. The awareness practice that we'll present is a form of vipassana practice. That means we want to be guided as we move into the second half of your retreat by wisdom. Insight and wisdom, of course, are almost synonymous. We want to let that take the lead.

But we want to continue to support the collectedness of mind. As we open up—I mentioned this afternoon that we'll be opening up to a wider field—we don't want to allow that opening to completely undermine our steadiness. That's why we will be opening up gradually and encouraging you to carry along some practice with your anchor, even as we move into the second part of your long retreat.

So we'll take, to some extent, as best we can, some of that concentration with us as we turn to vipassana and wisdom. Of course, we'll give more details as we go.

The breath is one meditation that can be clearly inclusive of both tranquility and insight. The Buddha gave one famous discourse on mindfulness of breathing, which is also included in this volume of the Middle Length Discourses, called the Discourse on the Mindfulness of Breathing, the Anapanasati Sutta. In one section of that, he talks about using the breath for tranquilizing the mind and for concentrating the mind. So the instructions are right there for breathing for both tranquility and concentration.

In another section of the same discourse, he talks about using the breath to contemplate impermanence. You can sort of see this because the breath is always changing, isn't it? Sensations are changing, it's coming and going. No two breaths are really the same when you look closely at them. So if you turn to an approach of investigation with the breath, it could lead into more insight, more wisdom.

When practicing—this is my experience—when I'm using the breath and practicing for samatha, I approach it one way. When I use the breath and I'm developing it for vipassana, I practice a little differently. I'm going to say a little bit about this because it might be relevant for you.

In practicing for samatha, I find it helpful to see the sameness in breath after breath, to see the

commonality in breath after breath. One of the ways this may be expressed is that one keeps the attention steady just on one area of the body. In keeping it on one area of the body, there's a kind of ongoing focus that one can connect with and even emphasize. I'm just going to perceive that one area. Yeah, I could feel the breath up, I could feel the breath down. But as I'm practicing samatha, if I'm experiencing it mostly in the chest, I'm going to play with keeping my attention kind of in that area and see where that leads.

The image that's used—I think this is from the Visuddhimagga—is of a saw going across a log. The idea is the saw goes back and forth, but it's always contacting that one point where the wood is being worn away. That's kind of what the breath is like. It's coming and going and coming and going. And yet if we leave our attention at that one area, that provides a sameness of focus that gets reinforced breath after breath after breath. That's what can help the mind to unify—that sameness.

If I'm using the focus on the breath for vipassana, it's more helpful if I notice the change.

Not the sameness, but the change. Within one breath, there are many different sensations. We often speak of feeling the breath in the abdomen as though it's one unified thing, but if you truly examine the experience of breathing in the belly, you discover countless little sensations flickering and shifting with each in-breath and out-breath.

When using the breath for vipassana, I want to observe all those changing sensations because the impermanence becomes so vivid and clear. I want to notice how one breath differs from the next, really increasing the degree of investigation that characterizes vipassana practice.

This distinction was brought home to me quite powerfully through direct experience. I've always enjoyed investigation—it's naturally appealing to me. But when I began using the breath for samatha, I had to shift that investigative tendency somewhat.

In the early 2000s, I traveled to Burma to practice with Pauk Sayadaw, a renowned meditation master skilled in both concentration and vipassana techniques. I sought him out specifically to learn his concentration methods, which people found remarkably helpful and powerful.

As I settled into practice, Sayadaw knew I was a teacher in the West. Whether he had particular expectations of me, I'm uncertain, but I definitely harbored expectations of myself—a desire to match whatever he might expect. These subconscious pressures can dominate our practice sometimes.

I found myself falling into striving. The way I understand striving is when we apply the force of craving to meditation states, trying to reach them through sheer force of will. That was certainly happening. I'd experienced some settling and desperately wanted to maintain and deepen it, so I was working very hard with a definite element of craving.

What does craving do? It creates tightness. I found myself getting tight, but what's the key to concentration? Relaxation. I wasn't being relaxed at all.

During my daily interview with Sayadaw—he kept close tabs on my experience—I reported, "Sayadaw, I find myself striving." As a very experienced and knowledgeable meditation master, I expected him to offer three or four skillful suggestions to help me move out of striving.

He simply looked at me and said, "Don't do that."

That was good advice, though I had to return to my little hut and figure it out myself. What I discovered was that I needed to readjust my understanding of right effort. I saw that right effort couldn't be focused on achieving a particular result—it had to be focused solely on the immediate experience.

This became my understanding: if I'm seeking an outcome, it becomes striving. If I'm simply interested in the present experience, it's not striving. Right effort means directing attention to the present moment with interest and curiosity.

Feeling quite proud of this insight, I reported to Sayadaw the following day: "Sayadaw, I took your advice. I went back, investigated deeply, and came to a new understanding of right effort in this practice. It really helped eliminate the striving."

He said, "Too much thinking. Just stay here."

He dismissed all my investigation and said, "Just focus on the breath at the upper lip. That's all you're supposed to be doing."

This gave me a completely different approach to meditation than I'd known was possible. I took the advice, and it worked.

One crucial lesson from that instruction and experience was learning I could simply stay here even when hindrances arose. As a trained vipassana meditator, it was almost a religious conviction that when a hindrance emerged, I had to approach it with mindfulness. The RAIN acronym was deeply ingrained in my meditation habits, and I believed that failing to approach hindrances with RAIN meant I was truly failing the practice.

But Sayadaw said, "Just stay here."

I began experimenting with that approach when hindrances appeared, and I found I could actually do it. I could maintain attention here while letting the hindrance run its full course in the background. Thoughts, emotions, and body sensations would continue, but I didn't need to engage them. I could keep attention anchored here, and while the concentration didn't necessarily strengthen during the hindrance, it didn't weaken significantly either.

And so it became a whole other option for me in meditation—I didn't have to go to the hindrance. But I should say, this was after I had been meditating for probably twenty years in the vipassana tradition, and I was very familiar with how to work with hindrances. If someone tried to apply this instruction as a new

meditator, very likely there would be a kind of aversion to the hindrance, using the breath as a way to get away from it. That would be a form of bypass that wouldn't be so helpful.

But I was familiar with what the hindrances were. I knew how to work with each of them. From that place of some confidence, I could leave them in the background. This is something we may talk about more when we get into awareness practice. Because sometimes in awareness practice, the wise thing with hindrances is to let them stay back and keep the focus on the chosen area, which is the awareness itself. So we may bring that in later. I mention it now so that it may be helpful later on.

Another thing the Buddha said about these two—samatha and vipassana—that I found really helpful: I had thought only insight could liberate us to any significant degree. My practice was always devoted to the development of wisdom, with concentration as support. Then there's this very short statement that I found fascinating in the discourses where the Buddha says samatha is for the abandoning of lusts, and vipassana is for the abandoning of ignorance.

So we're not totally liberated until ignorance is abandoned. That's why wisdom is necessary, vipassana is necessary. But if we could abandon lust—and this doesn't just mean sexual desire; the Buddha uses lust, the term raga, in a broader sense to mean any form of desire, usually sense desire—but if we use the tranquility we develop through concentration to let go of wanting, that is a form of liberation in itself. It's not thorough, it's not complete, it's not final, but it's a form of liberation. I found that really interesting and encouraging.

I want to close with some really practical guidance. We're moving into a different form of retreat over the next two days and more in the days after that. But I really hope you will all keep an eye on this factor of samadhi as the retreat moves on and keep nurturing it. The instructions will provide some support for samadhi. We'll make it very explicit what the support for samadhi is in the awareness practice. But there are ways you can also benefit the maintenance of samadhi in other very practical ways. So I'm just going to name a few.

You may have been practicing with these already during this retreat, and I hope you'll continue. One is to return with some regularity to your anchor. As we move into a more open practice, we often say space leads to spacing out. So as you open up and let go of the primary anchor, it's easier to become distracted. Keep an eye on that. When the distraction is getting bigger, don't hesitate to come back to your anchor and recollect. Continue your relationship with your anchor. Come back regularly and maintain that.

Using specific techniques with the breath can be really helpful. During this retreat, was there instruction in noting practice with the breath? No. Any instruction in counting? No. Both these little verbal additions can really help develop the quality of concentration. You may have used them in the past. Maybe something you want to refresh your connection with. They can be useful tools for strengthening the samadhi as we go forward with the breath.

The counting practice is not just for beginners. When I went to practice with Sayadaw U Pandita in Burma, he gave me the instruction to use counting. He told me to count breaths one to eight over and over and over. While I was with him, I did it in every sitting, and I found it was really helpful. It really did strengthen my continuity in the present moment. It let me know when I was drifting out. We're not going to teach that here, but if you've had prior experience and feel like picking it up, that's not bad.

The third principle, which I'm certain was discussed in the previous retreat, is the most important single element: maintaining continuity of mindfulness throughout the day. This means sustaining awareness through your sitting periods, walking meditation, meals, showers, service practice, and time in your room. The more you can strengthen this moment-to-moment presence, the more it will support the stability of tranquility.

I'm already witnessing this quality in our group through your natural inclination toward slowing down. When I arrived at the retreat, this was the first thing that struck me—how many people were moving slowly and mindfully. This quality truly communicates to others and preserves your stability of attention.

Another valuable practice is using the walking periods for formal walking meditation. This serves the cultivation of continuity. Often we discover that when the sitting ends, we suddenly remember we need to return to our room to wash socks. This takes us to the other side of the building, where we spend thirty minutes on this task. With only fifteen minutes remaining, we might think we don't need to walk and instead sit down to watch the sky.

If you haven't established the habit of maintaining continuity through formal walking, I encourage you to experiment with periods where you do a sitting, followed by a complete formal walking session, followed by another sit. Observe the impact this has on the continuity of your mindfulness through these three periods.

Guarding the sense doors provides another powerful support. Sometimes teachers interpret this as meaning "don't look"—approaching the dining hall while guarding the sense doors means avoiding looking around. However, this isn't what the Buddha intended. What he taught about guarding the sense doors is to remain careful of any reactive formations that arise when you're engaged with the senses.

For example, when you're looking, notice if wanting arises. Is there liking? Not wanting? Disliking? These reactive patterns are what we want to guard against. It's not about whether we look at one another, although we don't recommend making eye contact. Rather, as you're looking, observe what the mind is doing in response to what you see.

Another possibility you've likely been exploring already: as your practice becomes more energized and continuous, you may discover that physical energy increases, allowing you to extend your daily practice hours. This could mean rising a little earlier or staying up later. You might find you need less sleep than when you began the retreat. By extending the hours, mindfulness has greater opportunity to flourish.

These are all potential ways to continue strengthening the factor of concentration. I wouldn't mention these to beginning practitioners just arriving, as they can lead to striving. But since you've all already settled into the rhythm, these are subtle refinements. If something interests you, choose one element to explore. I wouldn't recommend implementing them all simultaneously, as that can become overwhelming. Select one, experiment with it, and see if it proves beneficial.

I believe this covers everything I wanted to share this evening. It's about 8:20, leaving forty minutes for walking meditation—the schedule you've maintained these past days. We'll offer longer Dharma talks once our retreat fully settles. For today, we'll conclude here.

There will be a sitting at nine o'clock with chanting. If you have the energy, please join us. We'll be chanting *Imaya Dhammanu* this evening. Feel free to join our choir.

Rest well, and we'll see you in the morning. Sign-ups for individual meetings with the teachers tomorrow will be posted after this sitting, so you can check the board if you're interested.

Have a blessed evening.

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