Taking Refuge

Greg Scharf · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 59:47

In a little while, we'll be chanting the Refuges and Precepts as part of the talk tonight.

In a certain sense, the entering into the formal retreat will really begin with the chanting of these refuges and precepts together—this ancient tradition of beginning a period of practice this way. Carol spoke a bit about the precepts last night, basically this orientation around non-harming, undertaking that commitment. The words on the sheet are familiar to most of you, maybe all of you. You've all done a number of retreats.

This language that we'll be chanting in, the Pali language, is an ancient language coming from the time of the Buddha. It's the language that the earliest texts are preserved in. The only reason we have this language is because these teachings have been preserved in this way. It doesn't exist for any other reason. It's not spoken anywhere except in places where people are studying the ancient teachings of the Buddha. There's a certain power in a language that comes from that kind of lineage over the years, just in the sound and the feeling of the words in one's mouth as we speak them.

This evening we'll chant the five precepts. You'll notice there are eight on the sheet. In two or three days, we'll speak more about the sixth, seventh, and eighth precept. That's something some of you may wish to undertake. Some of you may already have decided you wish to practice this retreat undertaking these eight precepts, and you should please feel free to go ahead and do that. But we'll do a more formal taking of those eight precepts for those who wish to undertake this extra level of renunciation, you could say.

By chanting this, part of what happens in the doing of that is the creating of this retreat container. A retreat like this is a marvelous thing. It arises out of the conditions that come together that we bring here, this shared intention that we bring. It doesn't exist except through that coming together and bringing this intention we have to cultivate wisdom, love, kindness, clarity, understanding. We create a place of safety by engaging with these precepts. We create a safe place for us to undertake this practice, which is really a critical aspect of what we do so that we can really open in an environment where we feel safe, where we feel at ease. We voice this intention with the refuges and precepts together and we create this container of the retreat through that. And also, in a way, we will be touching our highest aspiration in voicing this, I feel.

I want to go through the Refuges and Precepts chanting, the format of this chant, because there's actually a lot there. We can tend to sort of say, "Oh, yeah, we'll do that, we'll get that in place, do that at the beginning of a retreat, we always do this chant"—and we either like it or we don't, that relationship we may have there. We can kind of figure, "Okay, it's done. That's done. Now I can get to the retreat." But

there's a lot to this, and it's something that is an ongoing exploration. It's not something we just get in place and then that's it.

In this chant that we do, the first part is this homage: *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa*. What does that mean, this homage? Yes, we have the translation there: "Homage to the Blessed, Noble, and Perfectly Enlightened One." What does it mean to pay homage to something? This is something to reflect on—not an answer I'm going to give you now, but a reflection we might look at. What does it mean to do this, to pay homage? What would we hold as worthy of paying homage to? We don't use this word that much in daily life. "I'm going to go pay homage this afternoon"—we don't say that very often to our friends.

I got to go pay homage. It's an unusual word in a certain way.

You might have noticed the teachers, some of your fellow yogis—you yourself may come into the hall and bow, or gesture with a kind of gesture of respect. I usually bow three times to this Buddha image here behind me. It's a tradition to bow, to hold the hands in this posture, this mudra, anjali mudra. Anjali meaning respect—an offer of respect, a gesture of respect. This prayer posture at the heart center is said to represent a lotus bud, something that might flower forth, you could say. There's a certain beauty in that.

Some of you might wonder what's up if you see me or others bowing, wondering what's up with that, and if you're expected to start bowing if that's not something you're used to doing. If you're a good yogi, you'll start bowing. You have to become a Buddhist, whatever that is. So there's some expectation here. But none of us have an agenda about any of you becoming a Buddhist. It's helpful, I think, to remember that the Buddha was not a Buddhist. What is a Buddhist? We might ask ourselves that question.

But then we do, some of us, bow. I bow a lot. I like to bow. It's a good stretch for the back, if nothing else. But it's a beautiful gesture, and I bring a deep aspiration into my mind when I do it. I may say more about that as the retreat unfolds.

But what might we bow to? What would we pay homage to? What's worth venerating? It's not this sculpture here. We may like it, find it appealing or not. It's a casting in metal. I've made things like that—I used to do work that involved not making Buddha statues, but things that were cast, sculptures. There's some value to the metal, but there's no intrinsic, inherent value in that thing. And so, yes, we bow to what it symbolizes. That's an obvious point in a certain way—it's a symbol. But it's worth thinking about what that symbol is then.

Traditionally, one would bow three times to the triple gem—not new to you—the triple gem of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. Or we could say one bows to wakefulness, to wisdom, to one's potential for this realization. We can bow to that. We might find that worthy of paying homage to. Maybe this symbol of the historic Buddha has meaning for us in some way. But it's worth exploring, each of us in our own heart, in our own minds: what might we hold worthy of paying homage to in ourselves, in the world?

And then there is this idea of refuge. We go to these three refuges—we go to the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha. Three times we do it, not just once. We go to these things for refuge. What is refuge? Again, we don't say, "Oh, excuse me, I need to go take refuge," to our friends. Not very often, probably. But what is a refuge? It's a place of safety, right? It's like a safe harbor. Or you could say a place where we could put our heart that's safe. It's a secure place. And in a world that's constantly changing, that's unpredictable, where can we find that?

Where do we find a place of real safety in a world of change, a world that we can't predict in any way? Where do we find safety there?

And so we have this triple gem. We have refuge in the Buddha. It's said that after his awakening, after his enlightenment, after he'd spent time around the Bodhi tree and had become convinced that he would teach, the Buddha set off on a journey. He was looking for his former companions who would become his first five disciples. And he's walking down the road, and he looks good—just enlightened. He might look kind of good. He's glowing, radiant. And he meets someone on the road, and this person is struck by him and says, "Well, what are you? Are you a human? Are you a god?" And the Buddha said, "I am awake." That was his answer: "I am awake." The name Buddha, the root *budh*, means awake, wakefulness.

And so we have this image of the Buddha, this image of one who is awake, who has awakened. Maybe, as I said, this idea of the Buddha as a human who lived and had this realization might be meaningful to us. We might say there's a refuge in that—this refuge in wakefulness, in our own possibility to wake up. The Buddha said, if this were not possible, I wouldn't ask you to do it. He's always pointing to this realization that he had. He said, that's what I want you to see—pointing to that always. That's all he was ever interested in. And it's always possible for us to wake up to the moment, to the truth of things. So it doesn't matter that things are changing or unpredictable. We can know the truth of the moment. We can take refuge there. That's a safe place—this wakefulness, awakening to the moment.

We have the refuge in Dhamma, the second of these. What is Dhamma? This word has more than one meaning. Dhamma means the Buddha's teachings. That's called the Buddhadhamma, all these teachings. And this is great for us. We don't have to figure this out all on our own. The Buddha did that, and he was pretty good at teaching it. So we have that as a resource to draw on.

The word Dhamma also means the law, like the law of nature. Again, it's the truth of how things really are. That's something we can know, potentially know in any moment. It's always there. That's a real place of safety. We can take refuge in the truth of nature, the law of nature, the way it is now.

And then the refuge in Sangha. Traditionally, it's the Ariya Sangha—those who have practiced after the Buddha and realized awakening following the path he was pointing to. That may have meaning for us also. In the chanting, it says, *Supaṭipanno Bhagavato Sāvakasaṅgho*—the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well. And so we can perhaps take refuge in that lineage over time. Yes, these people walked this path that is tried and true. There are those who have gone before us, who have walked it, and we can

follow in their footsteps. We may take some quality of refuge in that lineage, that tradition, that movement over time.

One teacher defined this quality of sangha as this marvelous organism that we create through our shared intention, the alignment of shared intention—this heart inclination, you could say, towards love and wisdom, kindness. He described it as individuals looking into a common space, as if we were all looking into a room through our own window.

We all have our own window. We look into this room through these eyes, through all that we bring in our own hearts and minds—all our conditioning, our perspective on things. But we're looking into something that's more timeless and more universal than any individual story that might be there for any one of us. We're looking into something bigger than our individuality. And yet our individuality is there, and it's honored, and it's part of things—but no one vision is going to run the show. We look into something greater and create sangha.

So we're creating that here. And that is a place of safety for us, this shared intention.

And then we have the precepts themselves, this thing we'll actually chant. Carol spoke about the first five of these last night, so I won't go over them. You all should be familiar with them, I think. What we're undertaking here with these precepts is this orientation towards harmony, towards non-harming—not harming ourselves, not harming others. We're not intentionally adding to the suffering of the world.

And this is the very foundation. The whole practice rests on our conduct, on this sila, this ethical conduct. The Buddha talked about this on and on throughout the teachings—the importance of this, that no real progress is possible without this foundation of attention to how we live, how we are in the world. If everyone in the world made even a half-hearted attempt to engage with the precepts, we would have a golden age on this planet overnight. If everyone just thought about the possibility, it would change everything—let alone actually lived by these precepts. It would completely transform the world. This isn't a small thing that we do here. This is powerful and beautiful.

And our whole practice rests on this. It's something that is constantly being refined as our practice deepens and our understanding unfolds. If we live a life of non-harming, then the mind is free of remorse and worry. There's more calm, tranquility, and ease in our hearts and minds. This opens the whole practice. Concentration follows upon this. Our meditation deepens. Understanding arises.

The Buddha described this beautifully in a short teaching in the Anguttara Nikaya. Ananda asked him a question: "Lord, what is the benefit of virtuous ways of conduct? What is their reward?" And the Buddha goes through this list:

Virtuous ways of conduct have non-remorse as their benefit and reward. Non-remorse has gladness. Gladness has joy. Joy has serenity. Serenity has happiness. Happiness has concentration. Concentration has knowledge and vision of things as they really are as its benefit and reward. This knowledge and vision

has disenchantment and dispassion as its benefit and reward. And disenchantment and dispassion have knowledge and vision of liberation as their benefit and reward. Hence, Ananda, virtuous ways of conduct lead step by step to the highest.

And in that same teaching, he goes on to say that this is a natural law. If this is there, then this follows, then this follows. It's just a natural thing. If one is steeped in virtuous ways of living, then these things follow naturally. One doesn't have to make an act of will. So it's a powerful thing.

These precepts are not laws or commandments. They're something we engage with as an exploration—to see what the effect of this is. And through our commitment to living this way, we're able to offer the gift of safety, of fearlessness. This is one of the most powerful gifts we could possibly offer—the gift of fearlessness.

That *sadhu* means "well-spoken." And it was well spoken.

As I walked over here through the woods from where I'm staying—one of the apartments at the Forest Refuge—I commute through the woods. I came out and it was a beautiful sunset time. People were doing walking meditation out in the driveway. I had mostly mudita and some envy for you, I'll admit it. I tried to get a friend of mine who was going on retreat to switch with me earlier today. "You teach. I'll sit."

It was just so beautiful to see people practicing here. It inspired me to do some walking meditation before coming in here.

Last night, Joseph spoke about three things that would be useful, important, powerful supports for the practice. He spoke about silence as the first of these, or at least one of them. I'm going to say a little bit more about this now.

If we just came here for this period of time—however long we're coming for, six weeks, three months—and we didn't do any formal meditation practice, just really kept silence, just did that, it would be a very powerful time. This entering into silence, and all the ways that we do that, is an incredible support for us.

I really want to encourage you to embrace that as a gift to yourself and as a gift to everyone else here—undertaking silence in all the different ways we might do that. Yes, we let go of speaking for the most part, this noble silence. We may need to speak at times, but for the most part, we're not speaking. But we have all these devices that we love so much.

I think we should be buried with these electronic things, like the ancient Egyptians got all their stuff. They'll pile us over, cover us with iPods and cell phones. But if you've brought any of these with you—I sometimes say throw them in the pond, but I don't want to pollute the pond. So put them in the trunks of your cars, or I think the office probably has a place where you can check them in like your guns at the door. Check in your cell phones. Really let them go.

And letting go of reading and writing as well, as much as possible. It's not like a "thou shalt not read or write," but looking to see what's the motivation behind reading or writing, really looking at that and letting it go.

In many of the monasteries where I have spent time, part of a chant that's done daily, usually part of the morning or evening chanting in these Theravada monasteries, there are reflections chanted on the qualities of the Buddha and the Dhamma and the Sangha—kind of my theme tonight, this triple gem. The chanting of the recollection of the qualities of the Dhamma is really short. You'd think, "Oh, the Dhamma, it's giant. We should have this long chant. We should chant on and on and on about it." It goes like this: *Sv ākkhāto Bhagavatā Dhammo, Sandiṭṭhiko, Akāliko, Ehipassiko, Opaneyyiko, Paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi.* That's it. Done. But what is that? It's short, but there's a lot there.

So that first line, *Svākkhāto Bhagavatā Dhammo,* is usually translated as "the Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One"—well taught, well expounded. I already mentioned earlier that we have this wealth of teachings. It is well expounded. There's a tremendous body of teachings we draw upon, and all of us will be drawing on those teachings over the course of this retreat and offering them to you in different ways. So the Dhamma is well expounded. We have that huge body of teachings that we can draw on. And the Buddha had this amazing gift of being able to teach in ways that were appropriate, suitable for his audience. The teachings are presented in different ways. So we have that well-expounded teaching.

The second quality, *Sandiṭṭhiko*, is usually translated as "apparent here and now." Here and now. It points to the immediacy of this practice. It's apparent here and now, in this moment. It's not apparent somewhere way off in some other time or place. It's apparent here and now. It points to this immediacy—that the realization is in this moment. It's an ongoing thing, this exploration of the truth of things. The truth is always the truth, right? It's not sometimes the truth. It just is the way it is. That's what we're looking at. One of my teachers once said, "We're swimming in Nibbāna, and our faces are pressed up against the Buddha, but we just don't see it." But that possibility is there. So it's apparent here and now—*Sandiṭṭhiko*. We're not creating something or getting something we don't already have.

The third quality, *Akāliko*, means timeless. These teachings are not time-bound. They're just as relevant now as when the Buddha first taught. Not bound by time in that way. And when we undertake this exploration on a retreat, we enter into a very timeless place, don't we? Certainly that's my experience on retreat. Time becomes very fluid. It's a timeless place that we enter. And this understanding is timeless. It's not bound by time.

The truth was, is, and always will be the truth—not some idea, not some belief, but simply the way it is, just the way it is.

Ehipasiko. This is perhaps the most beautiful one: inviting all to come and see. When the Buddha first began ordaining the monks and nuns, he would simply say, "Come." That was it. Until they started misbehaving, and then they had to develop all these rules. But early on, it was simply, "Come. Come and

see."

And so there's no belief here. It's not a question of adopting some kind of system of belief or philosophical stance that we take as "good Buddhists" or something like that. It's this exploration. We put this into practice for ourselves.

There's a beautiful teaching where the Buddha was traveling to the area where the Kalamas lived, a clan called the Kalamas. Apparently where they resided was frequented by many teachers. At the time of the Buddha, there were wandering teachers all over the place. When the Buddha arrived, the Kalamas said to him—and I'm paraphrasing—"You say this, and this teacher says that, and another one says something else. How do we know who to believe? They all talk a good line. They look good. You look good."

And the Buddha said, "Well, check it out. Put it into practice. See where it leads. Does it lead to good things or not? That's how you tell. You explore it for yourself."

And so we offer the retreat as teachers in this spirit of *ehipasiko*, come and see. Look for yourself. It's an invitation in that way.

Opanayiko—leading inward, or leading onward. I've seen it translated both ways, and both are good. Leading inward, because these are truths to be seen in this body and mind. We look into this heart, body, and mind right now. That's where understanding unfolds. So it leads us inward. We're exploring nature as it manifests in this mind, body, and heart, right now in this moment. And that's where we'll understand what the Buddha was pointing at.

The Buddha said we have everything we need in this fathom-long body for the whole deal. It's all right there. So it leads us inward to that place where we can really see what's going on, to the understanding that's possible there.

And it leads onward—onward to happiness, peace, freedom. We start to see this, to taste this for ourselves. So it leads both inward and onward.

And then this last phrase: to be seen by the wise for themselves, or to be experienced individually by those who are wise, as it's usually translated. The Buddha, like all great teachers, is pointing the way. The Buddha described himself by saying, "I am the guide who points along the way." All great teachers are pointing the way. Their fingers are pointing at the moon—or perhaps the moon is in your own heart—but they're pointing at that. They want you to look.

They all want you to see the moon, not the finger. Look at the moon. So they point at that, but then we have to walk on the path. They say, "This is the path. This is the pathway that worked for me." And all the great teachers—okay, "I started over here and I went that way"—they point in the way that they understood. And so then we can walk the path with those instructions, with those guidelines, with that pointing out, but we have to walk it for ourselves.

Our teachers can inspire us, and they can carry us with their faith and with their wisdom. Of course, that's true. And they may carry us a long way. But ultimately, it's up to us.

One way that this path is described is in terms of what's called the ripening of the paramis—paramitas in Sanskrit—familiar to you all, I'm sure. This list of the paramis, these ten beautiful, noble qualities of mind, of heart. In the tradition it is said that over countless lifetimes the Buddha perfected these things, and that in the awakened, enlightened heart and mind, these paramis are brought to perfection. This is a way that the path is described. These stories in the Jataka tales, these teaching fables where the Buddha takes birth often as an animal and cultivates generosity or patience or energy—all of these different paramis.

Here's Sariputta asking the Buddha a question: "How many qualities are there, Lord, issuing in Buddhahood?" "There are, Sariputta, ten qualities issuing in Buddhahood." "What are the ten?" "Giving, Sariputta, is a quality issuing in Buddhahood. Virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving kindness, and equanimity. These, Sariputta, are qualities issuing in Buddhahood."

These are the paramis. And we can see our practice as these coming to greater and greater fruition or ripening. We can hold our practice in this way. It's a powerful way to hold the practice because it really expands the breadth of what we think of as practice. We can get kind of narrow with that. We think of practice as when I'm sitting in formal meditation on a retreat. But these qualities of the paramis—they're being cultivated, strengthened throughout our lives in so many ways, no matter what we're doing. So our practice can become very wide when we hold it in terms of the ripening of these beautiful qualities of mind, of heart.

This perspective can help us cut through the tendency to be constantly judging and assessing and evaluating our experience, evaluating and judging ourselves and our practice based on that experience—whatever seems to be happening in the moment. We can fall into that so easily, can't we? We judge our experience, we judge ourselves based on our perception of that experience. We focus on trying to meditate, trying to get concentrated, to do it, to make something happen. Maybe we're trying to reclaim something that happened in the past that we think was really it—to get it back. And we can miss qualities that are developing just through our willingness to keep at it, to start over and over, to begin again and again.

This is our whole practice. We're going to begin again a gazillion times over the next weeks. If you kept track, it would be a big number, that starting again. Maybe our whole retreat is about patience or energy or generosity and kindness. We can miss that if we narrow our focus down too much. So I encourage you to hold a very wide field of what we think of as our practice.

It's really important to look and see what kinds of attitudes and expectations we're bringing when we begin a retreat. What's in our mind and heart? What agendas might be there? Usually we have some kinds of agendas, something we're working on. It's good to look and see what's in there. What's going on? What

am I bringing to the retreat? Looking at our assumptions about reality, about ourselves, about what we believe is true or possible.

He once said, "The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us—new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. This indeed is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control."

I really love this quotation. I use it a lot. I think it's a great description of mindfulness practice—this idea of waiting actively present to the moment, trusting that things will present themselves. And we have no idea what that is.

A colleague of mine describes this same quality, this active presence, as "soft readiness." I like that description of mindfulness—this soft readiness, and this idea of not knowing. Suzuki Roshi spoke about beginner's mind. Sometimes it's called "don't know mind." We let go of everything we think we know, all of our assumptions about what's true and real, and meet the moment with freshness and aliveness.

We can have such strong beliefs about who we are, about reality, about life. We don't even look at them. We don't even notice them. We don't question their truth. We take it for granted. We don't even look to see if it's true.

One time I was in Burma practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita, a teacher many of you have heard of. He's a powerful and incredible meditation master. He made this really simple statement. He said, "That which did not exist comes into being, takes birth, has its life, and passes away." That's the truth of each moment. It did not exist. It comes into being. We don't know. We think we know what a breath is. But do we really know what this breath is?

There's a quality that I think is really useful to bring to the retreat: a generosity of heart, a generous spirit. The path is also described as the trainings in *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*—in giving, in ethical conduct, and in the training of the mind. So this quality of generosity is another foundation for the practice. I won't say too much about it tonight. Maybe later in the retreat, one of us will speak about this in more detail. But this generosity of heart is powerful support to our practice.

We might reflect on the generosity of those in our lives who have helped to make it possible for us to come here—people who are perhaps covering for us in various ways, who have helped to support us in order to come and be on retreat. Great generosity that we've received.

We're so conditioned to look to the external world and our circumstances for the reasons why we're happy or unhappy—looking outside for that. But cultivating this generous spirit can help us find a place of inner abundance, which doesn't have to do with our external circumstances. An inner kind of wealth. We can feel that we're not complete so much of the time. And the whole world of advertising is conditioning this in us—all these things that we need, and then we'll be okay and happy and complete.

Generosity is an expression of non-greed, non-clinging. And this goes to the heart of the teachings. The Buddha taught liberation through non-clinging. So this generosity of heart is a direct antidote to clinging and grasping in the mind and heart. And it really opens the practice. When we find this quality of inner abundance, we can discover we don't need so much to be happy.

So see if you can hold this quality by giving yourself the gift of this retreat, giving yourself this time in silence, giving this gift of silence to everyone else who's here, sharing this time with you. Give yourself to the process as it unfolds.

And this generous quality of heart and mind can lead to two other really useful attitudes—climates of mind that can really help us. I'll mention them briefly. This generosity of heart, this quality of inner abundance, naturally conditions the arising of feelings of gratitude and of loving-kindness, of friendliness.

Those of us who are able to come and do this have a great deal to be grateful for, things we can easily take for granted. We don't tend to count our blessings. It's easy to see all that we seem to lack, all we feel we don't have. But to count one's blessings is a really beautiful thing to do.

Someone once told me they had a practice where every day they tried to think of five things they were grateful for. Just food and shelter. Here we have the opportunity to be on retreat, to hear the Dhamma, to practice. We have friends in our lives. All these things we might reflect on as things to be grateful for. It's really useful to turn our attention to that when it's so easy to see everything we think we don't have.

And this quality of loving kindness that Joseph mentioned last night—let me say a few more words about it. It really is a crucial aspect of the ground that our practice rests upon. This quality of friendliness engenders qualities of acceptance and patience, really critical for our practice to unfold. Metta, loving kindness, softens the heart, increases its pliability, its flexibility, its spaciousness. This quality puts us at ease, and all of these are really important and helpful in our practice.

This quality of loving kindness is not only compatible with the path, but it really pulls us along towards awakening, toward liberation. We could say liberation without love is not possible. And in an essential way, the practice of freedom is the practice of love, and the practice of love is the practice of freedom. These things are not separate. The practice of meditation is about the transformation of the mind and the heart. You could say it's the practice of bringing the mind and the heart together.

There's a quotation from Krishnamurti I'd like to read that speaks to this beautifully. He said once, "When the heart enters into the mind, the mind has a very different quality. It is really then limitless, not only in its capacity to think and to act efficiently, but also in the sense of living in a vast space where you are part of everything. Meditation is the movement of love, and it isn't the love of the one or of the many. Rather, it's like water that anyone can drink out of any jar, whether golden or earthenware. It's inexhaustible. Without love, there is not freedom. Without love, freedom is merely an idea which has no value at all."

And finally, one last encouragement. I want to reiterate—I think I'm not the only one reiterating—Joseph's

suggestion of making our mind our friend, befriending our mind, our heart. Put mind and heart together. We can approach practice like we're setting out into battle, set up a situation where we're in contention with our experience, with our mind, with our heart. We see our minds, our internal world, as a problem to be fixed or an enemy to be subdued. We bring a lot of judgment and criticism there.

But this practice requires the intention to understand rather than to judge. We need acceptance rather than struggle and resistance. We need kindness rather than blame.

A number of years ago, when I was living in San Francisco, I helped with a program studying the migration of hawks through the Golden Gate area. These big birds of prey don't like to fly over open water, so they cross at a narrow point there where the bridge is. They gather in the area north of the Golden Gate Bridge, and we were counting them, gently trapping them, banding them, measuring and weighing them, trying to preserve habitat for these birds and understand how they live.

You had to learn how to hold a red-tailed hawk. These are big birds, and they're fierce. They'll bite you or put a talon through your thumb if you're not careful. But they're also birds. They have hollow bones, and you have to be careful. So you have to hold them gently but firmly.

This is a good way we can relate to our mind and heart. Hold it somewhat firmly but very gently. We don't necessarily let our mind run all over the place, but we don't crush it in some way. We don't relate to our heart and mind as an adversary. We bring this quality of friendliness, of befriending our inner world. We receive life into this field of kind care.

I'll end tonight with a quotation from a Burmese teacher of mine, Sayadaw U Jotika.

How can you make your mind your real friend? By practicing mindfulness, by really watching your mind, by really paying attention throughout the day. Then you will see the truth about your mind. And when you see the truth, gradually it will become purer and it will become your friend.

Let these words drift off into the evening.

Thank you for listening.

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