Opening Session

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:24:00

Welcome, everyone. It's good to see you.

My name is William Edelglass. I'm Director of Studies here at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. I'd like to welcome everybody who's here in Barre and everybody who's on Zoom.

I'd also like to acknowledge that we are on land that was traditionally stewarded by the Nipmuc people, many of whom still live in this area. In fact, a couple of years ago, we had a Nipmuc language concert in this Dharma Hall. I'd also like to acknowledge all the beech and birch trees and hemlock, the owls that we hear at night, the chipmunks, and all the other living beings who accompany us.

If you look at our website, BuddhistInquiry.org, you'll see that at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, we are interested in exploring and inquiring into Buddhist traditions to help inform our practice. These next few days will be exploratory, inquiring. They began as a small conversation with Joseph and John and myself, and we wanted to invite others into this conversation. We wanted to invite some other teachers who were deeply rooted in the lineage, and then we wanted to invite some friends who could be here to participate in it.

We are very glad you're here. We've been thinking about this gathering for a couple of years, and you have a very warm welcome.

Now we will go to Dhammadipa.

A warm welcome to everyone. One of my dhamma names is Dhammadipa.

Just to give a tiny bit of background for this chanting: in Majjhima Nikaya 43, the middle-length discourses, there is a conversation between Venerable Sariputta and Venerable Mahakotthita with a lot of detailed information. One question that gets posed to Venerable Sariputta is: when there is right view, how does that ripen into freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom? It's said that there are five factors by which that ripens. The first of those is ethics, then learning and discussion, and then samatha and vipassana—calming or tranquility and insight. All of those conditions can come together this weekend.

We're going to start right at the beginning with ethics. Many people know these versions of the chants. These are in the traditional language of early Buddhism, Pali. If they're not familiar, feel free to just stumble over them or let it wash over you. Rather than do call and response, we'll just chant all together.

We'll begin with the homage to the Buddha, then pause for a moment as I begin the chant for the refuges—taking refuge in the Triple Gem: Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Then the five precepts. This is the early Buddhist or Theravada form of the five precepts for lay people. These are completely optional. Please only take precepts that you're actually going to follow, and you can follow them just for this period of time, or for a lifetime, or beyond.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama 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
Tisarana Gamanam Nitthitam

For the five precepts, let's chant the Pali all together, and then you will also recite the English so that you know what you're committing to.

Panatipata Veramani Sikkapadam Samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking life.

Adinnadana Veramani Sikkapadam Samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what is not given.

Abrahmacariya Veramani Sikkapadam Samadiyami

This one requires a note: what you have here is sometimes referred to as the monastic version, Brahmacariya Veramani, which means refraining from sexual activity. The lay version, Kamesu Micchacara, means refraining from sexual misconduct.

Musavada Veramani Sikkapadam Samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech.

And then this last line affirms that understanding I was mentioning earlier: "May this virtue of mind help bring about the knowledge of the path and its fruit."

So we chant it in Pali, usually three times:

Idam me silam magaphala ñanassa paccayo hotu

Thank you very much, Dhammadipa.

It's a pleasure to be here with you all tonight, and with these very distinguished teachers and practitioners of the Dharma. My name is John Dunne, and as William mentioned, I may have something to do with the fact that we're all here tonight. Hopefully that's good karma—although if a Dharma brawl breaks out over the weekend, it may not turn out to be so good.

That reminds me, actually: as William said, we were talking about this article, this essay that you have all received, that Joseph wrote. That was very much spurred by some other conversations he's been having, but also, of course, by his original work *One Dharma*, published more than twenty years ago. I remember that book begins with a certain kind of Dharma conversation. Some of you may remember it recounts an encounter between a Tibetan master and a Korean Zen master. At a certain point, the Zen master wants to engage in Dharma combat. So he picks up an orange from the bowl of fruit in front of him, holds it up to the Tibetan Lama, and says, "What is this?" The Tibetan Lama has a translator. He gets the translation—"What is this?"—and he says, "What? Don't they have oranges in your country?"

So let's hope we'll get to a higher level of coherence than that particular conversation reached this weekend.

But in some ways, that does speak to the very fact that you could have that kind of encounter at all. When the Dharma first reached Tibet, there was very little access to practitioners from the Far East—from Korea, some interaction with practitioners from China, but not at all from Japan. There was actually very little interaction between Tibet and Southeast Asia, where the Theravada tradition was flourishing. Likewise, those other traditions had some interactions here and there, but what we have in this modern period, especially in the United States—because we are indeed a kind of melting pot—are various transportation technologies, communications technologies, and just the way our lives are. This has led to a situation in which we really encounter the Dharma in many different forms very easily, even on a daily basis if we wish. Many of us have practiced in more than one tradition, or have at least dabbled in more than one style of practice.

This has raised many questions, especially the kinds of questions that Joseph has pointed to—questions perhaps that are really pointing to the quintessence of what the Dharma is about: liberation. How do we find continuities across traditions? Are there points that we all agree on? Are there important ways in which we disagree? That's part of what we'll be exploring this weekend with these distinguished teachers.

I'll be serving as your moderator, and I'll also contribute a little bit here and there. I'll begin by introducing myself, since I already have the mic, and then I'm going to ask each of our teachers to introduce themselves, and finally Joseph at the end. As we introduce ourselves, we'll also say maybe a

little preview of what we might say over the course of the weekend. We've had an interesting conversation already, and I'm really interested to see where all of this goes.

So I've been practicing the Dharma for about forty-five years. I was reflecting on that number just recently—it's been quite a long time. I started not very far from here, actually, at Amherst, when I left the United States Air Force Academy. I was a fallen astronaut, so to speak. I ended up at Amherst College, where a dorm mate very kindly introduced me to Vipassana meditation because I was definitely falling apart. Then I took a class with Robert Thurman and also met my first Tibetan teacher, Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche. That really got me rolling, and it hasn't stopped since.

I practiced especially in the Tibetan tradition, first in the Gelugpa tradition, which is more scholastic. That philosophical perspective has been very important to me throughout my life. But then I also encountered a tradition through the lineage of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, and especially his oldest son, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, but also Mingyur Rinpoche, the younger brother, and Tsoknyi Rinpoche. That is a non-dual style of practice that combines two non-dual lineages in Tibet, known as Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

I also have a kind of academic lineage, if you like. I'm a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I work with scientists who study the effects of meditation practices.

And probably some of that will come up in what I have to say this weekend.

But I'm especially interested in a particular quote that Joseph uses in his essay, a really important quote in the tradition that I'm involved in. It's said to have been spoken by the great Indian Mahasiddha Tilopa to his student Naropa. And the quote says—in Tibetan it says, *Nangwe miching shembe ching, shemba chodom Naropa*—"My child, you are not bound by appearances. You're bound by your clinging. Cut through your clinging, O Naropa."

And so that's what I'm going to try to unpack, especially in relationship to the idea of non-duality. So we'll see where that goes. I might do something entirely different, actually, when the time comes. But that's where I'm headed right now.

And now I'm going to turn it over to Anne and ask Anne Klein to introduce herself.

Thank you. And good evening, everyone. It's wonderful to be here with our distinguished cohort and with all of you.

Where does it all begin for any of us? Where did it begin for you, meeting the Dharma in this country, in this century?

So one early moment for me. When I was in high school and also in college—nothing. Absolutely nothing on Asia, Buddhism. A little bit starting about Zen. Suzuki Roshi was starting San Francisco Zen Center at

that time, so just a little bit on the edge of the culture. I didn't get any education in that. But what I did read was interesting in some unfathomable way. Alan Watts. There wasn't much to read at that time.

My junior year in college, I just got a hit that I really had to go to India. And I was going to do it, even though there was no real reason whatsoever that I could present. So I went to graduate school in order to develop a reason that would be meaningful to my parents. And lo and behold, there was a Buddhist studies program at the University of Wisconsin, where John now is. And I thought, fantastic—whoever heard of a Buddhist studies program? I like it. I like philosophy. I'll go.

That year, Jeffrey Hopkins, who some of you may know from his many years way back now translating for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, was a graduate student. He had invited Kensur Ngawang Lekden, who was the last abbot of traditional Tibet, of one of the great tantric colleges of Lhasa. He was seventy years old at the time. And he was a person I was told that if you met him in traditional Tibet, you would throw yourself on the ground if you saw him a hundred yards away. You would certainly not look in his eyes.

And he was living with us in this old farmhouse outside Madison—graduate students and Jeffrey. We wanted to be together so that we could see what it was like to live with a Tibetan teacher. We didn't speak Tibetan except for Jeffrey.

And he taught. He taught the seven cause-and-effect precepts, *Kuntimengak Dune*, a seven-fold method dating back to Chandrakirti for cultivating compassion. I'd never heard anything remotely like that. Jeffrey started talking about dependent arising. Whoa—this makes sense. I just had this feeling: nothing I've ever heard has made as much sense as this. This is what I have to focus on. May I have time in my life.

So I begged Kensur, please tell me what to study when I go to India. Because my hit to go to India was very open. I had no idea what to do in India.

And I realized that I would study with the dependant. So I did. I got an MA from Wisconsin and went to India, where I studied at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. I was taught by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, who was handpicked by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He taught Shantideva, so I was being introduced to classic Mahayana.

At the same time, my now husband had come to India to do a PhD in Tibetan, but he ended up taking innumerable Goenka courses—Satyanarayan Goenka's Vipassana courses. So I also went to some of those courses. I really valued them and practiced them for many years. But I also knew that my heart was with Tibet, inexplicably, because honestly, the experiences I had in those two or three ten-day courses were way more dramatic and impactful than anything that happened to me in the Tibetan tradition for decades. Nonetheless, that was my devotion.

When I went back to the States—also academic heritage—Jeffrey started a Tibetan studies program at the University of Virginia, so I went there for my PhD. We had an incredible situation. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was handpicking the best geshes of the era, those who had won debates and really accomplished

their status, who had triumphed over everyone in debate. We studied with them, which is sort of like asking Einstein to teach you a multiplication table, but that's what happened. We became very close with those teachers. They stayed sometimes for a year or more.

At that time, Jeffrey also invited Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche, who himself had spent time in Gelugpa monasteries in Tibet—not exactly of his own desire. He was actually a mantrika, a ngakpa. He introduced us to the foundation of what is now known as *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. It wasn't in English yet. He taught it to a class of about a hundred people, the largest class ever at UVA, I think in 1970 or 1971. It goes way back. He basically taught the foundational practices for Dzogchen. He was just a lovely person.

The night before he left, he read from his own autobiography some of what his experiences in retreat had been like. I'd never heard anything like that. He saw light in the dark. What could that possibly mean? So then and there, we were like, we have to do this. And he said, well, if you want to do it, do these foundational practices. Learn Tibetan, by the way—I'm not talking about things like this through a translator. So that was a big start for me, also with the Nyingma tradition.

Like John, for perhaps the first twenty years or so, most of my so-called scholarly work was really in the Gelugpa tradition—a couple of books—and I value it still tremendously in my mind. I could understand some things that opened cracks that I just didn't think I could if somebody didn't really lay it out in a very comprehensive way. I valued that. But at the same time, I was involved with Nyingma, and once I finished these practices, I continued for the rest of his life until 2009 to study with Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche.

Then in 1996, I was really moved to create a pilgrimage that would visit the places of the Longchen Nyingtik. The Longchen Nyingtik is one of the most famous and widespread, I'm told, of the Dzogchen lineages in Tibet. There are many extraordinary Dzogchen lineages in Tibet. Longchen Nyingtik means "heart essence of the vast expanse"—that's what it means in English. I'll probably end up saying something about that.

So in 1996, on this pilgrimage to visit places sacred to this tradition, I met a lama. That lama turned out to be an incarnation of Jigme Lingpa, who was the origin, the revealer of this tradition. It was just amazing. He was the reincarnation of several other really famous people too. And here we were meeting him. Would he teach us? Yes, he would. And he taught us one by one. He said, "Because everybody's different, how could I say the same thing to all of you?"

We met this great master through pure serendipity. And that was a very important connection for me—overwhelming, actually. So that was that, and then I became his student. To this day, he is a great tertön, revealer of texts, and we receive them when we're fortunate. Part of what we do—we being his students in the West and our center at Dawn Mountain—is teach them. They are beautiful entrees to Dzogchen practice.

So I have quite a conversation myself among these various traditions, as do you. I was very moved, as I

said earlier, by Joseph saying that the reason he wrote what he wrote—that we've all read—was that these teachers, they're really great teachers, but they say kind of different things. What are we to make of that? There's confusion somewhere in the system, or there's confusion in me. I don't understand it.

And then this other big question arises: Do the different things that people say lead to the same result or not? And is that even really the right question? That's my question. How would we know? But these are some of the things that we have been rattling around together in our brief time as we were preparing for this conversation today.

So, thank you.

Hello. My name is Guo Gu, and I represent the Chan tradition. It's not too popular of a tradition.

My practice journey started in 1972 when I was four, with my first teacher, Master Guan Qing in Taiwan, who was an ascetic known for his samādhi practices. We used to visit him on a weekly basis, and he taught me how to meditate at that time. But being so young, I was basically just a kid running around the temple, playing with whatever I could find. What I loved most was simply to be in his presence.

Then my family migrated to the United States, and that's when I met my root teacher, Master Sheng Yen, at eleven. He was like my father. He was also very different from other monks that I'd known. He was able to connect with me, just a mere kid. And he tricked me into doing retreats with him—he asked me to stay overnight, my mom had to stay overnight—so we started to practice with him.

He started taking me back to Taiwan when I was in college, kind of priming me. Later I found out this was very unusual, because all the monastics were wondering, who is this kid? After I graduated, I became his attendant monk and served him. He taught me everything—from how to cook, how to clean, how to practice, and how to offer myself to the benefit of others. The slogan he had for me was: "Body like a rag, mind like a mirror." That stuck with me, and eventually it was that teaching that flourished.

Practicing with a teacher is very important. I know that in the West, there is this phenomenon of getting a little bit here, getting a little bit there, compiling one's own version of the Buddha Dharma based on what one resonates with. That could be a little dangerous, so perhaps I'll say something about that.

For those of you who need some context: the Chan tradition in China, on the practice end of things, comes to us in two primary forms. One is called silent illumination practice. It's a poetic way of saying selfless function, but you could also say it's a simultaneous practice of samatha-vipassanā. That's one stream of practice. The other is what I call the practice of wonderment. The traditional word is *huatou*, critical phrase.

And the point of which is to generate, cultivate, and tune into the sense of not knowing—the sense of openness, the sense of wonderment—and allow that to bring one from scattered to concentrated to

unified, and then to the shattering of that sense of wonderment into awakening. So these are the two primary paths, and I may say something more about that.

I'll share a little bit about my own journey. In this lifetime, I encountered the Dhamma just shortly after college, back in 1987, in the form of some books and a young woman who had been sent by her teacher from Europe to Miami, Florida, of all places, to try to establish a sangha. I practiced as a layperson for a very long time. I got married, had a beautiful daughter with whom I'm very close, then got divorced, and then I moved. Throughout all of that time, I had been practicing in small, very small sanghas—that's all there was at that time out there—and doing a lot of reading.

Eventually I moved to California, to the Bay Area, and got involved with San Francisco Zen Center. I took my lay bodhisattva precepts with Shosan Victoria Austin, who much later also gave me Dharma transmission. But after moving into Zen Center, I went with a friend to Japan for a five-day sesshin with Sekkei Harada Roshi, who was his teacher. As I told everyone when I came back, up until that point practicing the Dhamma had been like exploring the four corners of the earth. But meeting with Harada Roshi was like being shot off in a rocket. The vastness of his teaching was almost daunting, really.

So I came back, I quit my job, had a chat with my daughter, and moved out to Japan. I was ordained in 2007, trained there for a couple of years, and then came back to San Francisco Zen Center as a nun. Interestingly, it was around that time of my coming back from Japan that I started to become exposed to the Nikāyas, the Pāli suttas, and really started delving deeply into that.

After various and sundry things, I ordained as a Theravāda nun—first as a samaneri, then as a bhikkhuni for five years. Although I've set that practice down, that is most definitely my path. That's why I still use the name. I no longer follow the bhikkhuni precepts; I still follow the sixteen bodhisattva precepts and the eight Theravāda precepts.

What else would be helpful to know about me? In addition to being a mom, I'm a chaplain. I've been both a hospital and a hospice chaplain. I also fairly recently went out to London for a while and did a master's degree in Buddhist art history. I paint watercolors, I babysit my grandson, and I share the Dhamma as best I can.

In terms of what I want to share, I'm going to say a little bit about Dōgen's comments on awakening, but what I really want to do is talk about how early Buddhism provides a path for studying and breaking through both experience and non-experience. Nibbāna is non-experience—both of those two things are described there.

I often tell people that Sōtō Zen in particular, which is the lineage I am ordained in, has very good teachings for beginners. For me in particular, it was very important to learn how to sit zazen—just sit down and not have a plan. It also has good teachings about the end, about what being awake is like. But that middle part of the path is difficult, I would say, in Sōtō. It's a bit of a ramble. What I find in the

Nikāyas is that there is very, very clear instruction for both what I think of as the middle part of the path and also the end. So I'm going to talk a little bit about those aspects and see if we can make some of the threads more clear.

I joined the Peace Corps after I finished college. I had studied philosophy at Columbia in New York and then joined the Peace Corps. This was in 1965. I spent two years there, and when I first went, I was teaching in a school in Bangkok that was right down the block from a famous temple, the Marble Temple. There were two monks, one English monk and one Indian monk, who were holding classes for Westerners who wanted to learn about Buddhism. So I started going to these classes.

I was asking so many questions that people stopped coming to the group. You've probably all been in a group with people like that. So finally, one of the monks said, "Joseph, why don't you try meditating?" I was young—twenty-one years old—and it was all very exotic to me. It was the first time I was in the Far East, with the Buddhism and the temples and meditation. He gave me some really basic instructions: just sit down and watch the breath. I gathered some cushions, sat down, and set my alarm clock for five minutes, because I didn't want to sit too long.

But something really remarkable happened. Even in those first five minutes, it showed me that there was a way to look into the mind as well as looking out through it, and that there was a methodology for doing it. I got so excited that I started inviting my friends over to watch me meditate—which I'm still doing. Thank you all for coming.

So that was the beginning. I kept my practice in that very beginner's kind of way. And then something very interesting happened at the very end of my Peace Corps stay, just a couple of weeks before I was about to leave. A friend of mine and I were sitting in the garden of his house in Bangkok, and he was reading from a Tibetan text. My mind was for some reason really still and concentrated, and just in listening to that text, I had an experience that had a tremendous impact on my life—really set the direction of my life.

Then I went back to the States and realized I needed a teacher. It was very hard to comprehend exactly what it was all about. So I went back to India to look for a teacher. I traveled around various ashrams and ended up in Bodh Gaya, which is the place of the Buddha's enlightenment. There I met my first teacher, Anagarika Munindra-ji, who had just come back from what I think was nine years of study and practice in Burma, teaching vipassana in the traditional lineage of Mahasi Sayadaw.

He said something to me when I first met him. I was just this young guy, twenty-three years old. The first thing he said was, "If you want to understand your mind, sit down and observe it." It just made so much sense to me. It was just so much common sense, because I thought, how else can we understand our minds except by sitting down and observing and looking and investigating and understanding? So it was really from that moment that I was hooked—hooked into the Dharma, hooked into that form of practice. I spent most of the next seven years in India practicing with Munindra-ji and also with Goenka-ji. They taught

different methods, but they were both different forms of vipassana.

Then I came back to the States in 1974 and started teaching. A couple of years later we started IMS, the Meditation Center. For the first ten years or so I was going around doing a lot of teaching, and then through a certain set of circumstances I met Sayadaw U Pandita, a Burmese teacher and one of the great vipassana masters in Burma. He was a very demanding teacher—tough. He was like a fierce Zen master, and tremendously helpful. Because Munindra-ji was more like a Taoist, very easy. His mantra was, "Be simple and easy. Be simple and easy about things, about your life, about your practice." Whereas Sayadaw U Pandita was just the opposite: "Don't be simple and easy. Make this heroic effort in practice."

At that time, for me, it was a good balance. I really needed it—like a kick in the pants in terms of my practice. So I spent quite a few years doing many retreats with Sayadaw U Pandita.

Sometime in the nineties—I can't remember the exact dates—some friends in the Tibetan tradition invited myself and a few others to go to Nepal and meet some of their teachers. These turned out to be some of the really great Dzogchen masters of the last century: Tulku Urgyen and Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche. I got an introduction to the Dzogchen teachings and began a little bit of practice in that lineage—not nearly as long as I had spent doing vipassana, but it was enough to get a real taste of what that practice was about and a deeper understanding of it. Then one of those teachers, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, came to the States and taught a two-month Dzogchen retreat, which I attended.

And there were two things that happened in that retreat—one was tremendously positive and impactful, and the other was very confusing.

What was so helpful, and what I felt in one way was the missing piece in my own practice, were the teachings of what is called bodhicitta—the aspiration to awaken for the benefit of all beings and to cultivate that motivation. For me, the understanding all along had been that my practice would inevitably help other beings, because how could it not? If we purify our own minds, it will have a positive effect on everybody we meet. But instead of seeing it as the end result, after hearing Nyoshul Khen teach about bodhicitta, I realized: No, I can put this up front as the very motivation for practice. And that really enlarged my sense of what the practice was about. So that was very, very meaningful in my unfolding.

What was a bit confusing was the description of what we might call ultimate reality. The Tibetan Dzogchen view of that was very different than how it's framed in Theravada and Vipassana practice. And so for about a month of that retreat, when I should have been doing Dzogchen practice, I was just tormenting myself: "Who's right?" Because they were saying opposite things about what I felt to be the most important question in my life.

I finally resolved it, at least for that time, with a phrase that came to mind. Actually, I resolved it in two ways. One is, I couldn't even know who was right. Maybe when I'm fully enlightened, I'll know—and maybe it won't even be important at that point. But what really helped me, and was the foundation of my

first understanding of what I call One Dharma, was understanding metaphysics—the metaphysical descriptions of things—as being skillful means for non-clinging. Because at that time I really understood non-clinging to be a foundational aspect of liberation. So "metaphysics as skillful means" became my mantra. And then I realized, well, it doesn't matter if the metaphysics are different. If they help us free our minds from clinging, that's serving its purpose.

And so that was the beginning of just trying to understand how we can appreciate different traditions, even when they're saying quite different things, in a way that's useful to us and not problematic.

Since that time—and let's talk a little bit about this tomorrow—I've come to reformulate my idea of skillful means and metaphysics. I'll be talking about some of the areas in our lives where we do habitually cling, and just highlight those areas that we should pay attention to. And then I'll speak about some rather esoteric aspects of the Dharma, of my own experience, and where I am at the moment. Thank you.

And then in the afternoon, I believe we have Anne and Guagu. And then Saturday morning, we'll have Dhammadipa. The second half of Saturday morning, we'll break into smaller groups of about four with each of the six of us for about forty minutes and then have a larger conversation. In the afternoon, John will share, and then we'll have more collaborative time and also more on Sunday morning. So that is the basic structure of our time together. Does anybody have any questions about any of that?

For those of you who are here in Barre, in the evenings tomorrow and Saturday, there will be time for some small group and larger group discussion and more silent sitting time. So there will be time to connect and share in a little bit more of a structured way.

Let us take an eight-minute bio break, and then we will come back for a final period of shared silence together, and then we'll go into noble silence.

You might take a moment to simply notice the contact, the felt sense of contact with your cushion, with your seat. Just feeling it, sensing it, brings you into the present moment. Also, when you sense that contact, you are sensing support. You might say you are sensing that you are being held. You are being held in a way that you directly experience. It's not an idea—you feel that contact.

Another way, if you like, of sensing the power of that contact is to recognize that what you are feeling here, that support, right now, is actually rising to hold you from the very center of this earth. You have a deep seat held from the depths. You may find that simply recognizing this truth, there's a little more ease in the body, a little more relaxation. You are being held. Without doing anything, you have support. It's not a job you need to take up. So your shoulders can be at ease. The muscles of your lower body can be at ease. Because in fact, seated in this way, resting deeply, your upper body rising forth, your skeletal structure supports you. You can let go. You will be held from within. Letting go and letting be, ease of mind.

You may notice small tensions in your body, in your hands, in your neck. Just bringing your attention to them may allow them to dissolve. And as your body is more and more at ease—or if it's not, simply notice that—your body is more and more at ease and at the same time very alive. Little sensations here and there. And most obvious is the sensation of your breath.

Feeling how the mind can ride the breath, not observing it from a distance, but feeling it, sensing it, riding it into your body, the in-breath down. And the particular sense of relaxation when you exhale—*ah*. The body is more at rest. The breath is more at rest. The mind is more at rest. Settling occurs just naturally. We can enjoy that settling.

As the settling progresses, consider letting your mind ride your next inhalation into your body and down. Let the energy of your in-breath carry your attention, your mind, into your deep belly. Very stable, the most stable resting place inside the body. Four fingers beneath your navel, four fingers in—or what might just feel to you like your center of balance. Letting your belly relax and your attention be deep within.

You may notice that as a thought begins to take over, be curious: what happens? What happens to your attention settling deep in your belly? Does it stay? Does it wander off with the thought? And how does that feel? Be curious about how it feels. Bring your attention back there if you can, very gently. Maybe there's a tendency for it to pop back up again. That's interesting. Is that because you've become a little more tense? Even very subtly?

Rest in your belly. See how it is to explore the possibility of resting your attention in your belly.

The Dantien, the Hara, the Do in Tibetan—many traditions recognize the importance of this place. Maybe this is new to you. Maybe you'd prefer to do what you're more familiar with. That's understandable. That's fine, of course. But perhaps we can be curious together. How is it to rest attention deep in the belly?

With your attention gently settled deep in your belly, you can see about noticing the alignment that runs down through the center of your body. This place deep in your belly is in direct alignment with the center of the earth. And that alignment, just naturally, the way the human body is, continues. The center of the earth, deep belly, your heart. Your heart is also supported from the very center of the earth. Our hearts can relax.

And the alignment continues through your throat, your crown. If you're so inclined, consider bringing your attention up and down from your deep belly up this central corridor through your body, up past your heart, your throat, your crown, and down again, just to feel what it feels like. It's a deep and sacred place in the body.

I invite you then to bring your attention very gently to your heart center—not your physical heart, but at the level of the heart deep in your chest, that point along this axis, this corridor. It may feel a little different than the belly center.

And in closing, by way of dedicating our practice, sharing our practice with all beings throughout space and everyone right here, you may imagine, feel, sense that there's an orb of light in the center of your heart. It's just there. And inside it, the letter A, which we pronounce AH—symbol of wisdom.

And with your next exhale together, we can sound the sound AH, feeling, if you like, that sound as well as light. It is so as long as you imagine it to be so. This isn't a big job. Sound and light and mind all together go out, sending grace, blessings, good wishes to everyone in the room, to everyone throughout Massachusetts, the country, the world, and by the end of your sounding, the whole cosmos receiving your light and the gift of your practice.

Good night.

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