On Method

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 49:24

Tonight we're going to talk about the meditation method that we're using tonight. Yesterday we looked at awareness and mindfulness, but without much concern with method or technique. Basically, "remember awareness now" is pretty much largely what we've been communicating. And tonight we're going to move on to a specific method or technique, a specific approach to meditation, originally developed by Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma. So as we said, that's him in the picture.

My main teacher in Burma was Sayadaw U Pandita, who was part of that lineage. In Zen terms, he was a grandson in the Dharma of Mahasi Sayadaw—he was a student of a student of Mahasi Sayadaw. And Sayadaw U Tejaniya, who developed the way of natural awareness, was a student of Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, who was a great meditation master and who was in turn a disciple of Mahasi Sayadaw. So he also was a grandson in the Dharma of Mahasi Sayadaw.

Shwe Oo Min was in the early fifties on staff at Mahasi Centre teaching. And after about five years or so, he basically resigned. He said to Mahasi Sayadaw, "I don't want to become a big Thai meditation teacher." So he went back to his monastery in suburban Rangoon and just became a suburban monk. But people had heard of him. Every year he would go off and do a lot of meditation, and when he was in residence, people would come and say, "I understand this is a meditation center." He would say, "No, it's not." They would say, "Could I meditate here for a while?" "Sure, of course, absolutely." "And I understand you're a meditation teacher." "No, I'm not." "Can I come and talk to you about my meditation practice?" "Sure, of course you can." He was quite low-key in that sense. And he was the teacher of U Tejaniya.

So it all begins with Mahasi Sayadaw, and it began with a book called *The Manual of Insight* that Mahasi published in 1945. He wrote it during the war. It was this book that made his name throughout Burma as a great expert in insight meditation, as a result of which he was invited to come to Rangoon by senior figures in the political party that formed the first government of independent Burma after the war. They installed him as the head teacher of a centre which eventually was named after him. In Burmese it's the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha, which is usually translated as the Mahasi Centre. *Yeiktha* is a Burmese word that literally means "shady place," but it's used to mean meditation center. It is interesting that in Burmese Buddhism, there was no word for meditation center until modern times when they opened it up to lay people.

The question becomes, of course, why do we need a method? Basically, the meditation method provides a framework. It provides a set of boundaries within which our practice can occur.

Now, if the framework is too loose, where there are no boundaries, this kills creativity. Because there's

nothing to bump up against, nothing to challenge, nothing to be challenged by. You find this approach in some people who, when they're talking about meditation practice or doing meditation, say, "Look man, it's all one, it doesn't matter, it's just one," or "There is no such thing as a good meditation or a bad meditation," or "One must never judge one's practice." You hear these attitudes, and this is an indication where the framework is too loose. It's basically the Dharma attitude of "she'll be right mate, don't worry about it"—when in fact, sometimes it isn't all right. So with too loose a framework, we get lost and creativity is killed.

With too tight a framework, where the boundaries are too tightly defined and too tightly constricted, this also kills creativity because there's no room for one's own decisions. The emphasis is on obedience and the endless repetition of familiar drills. But one of the problems with this approach is that in a dynamic world, which is the world we live in, there's no such thing as repetition. One thing we learn when we start to pay attention is that this moment now is new. We've never done this before. But when we're working to carry out a predetermined drill, we fall into habit. And habit is what kills meditation practice.

So to get a sense of what we mean—not too loose a framework, not too tight a framework—let's compare it to painting, which I'm very reluctant to do because I know nothing about painting. I had to look it up in Wikipedia.

So let's say you decide to take up painting. Will you paint with watercolours or with oils? This initial decision presents you with a whole variety of demands that will condition how you paint, what specific skills you need to develop to work within the boundaries of your medium.

If watercolours, you paint on paper. If oils, you paint on canvas or wood. If watercolours, you make quick decisions because the paint dries quickly. If oils, you can take your time and you can rework as much as you like. If watercolours, you start with the lightest colours and then layer the dark colours on top. If oils, you can add light colours to dark and dark colours to light. There's a whole different set of demands for each medium. But the boundaries of each medium set the conditions within which the craft develops. And the craft comes from using the materials available in new ways, in skilful ways. We respect the limits, but we develop creative ways to work within them.

This is what we do when we embark on a meditation practice and learn a particular method or technique. So what shapes the boundaries of this practice, of this particular approach?

The first thing, the central thing, is the felt continuity of awareness over time, which we've already spoken about as mindfulness. Maintaining awareness over time is absolutely essential to this practice. We do whatever it takes to experience the continuity of awareness. We abandon whatever habits condition the discontinuity of awareness. We focus on the present, cultivate sensitivity to awareness now. This is the distinguishing characteristic of mindfulness training—really any approach that puts mindfulness at the centre. The felt continuity of awareness over time.

Then we use a central reference point, what Mahasi calls a grounding object, that structures the continuity of awareness. The grounding object's job is to provide a home base. This is where we live, and to this we return. It becomes our centre of gravity and draws us back again and again whenever our awareness goes walkabout.

Keep in mind that when we talk about a grounding object, this is not a thing—it's a function. Basically, whatever grounds the heart and the mind can serve as a grounding object. It's not that there's one thing we're supposed to focus on. In theory, anything at all can be a grounding object, but what it must do is ground us, give us a centre of gravity. Different practitioners can use different grounding objects, and any one practitioner may use different grounding objects over time. Remember, if we're talking about a meditation career, we're talking about something that extends for decades.

The grounding object gives us a firm foundation. From that foundation, we can allow the practice to take us where it thinks we need to go. This trajectory, this direction, is provided by the third aspect: transitions.

So the first element is the felt continuity of awareness over time. Second, a central reference point, a grounding object, which is our home base. And third, we learn to focus on transitions. This is central to any style of meditation aiming to develop insight.

As we've already talked about and experienced, awareness moves from one place to another. We could express this as saying that awareness moves from A to B. Our experience of body moves from A to B—I start with breathing and then I'm preoccupied by pain in the leg. Mind moves from A to B—I'm with the meditation object and then suddenly I'm off with the pixies.

As the practice develops, as we become more sensitive to what is going on—and how do we become more sensitive? Through the continuity of awareness—we become interested in these transitions. We may come to recognise that transitions are always happening. In fact, we may discover that there is no final position. There are only transitions. And so we become interested in the fact that we move from A to B.

And then we learn *how* we move from A to B. In learning to maintain this continuity of awareness through transitions, that's how we learn the craft of the practice.

So: felt continuity of awareness over time; a grounding object as a central reference point; focus on transitions. And then what we might find is that tracking the flow of experience over time brings us to the mind that awares experience and the heart that responds to experience. These become central, and they may in fact become the grounding object. This is what the Buddha calls *citta*—mind, or heart, or heart-mind.

The grounding object itself matures over time, and this maturity arises naturally through our interest in transitions, in changes. Often what becomes predominant is *citta*, heart-mind, because it's the mind which fabricates experience for us.

And then finally, as we practice, we focus on the world of direct experience rather than our habitual concepts about our experience. We're going to talk more about this as we go through the retreat. At the moment, it might be quite obscure what this means. But essentially, from the Buddha's perspective, the pain of our lives is found in the world we live in, which is defined by narrative—the stories that we tell ourselves endlessly. All of these stories revolve around a single character: self. Liberation is found in the world which, for the Buddha, is defined by the three universal characteristics of *anicca, dukkha, anattā*—change, pain, not-self. Here our narratives do not revolve around self, but around our directly seen and understood experience.

Again, this is pretty obscure at the moment, but we are going to explore this later on. The key point is that we're interested in direct experience. We are not interested in the stories we are telling ourselves about experience. And normally that's the world we live in—our stories, our judgments, our discernments, and so on and so forth.

The first demand of the practice is to maintain the continuity of awareness. And as we've spoken of, in theory this should not be a problem because we are already aware. It is the mind's nature to aware. So why is maintaining the continuity of awareness difficult? It's because of our deeply ingrained tendency to forget our awareness.

We talked about this in terms of distraction. Think about how you are distracted. You're tracking your meditation object and then suddenly you realise that you've been thinking for the past five minutes and you didn't even notice it. This is a routine experience for meditators. But have you ever thought about how strange this is? How positively weird it is?

I'm practicing and I am aware. And then suddenly I slide into thinking, and sometime later slide out of the thinking. It's only in that moment of sliding out of the thinking that I realise, whoops, I'm thinking. In other words, for some time I was thinking, but I did not know I was thinking.

If I ask myself, was I aware as I was thinking? The answer would probably be yes, because I can remember that I was thinking. I can even remember, more or less, what I was thinking about. I was aware as I was thinking, but I was not aware of the fact that I was thinking. I had forgotten my awareness. And then I remembered.

This remembering, this realisation—oh, thinking—takes two forms. I can suddenly remember that I am aware: "Oh, I'm supposed to be meditating, but I've been thinking." Or we can remember what I am aware of. Have you ever had the experience when you develop some momentum in the practice, you get lost in thought, you suddenly realise you're thinking, and the mind goes bang, straight back to the meditation object? There, we are remembering the object of awareness. But the other flavour is remembering awareness itself: "Oh, I'm thinking."

These are the two flavours that we find. But in both cases, I remember. This explains why the English

word "mindfulness" translates the Pali word *sati*, which literally means memory, from the verb *sarati*, to remember. It's like the signs at railway stations that say "Mind the gap"—be mindful of the gap between the train and the platform. What it's asking us to do is to remember that gap in the very act of stepping into or out of the train. To remember in the present.

When we talk about the continuity of awareness, one way we could express it is that the job is to maintain continuity of awareness all day long.

The first time I discovered this demand was in 1984, the first time I went to Burma and to the Mahasi Centre. In those days, you could only get a tourist visa to enter Burma, which was for one week. So basically I turned up at the gates of the Mahasi Centre and said, "Let me in." And they did, for some reason.

I was assigned to Sayadaw U Pandita, who had recently become the head teacher of the centre and had taken over the job of teaching the foreigners. Because he was a busy man, head teacher of the whole centre, he only had an hour a day to teach foreigners. But at the time, I was the only foreigner. So I had an hour a day each morning from eight to nine.

At one point he explained to me. He said, "Look, this is what you're supposed to do. Be aware of everything that happens to you and within you from the moment you wake up in the morning until the moment you go to sleep at night, right down to the blinking of your eyes."

And I thought, that is impossible.

But I said, "Yes, Sayadaw." Because if you ever work with a Burmese Sayadaw, there is only one acceptable response: "Yes, Sayadaw."

So I gave it my best shot. I really tried. But I came to the conclusion that I was right—it is impossible. What I realized, however, was that one thing is possible. What is possible is to be aware *now*. That's possible.

And I think this is the essence of it. To remember awareness now. We don't worry about all day or all week. It's just now. That's the essence. And when we do that, we discover that quite naturally awareness becomes extended through time. And that is mindfulness.

So we compared awareness to the light that illuminates a dark room at night. We realize we're in darkness, and as soon as we do that, we flick the switch and turn on the light. The practice becomes flicking the awareness switch. Aware of what now? What is clear now? What is obvious now? What's happening now?

And it does not matter how long the light of awareness stays on. In the early stages, it doesn't stay on for very long at all. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that we become sensitive to when the light goes out. And when we recognize that—flick—turn it on again. That's it. It's very simple.

This is the essential simplicity of the practice. You could say simply: be aware now. That's the job. And if we do that, then the continuity of awareness will develop, the mindfulness will get stronger, and away we go.

But as we said, we structure our practice by developing some kind of central reference point, what Mahasi calls a grounding object. This structures the continuity of awareness. Now, this grounding object can be anything at all. Breathing, for example—very popular. The entire universe, for example—not so popular. And anything in between.

Why is there such diversity? Because normally, I think—well, not always, but often—when you go to learn meditation, you're given something to be aware of. "Be aware of the breath." And sometimes even very specifically, "Be aware of the breath at this part of the body." In Theravada, they really like following the breath at the nose tip. In East Asia, they like following the breath in the abdomen.

Mahasi, strangely enough, recommended following the breath in the abdomen. Basically because he thought that for most people, most of the time, the movements in the abdomen as we breathe are easy to find, and once we find them, relatively easy to stay with.

I found this very interesting. I practiced Zen for some years before I went to Burma, and there I learned to focus on the breathing down here in the belly, which I quite liked because up here was full of tension and thoughts, and down there was kind of more relaxed. So when I went to Mahasi and they said, "Note rising and falling of the abdomen," which was the instruction, I thought, "Yeah, this is no problem." Off I went.

And I did wonder: why did Mahasi say that? Because it's not very Theravada. If you talk to an orthodox practitioner of Theravada Buddhism and they say, "I do breathing meditation," what they mean is, "I follow the breath here, at the nose tip." Because that's what the tradition says. So why did Mahasi go against the tradition and say something very different, which got him into a lot of trouble? He received a huge amount of criticism.

I once asked Sayadaw U Janaka about that. U Janaka was a long-time disciple of Mahasi Sayadaw. I said to him once, "Why did Mahasi Sayadaw recommend following the breath in the abdomen?" And he gave me a very illuminating answer. He said, "I don't know." Perhaps Mahasi himself was never asked to explain.

When Mahasi was criticized for this, what he said was, "Oh, this isn't breathing. No, no, no. Breathing's up here at the nose tip. What we're following in the abdomen is the air element. So this is part of the tracking of the elements. It's fine. Relax. Don't worry about it." He would have made a good lawyer. Some people say he would have made a very good mathematician. Apparently he was very skilled at maths.

Anyway. There's such diversity in grounding objects because the grounding object is not a something—it's a function. Whatever grounds the heart-mind serves as the grounding object. Mahasi Sayadaw summarizes mature insight practice as being aware of whatever is predominant now in any of the six senses. That becomes the grounding object eventually, but that's for maturity.

In the beginning, it's important that we allow mind to settle. It takes energy and it takes stability to remember awareness over time. It's not easy. So one way of approaching the project is by giving ourselves a grounding object—giving ourselves something which is clear, relatively stable, generally easy to find—and saying, "This is what I'm going to focus on." For most practitioners, this is some aspect of body. It could be the breathing, again very popular, or it could be the posture itself, just being aware of the whole body as you sit and what's going on in the body. It could be any strong individual sensation, moving from one sensation to another to another.

So there's no universally compulsory grounding object. And if we come back to our first boundary, maintaining awareness over time, what we notice is that what is central is awareness, not the object of awareness. It's the awareness which is central. But we want to ground our awareness, to stabilize it. And the easiest way to do this is through some aspect of body or mind that we can easily find and settle on and stay with.

This is what we need to establish as we develop a practice: Where can I most readily rest my awareness so it will remain relatively still over a period of time? This is my grounding object, and this is what my awareness will learn to call home. Particularly when you get started in a meditation practice, this is what you need to find out. And again, usually you'd find it in the body.

So we use the grounding object to settle and stabilize. We focus on what is clearly available to us. And then we track it over time.

Now, when we do this, what do we discover? What every meditator in this room is already an expert in: distraction. And distraction is really important because it shows us transitions, which is another essential aspect of the practice.

As we've seen, awareness moves from one place to another. Body and mind move from A to B and back to A again. So we are practicing, minding our own business, and then suddenly we realize we're caught up in distraction. Awareness just moved. We have recognized a transition.

What to do? We actively aware the distraction. The distraction becomes the meditation object. And we call this the secondary object. The grounding object is our central reference point, but every time we are pulled away and we realize we're somewhere else, that something else becomes the secondary object, and we're directly aware of that. Our distraction becomes our teacher.

Distractions are very good teachers because they show us exactly what is going on in the mind. And that's what we want to find out. Using the language of the Buddha, what it shows us is impermanence, change. Impermanence, the perception of impermanence, is the first of the three universal characteristics. And for the Buddha, the perception of impermanence is the gateway into insight.

So what we do is aware our grounding object until awareness moves. Awareness may move because of distraction, or it may move simply because it moves. But wherever it moves to becomes our meditation

object, our secondary object. We actively aware this secondary object, and then we come back to the grounding object, to our center of gravity. Awareness moves away, we aware that, we come back. Awareness moves away, we aware that, we come back.

When practitioners are introduced to this method, which for some people sounds a bit unusual, one question that pops up is: how long do we stay with our secondary object? What I usually say is that in the early stages of the practice, briefly. Because we want to stabilize the mind. If we start spending too much time with secondary objects, we won't stabilize the mind—or at least we will, but it will take much longer. So we aware our distraction just briefly: this is what's happening, got it, and then we come back.

Sometimes our secondary object will not let us go. Pain, for example. If you've ever been sitting and pain develops, you just keep coming back to it. You can't let it go, so you stay there longer. Obsessive thinking—you stay there longer. Because you've got no choice. That's where the awareness is going, and it's not going to move from there. How long we stay with the secondary object—these are questions of skill, questions of the craft. This is what we'll be exploring as we go through the retreat.

So we're tracking the grounding object, we realize awareness has gone somewhere else, we're aware of that, come back to the grounding object, somewhere else, aware of that, come back. As the practice settles, as we become more sensitive to what's going on, we become interested in these transitions. We may come to recognize that transitions are always happening. In fact, we may discover there is no final position. There are only transitions. That's all there ever are.

We become interested in the fact that we move from A to B, and then we learn how we move from A to B. In studying this, we develop the craft of the practice. What happens as the practice matures is that this distinction we've been making between grounding and secondary object evaporates. It ceases to be relevant. The meditation object simply becomes the flow of experience itself, where conceptual distinctions between grounding and secondary are no longer needed. But that comes naturally over time as the practice matures.

For now, early in the retreat, it can be very useful to employ this distinction between grounding and secondary to map the movements of your mind, to see: what is the mind doing?

And as you do this, you favour the grounding object. You come back to the grounding object.

Now, we briefly mentioned that one thing central to this practice is learning to focus on the world of direct experience rather than our habitual concepts about experience. And paradoxically, one way of doing this is by using concepts—particularly by naming the experience that arises in awareness. This is naming, which is characteristic of Mahasi's approach.

Naming places a concept, a label, on the object of awareness. It could even be in the form of a question: "What is clear now?" That's a concept, but it can direct the awareness to recognise, "Oh, this is what's clear." What the naming is meant to do—and what it does when it works—is clarify the experience.

Let's say we're distracted by thinking, and we realise we need to be actively aware. It can help to name it. In naming it, we're objectifying it, making it an object of awareness. The name can be very brief—just "thinking." Or it could be longer, especially if we have a tendency to get entangled in our thinking. We might name it as, "A thought is just a thought." And then return.

The name could even be a question: "Past or future?" This can be an interesting question with thinking, because the mind time-travels. A lot of our thinking tends to be either about the past or about the future. So it can be interesting just to drop in that question—past or future? "Oh, future again." Come back to the grounding object. And it tells us something about the journeys our mind is making.

But whether it's a name, a statement, or a question, the purpose of adding concept is to stimulate accuracy of aim. This is what I'm aware of.

We can also use this with the grounding object. Let's say I'm using breathing as a grounding object. I want to stay with the specifics of the breathing—breathing in, breathing out. So I could name it: in, out, in, out. Another method that people use with the breath in particular is breath counting. They count their breaths, and there are different ways of doing it. But it's another way of adding a concept to the experience in order to clarify: this is what's happening, not that—this.

A question arose: "Doesn't naming the secondary object give it more juice, more energy?"

It depends on the name. Let's say you're thinking about something that really emotionally involves you. You don't name it as, "Oh, this person did that, and blah, blah, blah." Because that's just more thinking. You name it simply as "thinking." It's just a thought—that's all it is. Thinking. Period.

Or you could name the emotion that arises with it. Sometimes a thought arises, and what's really predominant is the emotion that accompanies it—wanting, anger, impatience, whatever. Name that. And if you do that, if you've got an emotion, you look for it in the body.

But where is it in the body? Just name it, in a very neutral way. So for example, name "anger"—not "that bastard did this to me and I'm going to get him." It's just "anger." Period. Full stop.

That's not feeding it. Once you've crossed the border into feeding it, you're back in the world of concept. This is the danger with naming—you don't want to use it as a bridge to get back into the world of concept. It's a way of stepping *out* of the world of concept, acknowledging "this is what's going on." And again, briefly. Then come back.

It takes time to get used to this, because particularly with thinking, our habit is to get sucked into it. It's a very strong habit. It's not going to disappear just because you decide, "I'm meditating now." And if you notice that—if you notice, "oh, sucked in again"—use the name "sucked." You're just naming the experience.

You can use your imagination with the names. What does it feel like to be in this? It feels "bleh." So you

can name it "bleh." That would work. Then come back to the grounding object. Again, it's that quality of creativity that always pops up in the meditation. "Gone"—that's a good name. Or "that didn't happen"—just something I'm fantasizing. These work well.

People find their own favorite names. I remember one time I was doing my own retreat and my mind was pretty active. Every time I was distracted by thought, I would name it as either "positions" or "noise." Noise is blah, blah, blah—just mental chatter. Positions is "this is what should be happening, they should have done this, they will do that, I'll explain it to them." Taking a position. That had more juice to it, so I would just note, "Oh, position. Well, that's another position."

There is creativity with the names. The other thing about names is that some people find them really useful—they truly serve to clarify the experience. Other people find them, at best, a distraction, and they just don't connect with them at all. If that happens, if it doesn't work for you, okay—don't use it. It's not compulsory. If it works, great. Its job is to clarify the experience. If you find that you're just adding more complexity on top, well, it's not working, so just drop it. Some people who are intellectually inclined may be tempted to pile more on top.

When you touch that pain, do you just let it live its life physically? Or do you examine it? What's the nature of the investigation?

With pain, it can hold your attention. And sometimes it's like striking gold. If it's existential pain or psychological pain, then it's really good just to stay with the felt quality of it. And you will find it somewhere in the body. So you don't go to the story around it—the story around it is rubbish. But it's the pain itself which is interesting. Where is it? What is it? Does it move? Is it hard? Is it sharp? Is it soft? Is it hot? Is it cold? This kind of inquiry can be really useful. But we'll talk more about it later on.

So the context here I'm using is fairly early on, when people are just settling in. But as you get settled into this, certain secondary objects come up. They come up because the mind is throwing up what we need to be paying attention to. So we stay there over a period of time. This is part of the process as we go deeper into the heart-mind. The mind cooperates—it sends up what we need to be paying attention to. And so we stay with it over a period of time. But again, it's a question of craft. If you find that you're just getting caught up in thoughts about it, then drop it, go back to the body. But if you can stay with it, great.

And if it's physical pain? There will be physical pain. So you stay with it. If you name it, do not name it as "pain," because that carries the judgment. But how do you know it's pain? What is the actual sensation? So it could be heat, throbbing, pulsing, whatever. You just stay with that.

Another thing which is interesting: let's say this is getting too much. This is pain in the body we're talking about. Then you switch the mind. Why is that sensation painful? It's because there's aversion in the mind—I don't want this to happen. So then, when you feel you can, you switch your awareness to the aversion itself. The "I don't like this" quality of that sensation. And again, that you'll find in the mind, but

also in the body. I used to get a lot of pain in the lower part of the body, and I would notice that my body would go up, like "get me out of here." Oh, that's interesting. So it's the aversion itself that you start to look at.

Now, when you're dealing with physical pain, at some point, that's enough. Cut. We didn't mention this in the sitting posture workshop, but especially if you get pain in the knees, don't push it. Because usually, in most cases, when people are getting pain in the knee, it's not because there's a problem with the knee. It's that they don't have enough flexibility in the hip and the upper leg.

And so that tightness there comes out in the knee. And the knee is delicate in the sense that the knee joint only works one way—not this way, but this way. So if you're stressing it out, danger. You've got to live with those knees for the rest of your life. Respect that and change the posture. I've got meditator's knees; they crunch on a regular basis. Just as there are sports injuries, there are meditation injuries. You've got to be careful of that.

So let's summarize. Basically, settle awareness in the body and then see what happens. The body usually provides the grounding object. From there we can see what the mind does, how the mind moves in real time. And we do this in whatever posture we have, in whatever activity we engage in. As the practice matures, what we learn to do is to be aware of whatever arises in experience, regardless of what it is.

But here's the basic framework. Cultivate the continuity of awareness, which, as we talked about this morning, entails becoming sensitive to the discontinuities of awareness. When we see the discontinuities of awareness—that's very important. Becoming aware of how awareness wanders, where it wanders. Become sensitive to distraction. And when distraction emerges, pay attention to it. It's interesting. It has a lot to teach us.

Secondly, we cultivate a grounding object—some aspect of our experience that we can easily find and then stay with, and then notice when we lose it. For most people, this would be some aspect of body: breathing, sensation, posture. As the practice matures, as transitions become central, the grounding object will become whatever is clear to us in this moment.

And then, as we track the unfolding of experience, we learn to focus on transitions. When we do that, distraction is no longer a problem. Because what we normally call distraction is just a transition—but it's a transition that we disapprove of. That's why we call it a distraction. So we become interested in the fact of change. And by learning to maintain awareness through change, we learn the craft of the practice.

Over time, as we become more sensitive to awareness and the aware, we become intimate with the mind that knows experience and the heart that responds to experience. We settle into whatever is predominant now, and we may find this is what the Buddha calls the citta, the heart-mind. And finally, we start to drop beneath our habitual concepts into the world of insight. We'll talk more about this later in the retreat.

Okay, that's it for tonight. Any questions?

A yogi asks: How do yogis normally differentiate between the narrative story of their experience and direct experience? Can you elaborate a little bit more about how to differentiate that?

I will as we go through. But for the moment, if you find yourself in an interesting story, drop it. It's a delicate thing, quite subtle. And I think we have an entire talk about it, so we'll get into it. It's very interesting—quite fascinating, actually. And it's really central to understanding how the practice works.

Thank you very much.

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