

2005-04-20 Concentration (Week 1 Part 1)

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SPEAKERS

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Welcome to the five week

course. That's an introduction to concentration practice. And for many years, I have been teaching a five week, introductory course mindfulness meditation. So you've probably taken that. And something I've enjoyed doing a lot seems like it's a valuable thing to offer. And about two years ago, for the first time, I offered an introductory class on concentration that's supposed to be kind of parallel to the mindfulness introduction, basic introduction to concentration. And both these topics mindfulness and concentration are central to the teachings of the Buddha to the practice of the Buddha taught, and they're so central that they can be seen as the two wheels of a chariot or two wings. Have a bicycle or sometimes the image of two wings of a bird, you need to have both wings in order for the bird to fly. So you need to have both in order for the Dharma practice the Buddhist spiritual life to unfold. And if you read the discourses of the Buddha, you see that he puts a tremendous emphasis on concentration. And so much so that you get the impression that, for the Buddha, wisdom unfolds with the deepening of concentration in in one of the classic descriptions of the Buddhist spiritual path or the classic kind of summaries of it, it's summarized into three areas, three categories. One is called ethics, integrity, the other is called concentration Samadhi. And then the third His wisdom. And so one third of this is Samadhi, huge part of it. And in a sense, the ethics part, the integrity part, lays the foundation in virtue and a good heart. That makes it easier makes it possible for us to go deep in the world of meditation, the meditation practice. It's very hard turns out, it's very hard. It turns out the door to get really still really concentrated. The heart has to be pure. Without a purity of heart pure intentions a good heart. It's very hard to get concentrated, if you have a lot to be remorseful for. If you have a lot of ill will or a lot of lack of integrity in some way or other. It'll come and provide presented barrier for allowing the mind to become concentrated. Partly because a concentrate Mind is a pure mind. And so if the mind is impure, it can't become pure. It's that simple. You know, just the two don't go together, right? If you want to have white paint, you don't pour black into it. That doesn't work, right? So. So on the basis of

ethics, integrity, then there's a cultivation of Samadhi. For now we'll call it concentration. And then on that, that's a basis for a wisdom for seeing clearly for understanding for liberation. The Buddha said, One who is concentrated can see clearly I think of concentration as being like a Like a tripod for for a camera, if you're trying to take a picture of something, it's kind of, if you're taking a picture, and you take a quick shot. And if your hand is wobbly, you can't get a clear picture as you need to have you put the camera on a tripod, and they have that firm foundation and then the picture can be quite clear because the cameras stable. In order for the mind to be stable enough to see clearly, there has to be that support to go this tripod to give stability to it. Right? Same thing for telescope, right? If you try to look at the moon through a telescope, it's not going to work if you're holding a telescope, would you put it in a tripod, then you have the stability that you can see clearly and directly what's up there in the skies. So it's the one of the functions of concentration is to provide enough stability in the mind so that we can see clearly. So there and that's that line of reasoning you understand why it's such an important partner To mindfulness practice, mindfulness is the practice of seeing clearly. But it's hard to see clearly unless your mind is stable. If you're agitated and distracted, or if your mind is busy and racing around, it's actually very hard to see. So the mind has to be has some stability in it. So, concentration is a very important factor in Buddhist meditation, and it's a partner to mindfulness. Some teachers will teach only mindfulness, trusting that as person does dedicated mindfulness practice, sufficient concentration follows in the way that just naturally have a natural concentration follows as you do mindfulness practice. Some teachers will teach concentration practice first, with the idea that it's very hard to get sufficient concentration by doing mindfulness only. But if you do concentration, practice first, then you build up enough concentration to That's the ability to be able to use the mindfulness in an effective way. Both ways, are fantastic ways. Whether they are different ways work well for different people, some people, it's better to start with concentration and do mindfulness. Some people find that through mindfulness and then first and then concentration, they say, right. And then and some people only do mindfulness and occasionally some people, some people only do concentration practice. There's a variety of ways of doing it. That's kind of individual. The advantage of focusing on mindfulness as a primary practice is that mindfulness is always relevant in all situations. Whereas concentration is not always relevant. So some stability is there. But concentration sometimes you can be too concentrated. I mean, I've been in situations a bit on retreat or so Sometimes I come back from retreat and, and I'm kind of a little bit you know, my wife wishes also the pastor. And

the

anyway sometimes we didn't mind is really concentrated, it can be hard to switch gears and engaged, you know, get on the highway one on one. And so also concentration practice doesn't take contain in and of itself, a lot of wisdom a lot of clear seeing. So some people will focus a lot on concentration. When they leave the concentrated state can end up being quite foolish. They're all reactive patterns can still function. And sometimes if you focus only on concentration some attend because it tends to create a pure mind, or blissful feelings or good feelings that sometimes will create a split between who They are when they're concentrated and who they are in the rest of the time. And there can be a tremendous duality between everyday mind everyday life and the concentrated state. And people hold

on to that concentrated pure state. And you know what have nothing to do with the regular world. Because it's such a big contrast between the two. I think those problems don't occur as readily when person focuses primarily on mindfulness practice, might because mindfulness is really applicable and useful in any situation, whether your mind is agitated or your mind is serene, mindfulness is useful.

So

but ideally, concentration and mindfulness are partners, and they work in tandem. So I think it'd be useful to spend these next few weeks looking at concentration. As a support for mindfulness practice looking at concentration, different elements of concentration has cultivated It has developed what happens when you get concentrated. So you can get a sense of that terrain that world. What I'll do during these five weeks is today's primarily introductory, introductory stuff about the topic. Next week, a little bit more introductions and a few kind of starting to get into the more of the details of concentration. And the third week we'll talk more about the obstacles to concentration, difficulties, you have to take care of the fourth week we'll talk more about some of the deeper states of concentration that can arise in similar ways to those play out. And the fifth week, I forget what I talked about last week. So by that by fifth week, I know I'm trusting that those of you who are here are here because you want to develop your concentration This is not an academic interest. And now in order to develop your concentration, you have to practice without practicing. There's very little development. So the expectation, the requirement for doing this five week class, and there's a requirement and that is that during these five weeks that you meditate 45 minutes a day. Now, it doesn't have to be 45 minutes at one time. If your life doesn't allow for that, or sometimes it's actually better, you know, you divide it in half and meditate for 22 and a half minutes in the morning and 22 and a half minutes in the afternoon, or three pairs of 15 minutes. Sometimes taking shorter chunks is better than a long chunk when you're doing concentration. Because what's important with concentration developing is the quality of your practice. Not the quantity. So if you can have in 15 minutes, you have fairly good quality of being focused and concentrated. And then the last half an hour, 45 minutes to just kind of drifting and you know, going to sleep, that's not so useful. So if you sit for 15 minutes, get up, and then later in the day, sit for another 15 minutes, another 15 minutes, you know, you can, you can do two very different ways of doing it. But somehow or other, you should have 45 minutes of meditation every day. The second requirement is to memorize a Buddhist text. And if you did not take this class before, then I'd like you to memorize this method suto just passed out to you.

Oh, man.

I know it's hard. I'll talk more about it. And there were I got the same response last time. And some people said, Well, I just can't memorize anything. It's really hard for me. And I don't know anybody who did it, who wasn't grateful and happy that they've memorized the text. It's a good really good thing to do. And now if you look at the class before, we have it other

texts for you to memorize.

And for two reasons. One is it's good to memorize something else. But also because this version is different, this version of the methods is different than the one you memorize last time. And it just be confusing, memorize a different version. So, and up here has a copy of the Mangala Sutta discourse on blessings. And so you can get that it's about the same length, so it's comparable. Now, the reason for memorization is that

is

varied. One reason is that concentration memorization, the way to use your mind when you memorize is similar to how you use Your mind you're concentrated, yes be concentrated in focus North memorize something, you have to you have to engage your mind. In a way to hold something in your mind, you have to hold the words the idea of the memory in your mind, and stay focused long enough to sink in and keep repeating it. So it's a classic practice in Buddhism, to memorize texts. It's an ancient, very important practice that seems kind of lost here in the West, but it strengthens the mind. And, and I met many people in Asia, monks in Asia, who, even to their old age, were memorizing or repeating what they memorized to keep their mind sharp. And so strengthens the mind, it's one of the ways to strengthen the mind. So if you think you don't have much ability to concentrate, everybody has an ability to concentrate. It's like a like it's like a muscle. And maybe you never really work the muscle. And so now you got to start working the muscle. And with time, you'll get it'll get stronger for you. The other thing is that The effort to try to memorize, even if you don't succeed, is useful. And I'll talk about this also that the efforts to try to get concentrated is useful, even if you don't get concentrated. Whatever what it requires of you what you see about yourself, what you learn about yourself. What's exercised in your mind is all for your benefit, even if you don't succeed and getting concentrated, so it's very important not to get disappointed or discouraged. If you can't get concentrated, we can't memorize, you still need to try and trying it's beneficial. The other benefit of memorizing a text is once you have it memorized, you can chant it or recite it or say it to yourself. And it's a kind of a technique of getting concentrated. If you really get absorbed or get involved with trying to remember something from memory. So as long it takes, you can't think about a lot of other things. You can think about what's for dinner. He can think about while your boss doesn't like you, you can't think about whether you should, you know, do excellent. You know, you can't think about things that kind of depress you. You have to kind of stay present for those things. And it kind of simplifies the mind clarifies the mind focuses the mind. At the end of that chant, probably you'll find the mind is more focused and concentrated. And many times in Asia, especially, meditators will often start a period of meditation by doing a chant, reciting something from memory, because it helps focus the mind. It kind of brings that constant concentration factor factor into play. So if you memorize this meta sutra, then you have a resource that you can use. Another benefit of memorizing a text is that there are teachings in effects that when you memorize them, go into the psyche in deeper way. They just Read it and kind of legislated to see how it goes in it kind of like it kind of penetrates more deeply or gets more rooted in

there with the mind has to negotiate or kind of work or be affected or, or really acknowledge what's being said in a way that's very different just reading something and going on. And texts that I've memorized. I'm always amazed at how certain lines or phrases will pop up. At opportune times. I'm just going about my life and there it is, Oh, yes. Kinda reminds me or inspires me or, or that's what it means or that's how it applies here something and it's there kind of in the subconscious and it comes up when it's needed in a nice way. Now the word for the Pali word the Buddhist word for concentration is Samadhi. And sometimes you find also the word is samata. It's related to that but Samadhi and probably the English word concentration is not a good translation for somebody. Partly because I think that the English word concentration has this idea of, from a people association of kind of fixating the monitor, focusing the mind one kind of one pointed way, just kind of zeroing in like a laser on something. And being one pointed is important part of Samadhi. But it's only one element of Samadhi. If you take the etymology of the word, some Samadhi, you get and translate that into English. You get an interesting word and you get competitive Lose your composure. Because the word some means with. And the deep part of Samadhi means to stand or to pose. So Samadhi means to stand with or to compose. So that English word compose has a much broader feeling to it, then concentration. It's more of a state, you can pull yourself in a situation. It's something we often do with our body. You can pose you to compose yourself, your mother says. And so you kind of stand needs to stand straight or relaxed or be grounded here in your body. If you settle your bond, you just kind of settling of your whole being around something when you compose yourself. So it's somebody something you do is a state of being not a single factor of the mind. So when you're cultivating Samadhi, and Buddhism concentration, we're actually cultivating a different state of being than a normal state of being so It's a state where the both the mind the body, the heart is more subtle, more relaxed, more unified, more focused, certainly. And some people will translate the idea of Samadhi as unification of mind, because it involves bringing together composing together, the fragmented aspects of the mind and the being. The normal state of mind for most people is a fragment its mind, the mind is going off in all kinds of directions is subject to physical force out of itself. It's going into the future, the past, thinking about this thinking about that. The mind is not the same places in the body. If you're thinking about the future, a lot, your minds in the future and your bodies here. If you think about the past a lot, your minds in the past your body's here, and that fragments the body of the mind and different elements of the mind are fragmented. We're thinking, we're focusing on something but our mind is on something else or intending something else. Part of the function of concentration practice is to take all the different factors of body mind and unify them harmonize them. So they're all basically working for the same purpose. The unified intention. The term is sometimes translated as one pointedness like I got that could be translated into English as having a single direction. So everything has a single direction, all the different elements of the mind are unified involving the same thing. So if your intent so if your intention is to focus on the breath, your emotional life, your mental life, your cognitive life, your physical life, all are interested in doing the same thing, are all day with it. Whereas mostly we first sit down to try to concentrate on the breath. You probably find that your mind has Other ideas, it's not really with you, you have the intention to be there. But your mind still wants to think about what happened at work today. And so it keeps going out, it's going out or your body has other ideas, your body's kind of, you know, agitated or restless or sleepy or something, and the body's not kind of laid

there with that intention out there to support it. So, Samadhi involves the unification of the being, the whole being, as the being or being this gets unified or harmonized, it becomes more peaceful, it becomes more still, it becomes more relaxed. I would like to give you a few kind of images before concentration, or somebody. Perhaps maybe at any kind of giving you some maybe some of you work well. The images and maybe this will kind of evoke something within you. And then after I give these images, then what I'd like us to do is to read the Metta Sutta aloud together and then repeated certain lines of it a few times. And then we'll do a meditation together. One of the classic images for a concentrated mind is that of a candle flame and the candle flame in the wind clickers book when there's no wind, the flame on one sense looks completely still. It just kind of go straight up as complete or complete, you know, can be completely still. However, inside the flame, it's really dynamic. And there's this kind of combination of stillness and dynamism at the same time. The mind that's concentrated, in a sense becomes very still. But it's also very alive can be very, you know, so it's called a heightened mind in Buddhism, Adi Chica a heightened mind. So it's kind of like taking our life energy and not having it agitated. So it's gonna be it's really still. There stillness is dynamic is very rich has a lot of potential a lot of possibilities in it another image or kind of stories for me that really inspired me a lot when I was in Asia, I practiced in a very large monastery in Burma. And at one point during vacation time, there were 5000 people meditating in this monastery and every morning I'd have to go in a file of other men, monks and laypeople layman to the breakfast hall to have breakfast, and we'd have to walk by slowly walk by this very large hall. That was a woman's meditation hall. Because Burma is a warm country, the main sides of the building, which is one series of open doors, really big, wide open doors, so you can kind of see directly right in like an open pavilion almost, almost. And, and there in this meditation hall was straight rows, row after row of women meditating 500 women, and it was one of the great sites of my life to see these you know, it's like a powerhouse. This building is loved going by and seeing and the women in Burma and they meditate so much different than the men sit with great dignity. They sit up straight, sit there kind of system and go by It's, I'd see this, this 500 people meditate and sitting straight and still, there's a stillness or a power that emanates from that people that's just phenomenal. And I'd walk by and get this kind of, hit of this, you know, field of concentration of all these women's sitting there so still so upright. There's a story like this from the discourses of the Buddha, of a king, who had a very bad conscience. He killed some people he shouldn't like his father. And, and the way the story is told you probably quit you having a bad night he couldn't sleep. And so his minister tells him Oh, nearby in the woods, the Buddha is they want to go visit the Buddha. Great idea. So he goes to the edge of the woods and they leave his bodyguards and his soldiers elephants behind. And I think he answers it was alone maybe with his minister but again there's a void and you when you go see the Buddhists like you know you leave your pick your swords and your weapons behind because you know and so he went into the woods and he was told that there were 500 that's a classic number. It's 500 monks, monastics meditating in the woods with the Buddha. And the Buddha was with the Buddha. So it's night it's a full moon night. He goes in to the woods and it's completely still. And this must be 500 people in the woods. You know, 500 people is noisy. You'd expect people to hear it. They hear things and noise and all that. And the description says the Kings here stood on end stood up. He got so afraid he thought it was an ambush. But then he saw in the distance of flame, flame or cancer or light. And so he walked to that light. And there was a place

where the Buddha was sitting at the base of a tree, and all around the Buddha in the woods around him with 500, monastics, sitting and meditating. Again, the power of stillness. And, you know, sometimes when you have a room full of people who are meditating it's stiller than a room that is empty without anybody there. Some of you have that sense. seems strange, isn't it? And so they can, you know, experienced that stillness in the spooked by it. And then he saw the Buddha and he relaxed and had a conversation. Another image for concentration is clarity. Kind of like clear air. You know if there's smoggy You can't see very far across the bay you can't see the hills across the bay. But when the smoke goes away, wind blows it away or something. And you can see across the bay you can see it's really clear. A mind that's concentrated has a certain degree of clarity to it, you can see clearly can see things clearly the ability to see clearly and having an atmosphere of clarity are synonymous like with this smog right? In order to see this the East Bay hills, you have to you can see them see them clearly. The air has to be clear. In order for the mind to see clearly, the mind has to be clear. So a mind that's concentrated is knowing it's clear, clean, like clean mind or clean. Very conventionally or simply a concentrated mind. is a mind that can remain focused on what it wants to focus on. So that's kind of the usually we understand and some people have trouble with being focused. Some people have Attention Deficit problems.

And

and so we could cultivate the ability to hold the mind someplace, keep it there. But if you don't think it's only a matter of holding the mind still are focused. You probably probably won't develop somebody since that's MIT's a whole state, a state of being. One translation I've seen for Samadhi is concentrated repose. It's a nice term, concentrated repose. There's a kind of ability to rest the attention On where you want the attention to be, so it's not locking on. It's not grabbing hold, it's not straining, but it has a quality of resting

or, you know,

be soft, but keeping it there in order to do that, so softly, if you do it out of an act of will, too much of a will, you have to get kind of tight. And sometimes if there's a tug of war between the destructive forces of the mind, something else wants your attention, and you know, thinking about something else, or there's a sound outside the mind wants to go to, and so then you're kind of struggling with that tug of war. You know, and so you kind of push a repressor everything else away or kind of hold everything a day so you can stay focused. That's not the way of Samadhi the way of Samadhi is to repose to rest or if you soft topic later mind and where you want it to be. And then rather than push away or fight or resist everything else to gently like, Let it go, let everything else go. Your concentration has a lot to do with our ability to let go. It has as much to do with letting go as it has with being able to hold the mind still on something. So, should we learn to let go and letting go is meant to be softening, relaxing, you know fighting something, you just kind of dissolving it, letting goes, you let go of our thoughts like medical, let it go. And every moment you let go, you're weakening the forces of distraction of forces

within you that towards getting lost in thought. So we let go and let go and as the mind Lets go, and it's resting with time, the mind gets quite soft. One of the descriptions of the concentrated mind is that it's a mind which is saw pliable, malleable and workable. Those are great descriptions is your mind. Soft, pliable, malleable and workable. Think of your mind that way. Most minds are brittle, hard, stiff, unwieldy. So you know the mind in Buddhism, am I talking too much? Talking away? Is it you know, it's one of these risks of being a teacher you carry on these monologues without knowing. You know? If I hadn't for some of you, maybe I am I apologize. I'll try to stop students we can do sitting. The mind is an activity. It's not a thing. I think conventionally Am I think of the mind as being maybe synonymous with the brain or thing. With that your mind that you have. But the mind is not a thing. It's not a substance, may the brain is a substance, but the mind is an activity or a series of activities. It's something and because it's an activity, the activity can change. The activity can soften in different ways. So part of what we're doing in developing concentration practice is helping the mind become soft. So again, that is very important that you're not trying to, to be hard in developing concentration. In the short term, if you had to, if you're hard or kind of willful, you can maybe get concentrated in a little bit, enough to kind of do certain things you have to do in daily life. But in order to develop somebody, there has to be a softness. In order for there to be a softness. There has to be a lot of gentleness towards oneself, a lot of forgiveness, a lot of compassion, a lot of kindness towards oneself. Because if you're hard towards your so if he's all I'm terrible, I'm a bad person, oh, I'll never get concentrated, I'm not made up for this, you know, all the kind of negative judgments that person can do for themselves. All those represent hardening factors of the mind. And, and so you have to, you have to figure out some way or other to let those let go of those or put those to rest long enough. So during the meditation you can enter into the soft world of Samadhi. Some people cannot develop concentration, until they somehow come to terms with their psychology, with the way they relate to themselves with their neurosis or something or their self criticism is the inner critic or whatever it might be. Somehow that has to come to terms or with their conscience, or their sense of guilt or their fear or their anger or their all these different things. So that the mind can start doing softening, relaxing. Okay, so we've been now sitting for a while, if you would like to stand for 30 seconds just to stretch your legs. You're welcome to do that. Developing concentration is it, it's more important. We use do concentration meditation, that your body be comfortable. And when you're doing mindfulness meditation and mindfulness meditation, we tend to work with the physical discomforts that arise in concentration practice. It's best not to have a lot of discomfort, if you can help it. If you have a lot of discomfort. There's, there's practices for you, but but if you can, you don't want to have a lot of physical discomfort when you're doing concentration practice. You don't want to kind of be a couch potato, no slouch either. You want to sit in a way that's upright and balanced, but you don't want to kind of Put yourself in a way that makes you uncomfortable. Because you don't want the physical pain to be a distraction. As some of you know, from teaching, learning about mindfulness, in mindfulness practice and mindfulness meditation, there is no such thing as a distraction. You know, that's right, you learn that right? in concentration practice, there are such things as distractions. And so, incoming your concentration practice, you want to have a wise relationship with distractions within and try to avoid having them. So you want to try to meditate at a time where there's not gonna be a lot of noise around or a lot of kids screaming or, you know, neighbors, you know, leaf blower going or, or, you know, a lot

of things that kind of would be distracting for you. Those are not important. When you do mindfulness meditation. You want to protect yourself that way. But when you do concentration practice, you want to do some of that and try to create a quiet, calm, clean environment in which you can practice in. So in a moment, we're going to read out loud, the Metta Sutta together. As you do this, we're going to do this as a as a practice of concentration. And as we read it, if you could immerse yourself in the activity of reading it out loud, turn yourself over completely as if this is the only thing is important to do in the world. if your life depended on or something, this is like the only thing that's interesting or the most Wonderful, fascinating things you've ever read. And you've put yourself into the into it. And if you can't do that,

because

you have some kind of thinking or something pulls you away. Let's say for example, you're reading and say, This is brilliant, I should be telling my neighbors about this, this is great. Notice that tendency to leave your absorption in the text. And then gently let go of that be willing to come back. Or if you say, why are we doing a silly thing? That's again, the mind is leaving the focus and staying here. So whatever so try to absorb yourself and what's he doing here, but be very attentive to notice. If your thoughts start pulling you away. And as soon as you notice that happen, see if you can gently let go that in We apply yourself to just just this if you start paying too much it switches to that. Okay, so meta to reach the state of peace,

once skilled in the good, should be

capable and upright,

straightforward and easy to speak to.

So I'm not proud,

consented and easily supported

living lightly with few duties, wise and with senses calm, not arrogance and without greed for supporters and should

not do the least thing

at the one I would criticize. One should reflect They all be happy and secure. They all beings be happy.

living beings, whether we are strong,

large, medium or short

or big, C or C, near or distant, gourd or to be born may be happy to see another or despise anyone anywhere but no one through anger or aversion, wish for others to suffer as a mother would raise her own by

the child. So what are all the

with loving kindness for the whole The world should work collectively

and all around without obstruction without a without their will, standing or walking, sitting or lying down, whichever one is away, may want to stay with this recollection.

This is called the sublime

here and

one who is virtuous, endowed with vision not taken by us and having overcome all greed for sensual pleasure.

So in the middle of a text There's a line that goes, may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart. Let's repeat that together for a few times. Until I ring the bell

may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy. may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart may be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart. May or may all beings be happier heart may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart. may all be happy and secure. They all beings be happy at heart. May all Be happy and secure. Hail the house. may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy. may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart. may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy. may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart may all be happy and secure. May all beings be happier at heart. They all be happy and secure. May all beings be happier at heart. They all be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart.

Then sitting upright in a meditative posture,