

2005-04-20 Concentration (Week 1 Part 2)

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SPEAKERS

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Then sitting upright in a meditative posture, gently closing your eyes and feeling your body. There is a vibration in your body feel the vibration your body In order to be concentrated or composed, it helps to feel rooted in this place where you're sitting. So feel yourself here on the chair, your feet firmly planted on the ground, on the floor. solid base. Concentration has a lot to do with softening or relaxing, letting go. See if you can let yourself be at ease. Just a teeny bit, moving yourself. Begin to ease with yourself as you are here. These with what is even if it's easy. Here at this time in place is where you find your lived experience. What it's like to be alive. living human being that experiences only only happens in the present and for you it's happening now. through your body, our mind when a person is getting ready to Do concentration meditation can be very helpful to have a way of setting yourself up for preparing yourself for it and of having a transition. Getting ready for it in one way, I'll suggest is to go through a seven point relaxation exercise. It is to systematically relax seven different parts of your body. So, start by taking a few, taking a little bit longer and deeper breath and exhaling, relaxing. A comfortable, fuller breath than usual. And then bring your attention doing that keeping that breath going deeper breath fuller breath Then bring your attention to your head, face. Feeling what's there, especially feeling any tension that might be there. And then as you exhale, relax the head to face. breathing deeply. bring your attention to your shoulders, shoulder and shoulder blades. breathing into that part of your body. And then as you exhale, your shoulder area relax. Even if just a teeny bit Continuing to breathe more deeply than usual to the area of your solar plexus and diaphragm prime rib cage and then as you exhale, that that whole area, soften, relax and then feeling your arms and your hands As you exhale, let them soften the flesh and the muscles can relax away from the bone in the area of your Belly, belly destines pelvic cavity as you exhale Let that relax and then feeling your legs, legs and feet as you exhale and relax and soften, relaxing the tops of your thighs Okay, And then the final seventh point is to relax. So feel the whole body. global awareness of the body, whatever way it's easy. And then as you exhale, soften it to degree you can doesn't have to get rid of all the tension that's there but just a little softening. Letting go how you brace yourself And then let your breathing returned to normal. That's your breathing beauties. In developing concentration on the breath,

remembering we're trying to compose ourselves on the breath, an experience of breathing. So you might go through your body and see what part of your body where you feel the breathing would be. Maybe a nice place to compose yourself to settle yourself. Relax into what's easy to be with. experience of breathing for some people might be the abdomen moving. The belly going in and out, or up and down. Some people might be the diaphragm area. Some people it's the chest center of the chest to the size of the chest moving. Some people it's feeling the sensation of air going in now through the nostrils or the air against the back of the throat. Some people it's kind of a whole sense of the whole breath body. Spend a little bit time becoming familiar with how your body experiences breathing. Your body steals the breathing process to see if there's some place some center of gravity some place where it'd be easiest to compose your Settle yourself around the breathing. If you can't decide the matter, just choose whatever. And then see if you can begin to compose yourself you're being on that breathing, like the breath. The breath is at the center and everything else kind of settles around. Don't expect you can do it well just a little bit. Just a little bit of settling composing on the breath. And then see if you can take your attention and really invested in the experience of breathing in that place where you feel the breath keeping attention alert, there. Present press School in a way to experience a breathing and if there are thoughts or ideas or anything that is pulling your attention away Let go of it saying no thank you enough now. So you can enter into the world of breathing so you can feel the experience of breathing in is different than the experience of breathing And then to help you stay present for the breath one breath after the other Each time you exhale, give that exhale account. Counting one to 10, the first exhale and gets one, the second to the third, three. And when you get to the 10th, breath, breath, starting in one again. If you lose count, don't worry about it. Without any judgment or commentary. It's very simply Matter of fact, we begin to get one. Gentle counting that encourage you each courage encourages you to hang in there with one breath after the other. Some people like to count both the in breath and out breath. One, one to two. Letting the voice that's counting. Be soft and relaxed. A whisper of reminder, stay here, stay here. Stay with the breath. If anything takes you away from the breathing you can let go of it If you can't let go of it, then perhaps by accepting it, its content to be in the best day in the background. And you keep the breath in the foreground. You don't need to fight anything or try to push something away. If it doesn't, if you can't let go of it. Perhaps you can just go to the background keeping the breath in the foreground. We're gonna sit here to two more minutes. Can you turn yourself over for leisure can for two minutes to your breathing. This is the only thing that's important only thing you need to do breathing Then to end this meeting take a few long deep breaths heal your body And then take a minute here to review what that city was like. for yourself without judgment or criticism or just very Matter of fact, like a reporter, or naturalist. What happened to you? Present where you are welcome you be concentrated on some of the things who took you away. How easy was it to let go of the things that took you away? The viewing bird's eye picture of what happened And then you can open your eyes are many different objects a person can use to develop concentration. In our tradition, the breath is very common. Another common one is using what's called loving kindness, meditation, and sometimes other things people use. For this class, we'll use the breath as well. benefits in the breath and it's go very far with the breath. The counting can be very helpful. Some people who've never counted might think it's a little bit harder, awkward to do at first. But if you do it for a while you get used to it's like riding a bicycle after a

while becomes easy. And counting can be very helpful, kind of keep you on track, encouragement to kind of keep a little bit track of what's going on or to know what the next count is. Keep your presence. It's also a good indication of how concentrated you really are. I think that it's very easy to be fooled, and think you're more calm and concentrated than you actually are. And you kind of sitting there and sometimes people are meditating for a long time. Like I've had this where I sit there and actually, things are pretty good here. I'm pretty concentrated and pretty calm, pretty good. And then I'll do something like count. And I realized, you know, I could hardly get beyond three. And I don't think I have a lot of strength in the concentration and so then I'll work on strengthening the concentration until it kind of gets up, be stronger. Also, the counting sometimes can keep you a little more alert, sometimes the concentration practice can be, you can get to calm when you do concentration, practice get kind of sleepy, but to count the counting and kind of keep you from drifting or getting too tired. The important thing with counting is to be on guard to the counting doesn't become mechanical or automatic too much. Try to keep it living or organic or somehow alive. It's possible to get into mechanic move, just counting and your mind isn't at all yet counting and you feel like you're doing it but really your mind is somewhere else. So you have to kind of not get mechanical and keep it living, the main connection there. I think it's useful when a person is trying to develop concentration practice. Do it with a lot of respect. And when you do something respect you don't you don't do it kind of arrogantly you don't do it with demanding it. You kind of respect both the practice itself and also how difficult it is to get concentrated so that you're not kind of beating yourself up for how hard it is. There are some people who never seem to get concentrated in meditation, but they still get a lot of benefits from it and tried to get concentrated. Even though you don't get concentrated, it tends to kind of dislodge or reveal a lot of the inner psychic forces that are operating. And you can see much more clearly Oh, this is what's going on. This is my where to think about this is my concern. These are my emotions and feelings. This is what you know. You see a lot By the attempt if you're trying to win, you might go somewhere else, you see that some people get a lot of benefit from that. So I would encourage you not to be upset or concerned, you don't, at first succeed, just it's well worth making the effort making the effort. I think it's also useful to think that concentration practice is helped a lot by preparing yourself for the concentration session. So if you had a busy day and you're running around, just plop yourself down to meditate and get concentrated, you're not going to take you're going to spend a good amount of time just kind of cooling out from the day before you can actually start using your mind get concentrated. I know that there was a period of time where I worked at restaurants very fast, difficult work. Very loud. I enjoyed it, but it was kind of an odd go sit there late afternoon when I came home Sit for 40 minutes in the first 20 minutes, which is kind of cleansing the body in the mind of the tiredness, exhaustion, the dizziness of all that we can nodding off and kind of just kind of and have 20 minutes, the cleanse cleansing aspect to just kind of relaxing aspect that happened. And then the last 20 minutes I get concentrated. So it's good to be prepared. So one of the things you might think of doing before you do your 45 minutes is to sit for five minutes and look out the window, just kind of have some tea, or go for a walk around the block. Or you know, take a nice shower and relax. You know, kind of go for a run or do something and kind of that's kind of settles you and calms you down. So you're not not as you're not asking the meditation, to kind of quiet to relax to everyday kind of excited state you might be in when you kind of do a little bit kind of might be more efficient to do it's

kind of sitting having tea for a little bit, just quietly and do a lot And then go on to something, you have to decide for yourself what is the best. It helps if you have practice moderation and food and drink. So don't drink a lot or don't eat a lot. Especially eating. It's best to kind of have a light stomach. So don't have a big dinner and then sit down to your concentration practice or big lunch. If you have to meditate after a meal, then it's really likely. You know, so really, be careful that your, your energy and your physiological state is one that's supportive of the practice of waking up and being concentrated. It said it's best not to sleep too little or too much if you want to develop concentration. So it's kind of epidemic in our society to get too little sleep. It said Americans are sleep deprived culture. So people need to sleep more than they need to meditate. But if you get to sleep, you know you Not enough time, and you're not going to have a very good mind crisp mind that can actually apply yourself. So during these five weeks of this class, if you're one of the people who don't get enough sleep, maybe you could try to sleep with more, you know, go to bed earlier, watch less television or whatever it takes. I realized this class has letter requirements of you. But hopefully it's not too onerous to get more sleep. But also you don't want to stick too much also. That's also a hindrance to getting concentrated, because then the mind gets sloppy, slothful. It's helpful if you can practice contentment. And now that's a tall order. Some people say what do you mean contentment. The reason I'm practicing meditation is so I can learn how to content. You tell me how to get content before I can meditate. That doesn't make any sense. But do what you can see if you can practice a little bit of content. To be content with your life with things as they are, it's good to push that edge of contentment. One way to do this feel more grateful for things. So if you have the energy, the time inclination to to cultivate a little more contentment, try to at least try to avoid discontentment. If you notice that I didn't know what that certain activity makes you really discontent. Maybe don't do that, do it after you meditate before. Like if you're some people like, you know, look at the stock market. You know, and don't do that just before you meditate. Even if the good good news is not good, is that good free meditation. And as I said earlier, when you develop concentration, there is no such thing as distractions. So to the best of your ability, you want to kind of credit credit Conditions around you where you're less likely to be distracted. And once you've created those conditions as best you can, then just work with whatever arises. If some noise comes or something happens, just work without and try to keep doing the practice, don't set up some kind of resistance to what's happening, you know, but, but initially try to set up the right conditions. And one of the conditions that is the classic texts talk about is meditate in a clean, orderly environment. And in addition, especially if you are a reversal type, they say, personality, but it's probably good for anybody. If you really want to get into this, you know, we're clean, orderly clothes, clean clothes, fresh clothes, when you sit down to meditate. So all these things kind of help along. It's helpful. Concentration develops repetition of practice, over and over again. It's helpful if you get a sense of repetition. Rhythm when you do a practice, so if you can meditate the same time every day. So you have a sense of rhythm into your body and physiology can use to it in the notes coming. Also, it's helpful to meditate in the same place you can. So again, so you have associations and meditation to that place. So you come back there, and that's the place to do it. Some people who are a little bit more, maybe religiously inclined or devotionally inclined, find it helpful to do a little bit of ritual, before sitting down to meditate, chanting the Metta Sutta, or bowing to a statue of the Buddha or, you know, some kind of little ritual, it's sometimes a ritual kind of subtle things, clears things out and can help. So

in this first week of practice of you 45 minutes of working with a breath in meditation, counting the breath staying with it, do the practice. encourage you not to try for results. Don't look don't don't don't look for. Don't don't measure. So how am I doing? I've done it yet. Make any concentrated, mean, do your best. But don't worry about don't don't think about results. Don't be don't don't try to don't be concerned about it. If you get concentrated, great, but if you don't get concentrated that's not the point for the first week. Okay, so you're freed from results? Isn't that great? And what I do, what you'd like you to do is, is as you try to stay focused in the breath, try to get concentrated. And also, when you as you're memorizing this Metta Sutta I would like you to, as you're doing that, to study how you're using your mind. What is it you're doing? What does it like to use the mind to try to apply the mind to the breath, to rest the mind there to engage the mind with the breath with that move. of engagement of wrestling of placing the mind which I'd like to turn the mind and put it there. If you do it many times, you get a sense what that's like. What's it like to try to keep it there? What happens in the mind when you get pulled away from the breath? What's that like? And what do you do to that? What you do? When you notice you, you get pulled away? What are your habitual things you do? Do you judge that you get upset, you get criticized you say, Oh, great, this is fantastic. I don't like this breath stuff. And now I can think about the heat as much as I can this much nicer. What do you do? And then start exercising your capacity for letting go and see if you can learn how to let go in a way that is soft, gentle, not aversive, not trying to push something away. And try to let go in such a way that it's convincing. Like you're really you know, really understanding Yeah, okay. I'll do this later. Thank you, lady, cuz I thank you. I'm glad you're there. Thought that will take care of this. We'll think about this later. Nothing no thank you or something. It's kind of respectful so they see if you can kind of exercise and learn what it's like to let go. So what what's the effort required to rest and stay with a breath? And what's the effort required to let go? So you're studying that you're getting to know it. And doing it works. So it's learning something about how your mind works. If you want to do this first week, not necessarily get the results of getting concentrated, if you get concentrated to some degree. take that as a nice byproduct. Does that makes sense? So the homework, as I said, is to memorize the Metta Sutta. Some people don't have very strong ability to memorize. Don't feel bad about how well or poorly you can memorize. Just do the best you can and be content with how well you Do it. If between now and next week, if you sincerely tried, all you can manage to do is one line or one word, the title. If you're going to try, you know, there's not a loophole out, you know, it's well worth the effort of memorizing one line, if that's all you can do, whatever you can do, if you make the effort is sufficient to get benefits. So don't hold up a standard Oh, I didn't get all the way through the whole thing. Some of you will get through the whole thing in a week. Some you'll get through the first two lines. The point is to memorize what you can and learn how to use your mind. Learn how you use your mind what's required of your mind to hold something in your mind and to bring it back up again so you can recall it. That makes sense. And now I'm counting Some of you memorizing it the whole thing by next week. So you can recite it in here for us. That'd be very nice to have some, I think very helpful, inspiring to have someone recite it from memory. It encourages everybody else shows as possible. It's like the four minute mile. They could do it, I think I can do it to them. And the last thing that I'll say is that there are a lot of benefits from concentration. And I won't go into all of it now, maybe SP more for next week. It can be very healing for health purposes, for psychological purposes. It can be it can generate a lot of

happiness, a lot of feelings of well being. It's not uncommon for people who Get concentrated, well, really well, pretty well, to say that the ecstasy or the joy or the rapture of concentration in meditation is so exponentially greater than the pleasure of sexual orgasm. We think of that. How's that for a carrot. So that's one benefit. The one of the one of the benefits of concentration practice is it helps a person live happily here right now. So that would be great. So I hope this so far has been useful. All these a lot of a lot of talking a lot of ideas. The meat is not that important if you took it all in, but it's important to you like just enough for the instructions to know what to do during the week. So, memorize the sutta, sit for 45 minutes a day. And then if you want to get extra credit for this course Why? Well, I don't give grades. Grades don't make any sense, but you can get extra credit, extra merit. And, and that is keep a journal. At the end of your sitting, spend a little bit of time reflecting what happened. Because you'd be spend the time acknowledging what has happened that sitting there not to criticize or be upset by what happened, but just kind of very neutrally kind of acknowledge what happened. You'll actually become more familiar quicker about the whole process of how the mind works will happen. in meditation, you'll learn you'll be more honest about what's happening. And you'll take that into account almost automatically. The next time you go and sit, it's like you're building, you have a reservoir of knowledge and experience that you're building on. If you take you know, that's greater than if you didn't reflect on it didn't review it. And one of the ways to review is to write a little journal, write down what that setting was like. And then as the week's spirally, scald goes along, you might go back and review it and see how things are changing over time or if there's frequent patterns. You might have noticed you have patterns in your practice, unless you have that record. So I wonder how many of you will come back next week. Anyway, thank you very much.