

# 2005-05-18 Concentration (Week 5 Part 2)

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concentration, concentrated, mindfulness, practice, people, mind, meditation, experience, breath, teachers, sensations, arises, notice, develop, stay, called, feeling, intuition, mindfulness practice, important

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

One of my important moments when I was practicing in my long retreat in Burma was I've been practicing for a few months there, practicing my retreat few months. And as I did on most days, I went into my Abbott's little house to have in my interview. And one day as I was walking in, I door into his, into his room, I glanced to the right. And we had an altar right to the right, maybe about 10 feet away. And on the altar, there was a new Buddha had been there before, but I noticed we had noticed before he'd have customers A few different small Buddha's there. And, and there was a new one there. And I saw in very rapid succession, I saw, seeing the Buddha, experiencing it as a, as a pleasant experience a pleasant sensation to see that Buddha seeing the desire for more pleasure and seeing the desire for more pleasure, translate into I want that Buddha. And normally, we just walked in seeing the Buddha, I want it and I wouldn't exactly know why I wanted it. But there were all these steps that happened very, because it happened so fast, but my mind was struck my course concentrated enough and still enough, I could see the building blocks, that's simple process of seeing it, seeing, experiencing the presence of it, and then that magic moment of trying to want more pleasure. Now it's a quite a lofty thing to want to put image. It's a wonderful thing. It's not so great religious object and all this stuff. But the fact is that it wasn't some lofty inspiration that wanted me to have it. It was simply that it was a pleasant experience and I wanted more pleasure. It was that basic and the movement of wanting pleasure, pleasantness pleasant experience of not wanting unpleasant experience is really foundational to much of human experience much of human life. But it often we don't see it that the kind of fundamental foundational level often with these copies very fast in the mind. And pretty soon You know, you, you want something and you have a whole philosophical Ross rationalization of why it's a good idea to have and you might explain to everybody else your philosophy of why it's good, but that the base was simply that you wanted more pleasure in this thing provides it or you wanted avoid some kind of think of something that's comfortable. So some people Find that as their mind gets Still calmer, more concentrated, that it gives them a vantage point to understand a little bit the workings of the mind that they normally can't see so quickly. So one of the things you might notice is the

relationship you have to pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Your knee hurts, you have an unpleasant feeling, you have a pleasant sensation, your body your mood arises. And it isn't just something that's there in a simple way. But there's a movement towards it away from it, there's a reaction, the mind might start thinking, the mind might start wanting, the mind might start pushing away, not wanting resisting, there's this reaction to it. So as the mind gets quieter and quieter, we tend to be able to see more clearly the difference between the pleasantness and the reaction to it. But some of you had that experience today when you were able to get a little calmer than you normally would and Could you actually track as of the very end? The difference between pleasant unpleasant and then your reaction to it? Did you have something like that today? Anybody want to say anything about their experience doing that? anything unusual you saw you simply saw it. No one's raised their hand yet. So please, passing the mic as if hoping someone's going to Katherine wants to say something about what you saw when you looked at the difference between pleasant unpleasant and then your reaction to it.

The thing that I saw was a thought came up about a co worker, who I'm struggling with and I saw was interesting that I Wanted to cling to something that was negative. And then I had the thought, Oh, isn't that interesting kind of claim to negative reactions more than I do pleasant ones. That's,

that's a big insight. So it's one thing to have a negative feeling some negative thought and I've experienced something else that cling to it. And then it's something else to realize that there's a preference for that. disposition towards

someone else.

Nothing happened. Nothing interesting.

So the

one of things I want to talk about today is that The relationship between vipassana and or mindfulness and concentration. And one of the one of the ways that one of the things, one of the ways of concentration is used is is used as a as a platform from which to do Vipassana work or insight work. When the mind is calm and concentrated, then it tends to be much more insightful can see more clearly, things which in the agitated that an agitated mind can see. So, teachers who emphasize concentration practice, usually at some point, will then ask the student to stop doing concentration practice, and switch over to doing mindfulness or Vipassana. And there's a variety of ways that that could happen. One way is to just switch over and do mindfulness in the way that it's taught at spirit rock or time Generally around, just note what is happening, maybe use the breath again. But do more mindfulness, the breath, read in the concentration, and just start noticing what arise in your experience. And there's no attempt to direct it in any way. Rather, it comes with choiceless awareness, noticing what's happening as it arises and developing your mindfulness in that way. And when the

mind is concentrated in the mind won't wander off as much as it can if it's agitated or distractible. So once it's concentrated, you can much more be present for the arising and passing of things. And so to kind of open mindfulness to the experience, some teachers will direct concentrated students to do the parsing in directed ways. So they have particular content now that you're concentrated, look for this, or explore this. One of the things that people might do is do exactly what I did for you. So notice the difference between the what's called the feeling In the vendetta, the pleasant the unpleasantness of the experience and, and your reaction to it, the clinging or the grasping of the desire that arises right after it. And that's that connection between the read enough between the feeling tone the pleasant unpleasantness and a reaction is considered to be a very, very important place for being able to cut or stop or move or see through the reactive mind, the mind which is not free. So, it's important place to discover equanimity and freedom by learning not to do anything to be able to let go of the reaction, the wanting the clinging that might arise. So some teachers will direct the students to look there. Look at that really carefully. And it can be very powerful. other teachers might never Western teachers do this, but in Asia, sometimes they do this. They'll tell students Now that you have concentrated, look very carefully at the sensations in your body, that are arising and passing, look for the what's changeable in your experience. And just choose are tuning into what's always changing. So, if there are kind of feelings of vibration are pulsing or flowing or you know, flashing in and out of existence, different sensations, then start looking at what is impermanent or is changing. And then and get you set up your ability to get absorbed, get absorbed in those sensations which are arising and passing. So that more and more what your experience is, is that of things arising and passing. And because you're concentrated, you can get absorbed in that and because you're concentrating you can see that much more precisely. The normal kind of street mind cannot notice the phenomenal my subtlety by way physical sensations and rising pass or mental sensations and rising pass all the time, the dance of our sensations. So it's something that's something that might look at other teachers might direct the students to look at, at what's called duco stress or suffering, look at the places even when the mind is very, basically you feel like a lot of strong sense of well being because the person is quite concentrated. Now, look in in that field of well being, look for the places where there's some stress or some tension, where there's still a little bit discomfort. And discomfort might be very, very my new my new look for it, smell it out, tune it out. And because that is where the cutting edge of your practice is, because that's where the suffering is, and see if you can let go of it or relax it or work through it. The more refined the mind is, the more concentrated the mind is, the more what's left in terms of tension. represents or is connected to some of the deepest attachments that we carry in our, in our minds and hearts. So that concentrated mind lets us to access some of the deepest places of holding. And the way to connect to it is to feel or sense, the tension that's there, the pressure or the unsatisfactoriness might be there. Now, in some very deep states of concentration, the suffering of the unsatisfactoriness is not very strong, or it's not, you know, it's compared to everyday life. It's not nothing much at all. But it might be you have to kind of use tuning into that part of your experience to purify that also, as I continue the process of letting go that leads to liberation. other teachers will direct students to do more thematic forms of Vipassana. So example, study, or look at your experience from the point of view of what's called the 12th Full chain of dependent origination. MCLIN go into that now but there's a very those of you know, there's a very big teaching around what's called the 12th chain of dependent

origination. So, way of analyzing your experience. So look at the experience through that filter. other teachers might say okay, now look through it, look at it through the filter of the Four Noble Truths, really use apply that your experience or some teachers will say, look at the arising of self self concept, self identity, self clinging, be really, really tuned into that whereas the self, some teachers will give the students the question, Who am I? And you can look at it and generally you're not supposed to find anything but but you kind of you kind of do some more thematic you're looking and looking and looking. So the concentration practice becomes a platform for doing a variety of different kinds of ways of doing the past now. There's not just one form of the past in the practice. Which is most people introduced just to one form is actually a variety might we put in. So, all this is possible if you're doing a lot of concentration practice. Some people don't develop concentration to the point of getting deeply absorbed into the jhanas that we talked about last week, but only will do concentration, do concentration practice, to the point that the mind is no longer easily distracted. So the mind is stabilized. So it's easy to be here. So you sit down to meditate. And you find that the mind is just really wild. And you can't hardly stay present. Some people will find it. That's the time to do some kind of concentration practice very simple kind of working with a breath or doing loving kindness, until the mind is no longer just easily distracted. You kind of hear and arrive. And then those let go the concentration practice and start the mindfulness practice. Some people will wait much longer and do a lot of concentration practice, get really deeply absorbed. And then at some point, you know, work on vipassana, practice and switch. Generally, sooner or later, a student needs to switch from doing concentration practice to doing the posterior mindfulness. The idea in Buddhism is that enlightenment comes from the passionate practice, not from concentration practice. So that so that if you stay with a concentration practice only, you'll stay limited. You have to somehow be able to switch into another other mode of being with our experience looking at our experience. Now one of the important things to realize about concentration is a concentration is a the capacity to be concentrated and the experience of being concentrated or constructed phenomena and all constructed phenomena are impermanent. So, and so concentration tends to have a lifetime. So, or the concentrated state tends to have a lifetime here you develop a strong concentrated mind through a lot of practice. And then you start practicing you that muscle is going to wither. You have to keep keep that muscle going. If you develop concentration and you're able to get concentrated. You're not going to stay concentrated, sooner or later it's going to fade away. And I know a lot of people who suffer a lot of meditators who suffer because they expect their concentration to be stable. Once they get there, thinking, Well now that I got it, it's not supposed to go away. And so, for some people, a good concentrated state might last for five minutes. Sometimes it might last for half an hour. Sometimes it might last for longer, but sooner or later it will fade away. And it's very important to realize it's impermanent. So we don't get anxious and upset when it starts fading away. But rather kind of take that as part of the part of the course of what happens kind of be very relaxed about it and just kind of go with it and Okay, I was concentrated for a while now I'm not so not I need to shift nearly that. If you're on retreat, okay, now is the time to do walking meditation, or to change what I'm doing. or switch back to mindfulness practice or just continuing what I'm doing but not be upset because I'm not at a steep level of concentration. The real key to developing strength in a meditation practice, whether it's concentration practice or mindfulness practice, is continuity of practice. So having some continuity of practice, like I talked about, so

practicing every day on a regular basis, and the other is whenever you're meditating whenever you're practicing, to give it your best effort. And your best effort is not supposed to be the best effort that's available at that particular time. Your best effort is not always situational. So when you're tired, your best effort doesn't look as good as when you're really alert. If you have just had some tragedy in your life, your best effort being concentrated is not going to look as good as when everything's going really well in your life and you feel really calm and settled. Your best effort What's important is if you give it the best effort that's available. Not that your effort looks like it matches some high standard. And it's the continuity of giving it your best effort, which bears fruit over time is not having a very deep concentration all the time, but rather, you're giving the best you have. So sitting and regularly, meditating on a regular basis, and then not being complacent, not not pushing too much. Not being too real, too complacent about the practice too lazy, but giving it the best that you have available at that time is one of the things that bears fruit. The other thing that to do with concentration to the degree to which you can get concentrated. And especially if you if you can get, you know, really well concentrated it's really helpful to try to extend the calm where the concentrated state that you're in, as you get out of meditation, as you leave meditation. So don't think of it as something that has to stay only for meditation, you open your eyes, and then you jump up and, you know, jump in your car and go somewhere. But see if you can kind of stay in that subjective state of being calm, settled. You know, whatever the feelings, you are being concentrated, see things keep going. As you start to as you get up for meditation for a while, so you kind of kind of extending that period of time into your life, the monk to literally talk to you a few weeks ago, he gave an analogy for this, which I thought was kind of nice. And that is if you go Go up. If you take the work of going up, climbing up a ladder to the second floor of a building, when you get to the second floor, and you've done your work up there in time to leave, you don't just jump out the window to go back. But you know, you kind of go down slowly down the ladder. So the same thing with meditation if you get yourself into a nice state of calm relaxation or concentration in meditation, if you just kind of float away, just get up from meditation, stop what you can do next. It's like jumping out the window. But it's cheating can extend the sense of being peaceful at ease, open, relaxed, work, work, work, work the edges of that. And if you do that, it does two things. It will continue developing a capacity for being concentrated or being peaceful. It'll help you to stabilize it. It also helps you understand what it is that takes you away from that. What are the forces in your own psyche that trigger you to get anxious to speed up to lose track of your presence? What is it that gets you caught? Anything more you can be aware of what gets you caught? The more wiser you can be about the world of consciousness and the wiser you are but the world of Caithness, the easier it is to meditate, get concentrated again to come back to a still place. So leaving meditation is important how you do what to do with Nick, careful, careful way, try stay present. So, now it's your turn. I talked a lot. And I think last time last week, we didn't have much questions. So now it's the end of the five weeks and so This is your chance to ask questions, if anything that seems relevant that I haven't covered or wasn't clear questions from your own experience of doing the concentration practice. Yes. You could use the mic here.

You would talked earlier about

us using this concept of joy. And as I've been trying to work that into my practice, I'm finding that I'm finding a little bit that it's that it's working, but I'm also finding that there's a kind of effort that I'm a little self conscious about. It seems a little contrive to be able to hold it for any length of time?

What do you mean by contrived?

Well, I don't know if that's the right word, but it just it seems to take a lot of energy to hold on to the joy for any length of time. I think what it is, is that in the past, I've seen meditation as being a state where I'm relaxed, whereas this isn't that this is having to come up with energy

to maintain joy, for for being concentrated. Can you say a little bit about how you maintain that joy?  
Well, how do you experience the joy and what do you do to maintain it?

It's partly

an energizing feeling. In my body, I noticed myself smiling a little bit. And my posture being more erect, so it's also partially physical exertion. And I have kind of a mental image of the way you describe joy as being a combination of happiness with anticipation.

So, you might, you might continue for a while, see if, in continuing with the way you're doing at the country where you're doing it, whether you can, whether you can get more concentrated, more absorbed, more present, less distracted, just really here, and then at some point I don't know what the point the point will be. Then see if you can relax. Like go into letting go maybe letting go into the joy or letting go into some subjective experience of concentration or letting go into the breath but that's what you're focusing on and relaxing and see what happens then. And Now, it might be that you'll have even more joy. If you kind of kind of come prepared you let go into it more fully. And it's much more peaceful than the other possibilities that maybe it is to forest what you're doing. And so maybe you want to stop doing it. But as you develop the concentration in a more relaxed way, in the way you're familiar with some, some of the same symptoms will arise, but it kind of come in through the back door rather than being contrived. And then you'll recognize them and then you can kind of like just have them help you along and let them grow. Does that make sense to you?

Someone else please.

back down.

You can clear up some confusion.

I was reading last night number

seven

and eight.

Okay, get all the closer to your mouth and you look vertically. Okay?

So the seven

part of the path is mindfulness and the eighth one is concentration.

So I was wondering about your statement that mindfulness is considered I mean awakening or enlightenment is considered coming out of mindfulness and not concentration. Concentration is that as the last step of the path. And also, last week we were talking about the, the different states of consciousness. And I was under the impression that those were

stages coming out of concentration

practice. The jhanas are stages of concentration practice. And the classic definition of the of the, of the concentration factor of a full path. The last step is developing the jhanas is developing these absorption states. Now, I don't know if we necessarily have to see that there was called the eighth force, April path as being a linear sequence. These are just the eight aspects the eight wings with eight columns important parts of the path. So that's one thing to say. Some people do see it's kind of the sequence. And some people will say that mindfulness is very helpful as a foundation for doing concentration practice. But once the concentration is strong enough, there has to be some kind of insight, some kind of seeing that that somehow lets the mind let go. And that seeing is the insight practice. Another way of saying this is that mindfulness and Vipassana are not synonymous. We often we often call them as we always treat them as the same thing. Because we use the word the past, never we do. Mindfulness is the is the mind's ability to know what is happening to recognize what's happening in a careful way. The past is when the mindfulness has a strong enough level of concentration. That is seeing the three characteristics. So sooner or later there has to be a yoking together joining together of concentration and mindfulness. And it. The two has been in the history of Buddhism. And off my a minute way I talked to you in this class, I was feeling that there's a strong distinction between mindfulness practice and concentration practice. But in deep practice, I think that it's not so useful if they can see it as being so separate from each other. You need a very strong level of concentration in order to do mindfulness practice deeply. And you need a certain level of strong mindfulness in order to concentration practice. So and the other thing is that some of the experiences that happen as you go through the jhanas in concentration practice will also happen. It may be a little different. degree different degrees of intensity as a person goes through very deeply personal practice some of the same sequences or some of the factors come into play. So I think it's also useful to kind of

see the Eightfold Path as being a consideration is definitive end of the path. That's not that satisfying for you. As an answer, so gay on the back.

This is very related. I'm

just trying to get that difference. A little bit more in in mindfulness. The instruction is often just to

be aware of, for instance of what this breath is like,

in

when I'm doing this practice, it doesn't seem different. From that, so I'm just, in other words, when when I'm concentrating on the breath, I am aware of each breath as it comes. And I'm interested in what each breath is like. How is that not. Mindfulness is mindfulness when you when you just let whatever arises, you're willing to just let anything arise and to go away from the fear,

necessarily. The breath breath can be both an object of mindfulness and an object of concentration, and just kind of an overlap. So if you're using the breath as an object of mindfulness, so also tends to help developing a concentration. But the difference, if you want to distinguish between mindfulness concentration here would be when you're doing concentration practice, you might actually know the details of what the breath experiences like. You just holding the breath at the holding the attention at the breath at the experience of breathing He's holding it, they're not allowing it to slip off. Just staying there staying staying there. At the end of your session in meditation, you might be very concentrated. But you haven't really learned much about the breath. You haven't seen great detail. So it's like if you if you're looking at a window it is snow falling. If your concentration practice will be just like holding the attention watching the flow, the snow going down, just kind of staying there, right? They're not going to get distracted at all. He's absorbed in that flow going down. And mindfulness practice, you really try to get really close to seeing really what's going on there. And you might see this the deep the differences between different snowflakes. You really see the snowflakes snowflakes for what it is in itself. Was concentration practice you. You're not going to know anything. As concentration practice gets really strong. There is a Sometimes what we're focusing on is conceptual, and not experiential, or not immediate. So in the past that we stay in the real world, non conceptual world, sometimes in in strong concentration practice, you're no longer focusing on what's the real world. So for example, one classic practice for developing concentration is called casino practice and casino practices where you have a disc, a dish or a disc of different colors, and then you focus on the disc. So much that when you close your eyes, there's an after image and then you focus on the after image. So you're not trying to see the disk more more carefully what it is. But you actually try and spend you have this concept it's ideas after image kind of, and you're trying to hold the mind really still get absorbed in the after image. Some teachers that teach concentration will have the students stay watching, kind of watching the breath that the nostril, but they're not they tell the students don't focus on what the sensations are, don't get

into the details of that's heat and that's cold and all that just hold the mind right there until a white light arises at the tip of your nostril. And that's called that white light is called the nimitta. And so some teachers folks is what's called is nimitta. And then and then if it just a pale light, ignore it and keep staying with the breath. And then at some point when it gets really bright, then you leave the breath and you focus on that bright light, which is kind of like an after imager. Some people who certainly in Buddhist terminology, sometimes call it like a concept. So it's not really the experience, it's more like something the mind is creating the function of concentration. So with when you when you develop very strong concentration, the breath going into the jhanas. For many people at some point the breath disappears. And what they're really concentrating on at some point is something like an nimitta. Maybe the myth is not like white light, but it might be a feeling of beauty or feeling of a lot of pleasure or joy that arises. And so again, it's kind of a created aspect of experience. So, what are the simple differences in concentration? You're not necessarily trying to know what the experience is. You're trying to hold it there. So just anchor for the holy the mind still. In some ways, frustration Practice, practice is really stupid. Because he's not trying to just trying to hold the mine there. Just keep it there. You know, in a wise way, soft way, but keep it there, and then everything else will fall away. And then some point, you get concentrated. And so the dumber you can be in some ways, the easier it is. Because you're trying to analyze and figure and judge and manipulate and thinking about your taxes, you know, it's not gonna happen. But if you can just go just teacher told me stay there, just stay there. That helpful.

Thank you.

This is kind of along the same lines, but then when you it feels to me like when you are getting very absorbed, and the breath kind of falls away. And you're

just there with that very spacious,

still feeling.

How is that different from mindfulness? I mean, it doesn't it just become a mindfulness

state at that point. They couldn't be and people, people, some people kind of naturally are kind of on their own, just go over to mindfulness, what's going on. But if you want to develop your concentration further, then you don't, then you want to maybe you find something that you can focus in one pointed way on, in your experience. So if the breath disappears, then is there something else and there might be some feeling of pleasure in the body, some feeling, it's really some really nice feeling. And then you can kind of focus in that nice feeling, and then develop your one pointedness there. If,

if if a person

if the breath has disappeared, and you're in a jhana

then

you need to talk to a teacher probably where they can you can focus and then janyk factors and try to convert you know, notice, you know, if if some of the jhana factors like the joy is there Then work the joys pervaded through the body, pervading it is printing instructions. And so your work is pervaded through your body. So it really get strong and stable. If the joy is passed away, and it's happiness in the third jhana, then you can do the same thing, try to pervade the happiness throughout your body stabilize and really make it strong. And if that happiness fades away into this powerful state of equanimity, the same thing, if it makes sense, if it makes sense to do that, you can try to stabilize and working if you're just getting concentrated, and it is not a jhana just kind of somewhat concentrated and unit mindset really wandering away. And it feels very open and spacious, you might be at access concentration. And so then you have a choice of whether you want to be past that practice at that juncture, or that you want to do more concentration practice.

Along those lines, what role does intuition

in knowing Do you use intuition to know? Feels like now's the time to go to

mindfulness?

What's your What do you mean? What do you mean by intuition?

Sometimes when I'm sitting, I'm there, and I have a,

I guess for me, it feels it's a feeling.

And it feels as if I should do a certain thing. And it feels really clean. And I've been following that. And but then later, I think maybe I shouldn't do that. So when we talk about shifting to mindfulness practice, I don't know if I should do that. If I have the feeling that now's the time maybe, to do it. I think

I think it's fine to fine tune, use intuition, whatever, you know, whatever that is for you, whatever that means, you know, and I think it's good to check it out. should always be double checked first. So just kind of automatically act on it, because it's intuition as you do it. But when you check it, or is it, is it clean? You know, this is this deal? Right? And I think it's fine. So you know, properly I think a lot of the unfolding of practice is through trial and error. And part of the, the, the prompting of trial is intuition. You try something out and see what the consequences are, what the results are. You might, if what you're setting out to do, sitting yourself down to do is you know, and sometimes you might not, you might do trial and error and not giving in to not give in to your intuition and see what that's like. And,

and, but yeah, it seems fine to me for as long as you learn from your experience, and then your intuition will get better and better.

My other question has to do with ethics. And you mentioned that that some teachers say go back to that, as foundation to cultivate concentration.

Well, there's so much to cultivate it, but it's if you if your ethic, if your ethics are really off, it's hard to get concentrated. And so sometimes if, as I said with some teachers say that you cannot get into even access concentration, unless you're ethically clean, clean enough, I don't know exactly, you know where the line is. But so I don't know how you know how it works, you know, I feel shy to generalize how it is for everybody. But I think that to some degree, you need to have your ethical life clean in order to get concentrated, how to have wise, useful concentration, how clean that is, may vary from different people. So if you've robbed banks recently, you're probably not going to get concentrated, you know, or you sit down to meditate just after after having done this hurt. dislike to your best friend, it's probably going to find it hard to get concentrated. But so you have to kind of make, you know, make sure you have, you know, you develop, you know, some somewhat clean. And for some people you know, they might have to go back and clean up some parts of their life, they kind of as the mind gets more more relaxed, it bumps up against the places where the mind is not relaxed. And so what does it take to relax those places? And if those places have to do with ethics, what does it take to relax those places in the mind. And sometimes it means you have to call someone up or you have to make amends or it means to change your behavior or your something. So the mind can be relaxed enough because the mind has to be relaxed in order to get really deeply concentrated. And if part of your mind is not relaxed, you've got to work on it. So that's where some someone might say, Oh, you should stop meditating for a while. I think you have to go home and work something out. Oh, in the back.

I have a couple of different

comments or questions. I'm not even quite sure what they are. When, again, getting back to this distinction between concentration and mindfulness. So, for me, the experience of concentration is very relaxing, maybe because it is so dumb, whatever. But when I switch over to mindfulness, it's more agitating because I can feel that I'm searching for words, to try to describe whatever I'm feeling or thinking or even even the word planning or thinking it's, it's, it moves me into a different realm, right? And and, and I'll notice that that's not it. Have more aversion to that than the concentration because that feels just so good. So I, I'd like you to comment on that. And then also as a follow up to that, when you said to switch over to the mindfulness, is there some point you let go of that too and then you're Are you back into that sort of state that you get into sometimes with concentration that you're no longer in that realm of words or thinking you're just in a beam kind of realm. So, okay,

good. So often, concentration practice tends to be more relaxing and refreshing, restful, then mindfulness practice. So sometimes when people do a lot of mindfulness practice Sometimes they're

instructed if they're getting tired from doing the mindfulness to, to go and spend some time do concentration practice to get the rest. And then when you're rested, come back and do mindfulness part of the function. One of the usefulness of concentration practice is to get that kind of rest. Now it's a common enough for people who've done a concentration practice first before doing mindfulness to feel a little bit like oh, this is my mind's coarser than it used to be a meditation doesn't feel as satisfying. Some of that is just the awkwardness of learning a new skill. So if you spent your whole life walking and that's really smooth and easy, you can get where you want to go easily. And then you've so finally someone gives you a bike to ride. And the first day on the bike, you're really wobbly, just like you've really sore takes a lot of muscles and you know, just like really hard to ride that bicycle. You say well, why should I ride a bike? Go, and I can walk. But if you ride a bicycle for a couple of days, pretty soon you can ride without using your hands. It's really easy. It's actually easier than walking. So it's it takes a while to learn a skill. So with a mental noting, if you're using mental noting, of your experience, it's sometimes it takes a while to get the hang of it to become because smooth and easily easy kind of second nature almost. And so some of the agitation that comes from using it falls away. Also, it's, it depends, you know, you might meet might need to look a little bit of how you're being mindful. If you're making commentary about your experience. Maybe that's is too complicated. And maybe in or maybe you can make it more simply, maybe it's just a one word label, and not a commentary about your experience. keep it really simple. Some people who, even some people, do mindfulness practice without doing labeling, without doing using words at all. And I mean, there's the opportunity both ways to do with more silence labor, just kind of silence seeing of the experience. And there's the option of viewing it with very quietly, very soft whispers in the mind, labeling your experience as you're doing it using the mental noting. And I've heard one teacher like Joseph Goldstein, or someone say that his experience at IMS is that the people who tend to note as a as a group tend to go further in the practice and as a group that people who don't but that's what individuals are, you know, there's a wide, wide range of difference within individuals within each group. So for some people, the noting just never works and they can go really far without noting. And, and some people noting works really well for me noting was really fantastic. They really helped my practice and really kept me on track. And some people as will do the noting and only when the mind is not so concentrated in once the concentration comes from mindfulness practice will produce concentration. So once the mind is quite still concentrated in doing a mindfulness practice, then they'll stop doing the noting some people will only know certain things. The only note only note if there's thinking going on, because somehow that's or some people only know known only noted sensations. I mean, the feeling tone, bad enough, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. You know, there's different kind of there's like, it's like an art and so different. Some different people use the art form in different ways. The noting is not so important. In and of itself. What's important is that there's a clearly you're clearly seeing or sensing what that exterior Just really like so. So if I hold up this bell, what's important is not that you label this a bell, but rather you see very clearly the roundness of it, the color of it, you know, sees actually see kind of the sensation level, what this actually is, calling a bell might actually make it easier to stay there, keep the mind there and really stay focused, as opposed to the mind. Thinking about your taxes. You know, this is helpful.

It is I have a follow up question though, if that's okay to probably both have mindfulness noticing and then the concentration with mindfulness noting how accurate or how, how detailed Are you trying to be? Or do you just have a couple of words that you just use, you know,

it'll probably for some people, so there's no one way in which this unfolds for people. So different different people in the process. Central's a little bit different as you have to kind of find your own way. So but some people find that there are certain times when accuracy is really helpful. And it just really helps us not be caught by it kind of freedom that can come by really acknowledging what it is an accurate label. And sometimes, the label accuracy is not important at all, the main function of the label is just kind of nudging the mind to stay present. And there are times in my practice where I've used the gnochchi, yes, for everything happening, to say yes to everything. And sometimes my mind has been really, really concentrated and still, just granted, everything is gonna be really quiet little whisper in the back. Just kind of like acknowledging being there for it. And so it doesn't have to be accurate. It just kind of, you know, just what keeps you there.

And one last question that I'll pass this along, and this has to do with a concentration. I noticed that when I really deeply concentrated Did it times it's a wonderful place to problem solve, because but I'm serious, like, solutions comes at when I'm too busy or whatever, I can't see them or so when I'm asking do you sometimes sit down and get concentrated in order to do problem solving, that it's not attached to doing meditation at all?

Yes. Okay.

So it doesn't confuse you, as long as your intention is clear of that sitting right then

right? As long as it's very clear and, and, and really clear. So, but if you're, if you're if your intention is to meditate and not to problem solve, then the practice is working really well. If it if it gets you to the point where you're creative. something's not working really well. But if you get off The train to do the creative creative work, then you've lost the opportunity to continue the momentum of that good work to take you further.

So, I guess I don't understand the whole mindfulness thing. Because when you're doing the noting, it's, it's always the same thing like, either there's pain or an itch or so how, how is this helping you in your life? Because if I'm going to notice something, I want to note something that's going to come up like if perhaps I did something wrong in the day and need to make amends or, you know what I mean? It's like you're only noting sensations and pain or stuff with your body. It has nothing to do with in the real world. So when does it when does practice Like all of this mindfulness help you in the real world, is it like you're outside and you can just know when you're upset?

Or so maybe it maybe. I mean, I don't I don't do much noting in daily life. I tend to use noting and meditation not so much in daily life, sometimes I'll use it. But if we if we use if we substitute the word noticing from mindfulness, your capacity, your ability to notice what's happening in meditation will do to bring a number of benefits in daily life. One is, it's like a muscle or habit you're developing. So that as you develop the habit of noticing the present moment more and more in meditation, then you're more likely to notice what's happening in the present moment outside of meditation. And it's, you know, and that's as long as you notice what's happening in the present moment in daily life, it's really helpful because you know, if you if you know, If you're if you're not noticing what's happening around you, or within you, all kinds of unfortunate things can happen.

So how do you know when you're not noticing?

What you're noticing? Like, you know what I mean? You can't tell like, if you're asleep out there, or if you're,

if you're asleep, you can't tell. See, if you're really asleep and you lost your mindfulness, then there's no hope for you while you're in that state. I mean, if here's the tool to last even know that you're not mindful, means the whole night but, but sooner or later, you'll notice that's the case. And that's when the practice begins. Oh, I was lost for the last five minutes. Okay, let me let me try to be present now. And then you try to wake up and be present. But if you really lost my understanding of being lost, and you're so lost, you can't even you know, you don't even know you're lost.

So when you get to education, Like when you say you have to switch over, I don't think that I consciously switch over it just like you just, I don't know what I'm doing. I think I'm doing both together or something like that. And it doesn't make any, because you still pay attention to your posture into your ear, try not to move and you, you know, like, if, if you want to move your hair, you know what I mean? You know that or something. So, but I started out doing concentration. I know quite follow, like, you sit down, you say you're gonna do concentration. And then I guess when I'm concentrated. Like, if I painted my knee, I just say pain. Yeah. And then and I don't deal with it. I don't I try not to move.

Right. So you're, you're mixing up a little bit of mindfulness with the concentration practice. That's fine. I think it's, I think to some degree, they work together. They support each other. But if you want to get really concentrated at some point, you know, if you're constantly on the breath, you would simply let the pain in your leg recede in the background. And, you know, you wouldn't be aware of it anymore.

Oh, if you were really concentrated.

And so one strategy to get concentrated is to ignore certain things like that. So sometimes we have a very strong habit to be concerned about pain. So the mind goes there. And then we note it and do mindfulness. But if it's possible, one strategy for getting concentrated is just ignore the pain within

reason, of course. So you can stay on track with the concentration with the focus on the breath, for example. Here we here on stage. So we're going over now it's almost 15 minutes after nine. And let me say this that I just want to thank you all for coming. I hope it's been useful. The glass and And happy and other times to answer other questions. And if you do the concentration practice and tried for a while and you want to come and talk about your experience, you can certainly come and talk to me or talk to other teachers, it's always good to talk about your experience. So I just want to thank you. And so I'll continue taking questions for a while. If some of you want to quietly leave at any point. Now at this, you're welcome to do that. You don't have to, you know, to be a captive audience.

So please,

question I have isn't really

it's all I used to call it like this.

I was actually not wanting to use a microphone, that's probably

it's not so much the concentration practice itself, but lately, I can pick up a lot of other people's energy more than normal. Like I can perceive it and I can and I know it's somewhat fortunate has it Fortunate aspect, and it's unfortunate. And I'm not really clear on how to work with that. So this is not really a question. So it can be a question related to the energy sometimes sticks a little bit, you know, for me, because if somebody has really strong negative energy, I don't, I definitely feel the strong, I can't be with this energy. Like, it's really intense for me more than before. Like, I sat number, whatever. So I don't know how and also I can also sense people's judgments. And that is also really I don't know what sometimes I've gone after it, like, tried to work with them about it, and sometimes, I don't really know what to do. So those are two examples that if you wanted to walk me through what I was doing, that would be really helpful to me

was a big, big topic. I'm not gonna spend a lot of time with it now. But I think it's what you're talking about is everybody has some experience of that. Just a matter of degree. And so but as people get more concentrated or develop mindfulness or other other for other reasons, some people develop a very heightened sensitivity to the issues of energy or, or, or emotional feelings or projections or judgments as you said, feelings people have. And, and it but but just like anybody, PBS make a decision who is comfortable to be with this person or not, and am I capable of being on this person without it being, you know, pushing me over the edge in some way or making me feel too lousy. And so sometimes we decide, you know, this person, you know, just painful to be around this person because it's just, you know, and so then sometimes we pull back. Other times, it might not be too painful, but we decide, oh, maybe I can work with this. Maybe I need to develop more mindfulness, maybe have to look at the ways in which that person is expected. experience that person's way of being judgments of me even because people do judge each other a lot, the world's full of judgments.

Can What does it take for me to not be concerned about that? Not to care whether someone likes me or not like me to find that freedom, you know, and so rather than seeing it as a problem out there, see, you know, what, what's the what's the, what's the button that's being pushed in me? And can I or what's the hook? I can I straighten up that hook?

Yeah, I just wanted to ask a general question about practice in general. It's my understanding that to the extent that we can that we week we carry on the practice throughout the day in trying to be aware of what's going on. And does that mean that let's say for example, we're driving, and we're going someplace, and perhaps we're thinking a little bit about what we're going to do when we get there. And maybe also we have the radio on. And so we're hearing stuff. Now, does that mean that would good Buddhist practice say, well, we want to limit what's going on so we can easily more easily be aware of what's happening. In other words, turn the radio off. Don't plan about what you're going to do and until another words limit your activity so that whatever it is that you're doing, you can be more aware, or do you just kind of like do what you would naturally do. Another example might be you could be in the street. Our normally when I take a shower, I start singing just. But that's now Now I have to be aware of two things. I mean, if I'm a good Buddhist, I have to be aware of my singing and, and washing myself. And this might sound ridiculous, but I'm trying to get some kind of a handle on. Do you modify your lifestyle? To make it easier to be aware of what you're doing?

Yes.

But you have to be careful what you do. You have to be you know, it'd be wise about it. So I hope you don't stop singing in the shower. Sounds like it's a nice thing, joyful thing. It's maybe a really nice, nice moment in your day. But don't do that. If you go on a meditation retreat. Don't sing in the showers then. Because then your time is better spent just showering and continue to develop the mindfulness practice just okay. With the radio in the car, you can experiment with again, you can start And see what serves you the best. You arrive where you're going more present more calm. If you turn off the radio and stop thinking about the net tomorrow, you just stay in Drive. What's the most useful way to arrive? And I've noticed that for me that I find a certain pleasure in listening to the radio. And sometimes I'm a little bit seduced by that pleasure. But, but if I, if I'm really honest, I really notice carefully, I actually arrive in a much more satisfying state. If I don't listen to the radio, in the car, actually, you know, so, you know, it's like the moment that just momentary satisfaction, pleasure of the radio. But if I let go of that momentary satisfaction, it allows a certain kind of deepening of presence of beingness it's very satisfying. And, and so I've learned that tends to be a lot better for me. It also depends on what you want to do with your life. So if so I get this question on retreat, it retreats, you there because you're trying to develop mindfulness, then you want to try to modify as much of your life as possible to really support that direction. And then in daily life, what is the purpose of your life? What is important for you? And a developing mindfulness is really important, then what what are you willing to modify? So you can, so you can so that you can strengthen its growth. And, and then, but you want to make sure you have a balanced life? Because if you start feeling grim, because you're not living a

balanced life, that's not good. So maybe then you start singing in shower again, so you can get more suitable balance. That makes sense. Yes. Daniel says so he hasn't been asked yet.

I'd like to get a clarification about loving kindness as like Concentration practice. I heard you say earlier that it helps you be present helps one be present who practices that. And that doesn't tell me anything that's distinct from many other things that help one be present, or be more concentrated. So I wanted to know why why is loving kindness in particular, singled out as a constant, something to do for concentration, as opposed to as opposed to other other. There are other methods that help one be present and be more concentrated?

Yeah, there's lots and lots of things. I mean, they're classically in Theravada, Buddhism, they're 40 classics, objects for concentration practice. So there's a lot of things you can use anything you know, for concentration. Part of the advantage of unkindness practice, is it also helps condition or dispose or condition the mind to be more friendly. You know, you can get caught traded on you know, you can get concentrated you know and things which are also other kinds as a whole something you can get concentrated on hate. Some people are very concentrated in their hate, but it's not, that's not a healthy concentration center combos and wrong concentration helpful.

Okay, so it isn't that it produces more concentration or is a better tool. It has other benefits beyond concentration.

The loving kindness,

some people, some people find it easier to develop concentration in there than anything else. Some people find a breath doesn't mean a little bit too subtle to work with to really get concentrated registers is considered a little bit hard to get to get concentrated on because the breath gets more and more subtle as you get more concentrated. Whereas with the loving kindness, the phrases stage is the same and you can kind of, you know, to go looking for them or kind of where is that loving kindness praise so it has other benefits.

And,

and

good thing to do. It's a very pure very purifying practice because of, you know, so for example, you could use casino, you know, you just this disc you know it doesn't that doesn't really bring up the same kind of issues that loving kindness tend to bring up that you have to work through.

What was it that you referred to just now?

You said it's a casino. There's a classic meditation practice of looking at it at a colored color disc of casino. Yeah, you're welcome. So maybe we'll end then. So, thank you. I'll stay behind you and come up here. So thank you very much for today.