

## Supportive Conditions for Practice

And so, drop the attention into the belly, noticing the movements as you breathe in and out. When the breathing has calmed down, notice the totality of the body. Feel that your body is there, in this room, sitting. From the head down to your toes.

*The Brahma Viharas:*

*Aham avero homi, abyapajjho homi, anigho homi,  
sukhi attanam pariharami.*

*Aham viya sabbe satta avera hontu, abayapajjha hontu, anigha hontu, sukhi attananam  
pariharantu.*

May I be friendly, calm and free from ill-will and may I live in happiness.  
As I am, so may others be friendly, calm and free from ill-will  
and may they live in happiness.

Together at The Orchard we chant the *Brahma Viharas* in *Pali* three times at the beginning and the end of each day's practice, and as individuals at home this is also what we would do on waking in the morning and before sleep at night. Thus it provides a supportive container for the day.

### Structure

Physical posture, organising time, routinely doing a review and dealing with obstacles – structure is an important aspect of meditation practice, providing a secure and stable foundation.

### Body work

You need to take it gently; so for settling down we are going to start with body work. Begin by lying down, flat on your back on the floor, checking down the body; experience the body's contact with the floor, reading the body, listening to the body. Have awareness of the breathing, not controlling it. Know that you have a body. As in sitting practice, you get in touch with the body by scanning the body; you do that by bringing the attention to the points where it is in contact with the ground. Then do the hollow body, space, and now you are in the subtle body.

Choose what you need to do, choose something that is helping you to loosen, to soften, keep it gentle. You lie down flat at the beginning of all exercises or movements. All are done slowly with the intention of maintaining continuity, of the movement and of intention. And of course you stay involved with the movement, very present, not trying to speed up at the end, maintaining continuity of movement. Being right there with the movement. Be aware of the movement, mindful of all instructions and how it effects the body. Be aware of any activity elsewhere in the body, such as another part compensating for the hip's reluctance to move. With mindfulness, noticing that is what is happening, then it may shift. The movement becomes endless, contacting the energetic body, not just stopping with the foot. Let the breathing be as it wants to be. *What if there are areas of resistance, blocks?* Stay in the body, not having ideas or opinions. The body will find a way of moving through the blocks, maybe by stretching or twitching.

I want you to notice, does the impulse to move come from the body or from the mind? It is not a trick question, there is not one answer, it can be sometimes from the body sometimes from the

mind, even within one movement. *The impulse to move often began with the mind, the body was slow, then the body joined in.* Yes, it can be like that. You may notice that you come to a point when the body is moving by itself; if you try to control it, pick at it, you lose it. If there is a problem with the body, is it in the mind, in the heart?

What is the difference between an exercise and a movement? *Exercises follow an instruction.* From a book. *They have a sense of achievement, a beginning and an end.* Movement has more flow, it goes further. Many of these movements are in the *Feldenkrais* method, so you lie flat on the floor and rest afterwards then walk, outside if possible, to integrate. Integration, this is important. Integrate after each stage, lying down; this can last a lot longer than the movement itself, it is like digesting the movement. And integrate also at the end by sitting, standing, walking, and any other spontaneous movements that might want to happen. Then that is the end of the movement. Once you are experienced you can also do these three postures after each lying down integration, then back to the movement. *What happens in integration?* The movement is setting it up, stirring it up – but in integration, then is when you meet the body as it is, when it is happening. The body is going through layers, making adjustments for example by twitching, shaking, hot/cold temperature changes, spontaneous movement. Images can come up, colours, smells, a bubble of stories (don't go into them); unlocking stored emotional memories. Recognise this and let it go. *How do you know when adjustment is finished?* There can be a change in the breath, or an impulse. Or the mind becomes distracted again, restless to move onto something else, the start of thinking. Or maybe there is a feeling of softness, lightness, of having settled, of resolution. Learn to know when integration is finished, explore it. *Doing a movement that my body has never done before – it's like a lovely dance and I'm enjoying it a lot.*

Body work is an exploration into calm abiding, a quality of just resting in the “here, in our body” and “now, in this moment”, neither being pushed by our past or pulled by the future. We need to cultivate deep letting go – if it happens in one part of the body, it will spread to other parts. It is a lifetime process – the last breath is letting go, at death. If there is an area that will not give, the key is interest – the new exercise, new movement. Relaxation leads to ease, leads to loving-kindness for self and others. What could be simpler? Just resting in full open, non-clinging awareness to reveal the essence of our true refuge. <sup>1</sup>

## **The postures**

There are four postures for meditation: sitting, walking, standing, and lying down. Sitting and walking practice are what we normally do.

### **Sitting**

First it is very important to settle the posture, checking your back, external physical posture, softening the hips and lower back, leaning into the cushion of energy, even distribution of right and left sides. Then inner energy – contact the column of *chi* in front of the spine, it goes all the way up above the head and down into the ground; a subtle channel, strong. Then focus on the belly, then the mind.

*Should we do the nine breathings?* You don't need to do the nine breathings before every sit – they are a device to settle the breathing; if you are already there after walking, there is continuity of practice. Settle the back – it is your history, solid support from ancestors, where you are coming from. Then focus on the belly, the here and now – this is where we start off. It doesn't matter what the breathing is doing, just stay with it. All this is just setting things up. When you are

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<sup>1</sup> A separate leaflet will be available of ‘how to do’ revision notes for some of the body work which Sonia has taught.

focused on the belly and settled, you have a viewpoint from which to change the mind. It is a change of gear.

You can take the traditional *vajra* (diamond) sitting position, the ‘full lotus’ (if you are able) each foot resting on the other thigh, the left leg inter-locked under the right. Or the ‘half lotus’, the right foot resting on the left thigh, so again the left leg is supporting the right. The left is the intuitive side, the female aspect, *yin*; the right is discursive, intellectual reasoning, the male aspect, *yang*. Or just both legs bent flat on the floor, the left in front with the right tucked behind. Your bottom rests on a cushion (or on a meditation stool), tilting the pelvis slightly backwards. So the sitting body forms a triangle, with a secure base. Or you can sit in a straight-backed chair with both feet on the ground – this is the posture of *Maitreya*, the Buddha of the future, with his feet firmly in the world.

*What is the position of the hands?* There are hand gestures, *mudras*. For the *mudra* of concentration: bring the hands together at the belly, the right hand resting in the left palm with thumb tips touching, and little fingers touching just below the navel; this is inquiry. The eyes can be half open, focused with a soft gaze slightly above the horizon, allowing spacial awareness. The position brings the body slightly forward, a posture of question, alertness; it brings an awakening in the whole body. When the hands are on the upper legs, that is ease, softness, non-clinging awareness; thoughts come and go. In the *mudra* of generosity, the right hand rests on the right knee, with the palm fully open while the left hand remains as in the *mudra* of concentration. For the earth-touching *mudra* of *Sakyamuni*, the historical Buddha that lived (see the Refuge section of Foundations chapter): bring your right hand over the right knee and touch (towards) the earth with the middle finger. This is earthing, grounding: ‘I have the right to enlightenment’. You can do this while walking too, hold the right wrist with the left hand and point down with the right middle finger.

*How to relax the face, relax the jaw and the mouth?* Have the lips half open, the lips apart in a half smile. The tongue touching the roof of the mouth, pressed just behind the top front teeth. If you wear dentures, take them out.

*My back sometimes feels too weak to hold me up.* There are methods you could try for adjusting the posture if your back is weak, the posture collapsing:

- tuck in the chin, with hands on thighs pointing inwards; this opens the belly, the belly moves forwards
- breathing in, tilt the pelvis slightly and lengthening the chest; breathing out, soften into the back, soften into the pelvis
- expand, lengthen the breath up into the upper chest, like Buddha statues; this sharpens the mind and straightens the body

And also:

- try to make a practice of always returning to the breathing – if the breath is held, the mind will go crazy and this amplifies any pain or difficulty, so come back to ‘rising and falling’ of the belly
- if you start falling asleep during a sit, press the thumbs very hard together and the tongue hard against the roof of the mouth, then relax - three times

*If the posture is correct then the breath is something that just happens – you receive it and the experience of breathing feels relaxed. It is not something that you do, it is something that happens through you, into you. Breathing is an experience of continually changing sensations.*

Namgyal Rinpoche

So bring your attention to the spine, from the base of the skull to the tailbone; softening and relaxing. You can imagine a big cushion behind you, leaning on it; relaxing the muscles of the spine, from the base of the skull right down to the tailbone. Then bring your attention to rest on the belly and feel for the tiny movements of the belly as you breathe in and out. Imagine that your hands are now inside the belly; either the hands have shrunk or the belly has extended to enclose the hands. A technique to help you to focus inwards. Now you can work through the *hara*, via the ‘hands in the belly’; energy rises up the central channel, the inner stick. The central channel is a field of energy which runs in front of the spine, between the conception vessel and the governor vessel. The spine is straight, alert; from that comes spaciousness, mindfulness, joy, intelligence. Bring your awareness to the *hara* point and imagine a line connecting your *hara* point to the earth, the centre of the earth.

To follow three steps into a sit<sup>2</sup>:

1. Rest your hands in the *mudra* of concentration (right palm over left, little finger touching the belly) and watch the breathing, with awareness only, until it starts settling down. This can take a long or a shorter time; you know it has settled when it becomes calmer, more regular, more subtle.
2. Whole body breathing: awareness of the totality of the body, the whole posture, whole breath; don’t do or fabricate, just observe.
3. Scan the body for parts that feel a little uncomfortable, take the breath into them, just for a few breaths.

Now you are ready for whatever is going to be the focus of practice during the sit – it could be ‘bringing the mind home’, or ‘just watching’; John Garrie used to say you put in the cassette, the programme for practice. Coming out of sitting, you do the reverse process. When the gong goes, you let go of the cassette and bring awareness to uneasy parts, then awareness into the whole body, then take the breath more onto the surface. Follow the three gongs, in these steps don’t move the body until after the third gong. The same three steps can be taken into and out of walking practice. *Why do we do this?* To do the three steps at the beginning then again at the end is equally important; to ease out of, let go of, a completed activity and into the next afresh, not carrying on with the same feeling from one to the next. It is all to do with letting go in life, re-entering the moment again and again. Different postures are different becomings.

Bringing the mind home Don’t do anything special. Be kind to yourself, soften. Imagine your body hollow, empty, from the top of your head down to your toes. Imagine just the space inside your body, like if you are a balloon, a bubble and within that space, notice the movement of your belly. And so place the attention at the belly. Do not try to change anything, just noticing; and feel for the tiny movements of the belly as you breathe in and out. Mentally you can name ‘rising’, ‘falling’; or ‘breathing in’, ‘breathing out’. And try one time, just one time, to be really present, to be right there. Gradually the mind will settle, the body will settle. Don’t use thoughts to stop the thinking, just keep coming back gently to the movements of the belly. If something arises, a distraction – rest and give it space, whatever it is. Give space rather than seeking a remedy. It has to come from a place of stability, not too agitated. Give it space and see what happens then. If the body is still and steady, the mind becomes calmer, more restful, more attentive. And when your mind wanders, bring it home: be it an itch, a sound, a smell, a thought, an emotion – return to the movements of the belly. Don’t push them away or pull them in; notice them and relax, bringing the mind home.

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<sup>2</sup> This is explained more fully in the Foundations chapter.

- *The mind is busy, but when I come back to the body I feel this is because now I can see that it is busy. Now you have time to see. Busy mind, but it's always busy. It is very important how you bring it back; no thinking, no drama, just bring it back.*

During a half an hour sitting: focus on the belly, every time the mind goes away bring it back. Just training, like training a dog, so the mind knows there is no need to go there because it will have to come back. At some point you will experience great stillness in your body, no conversation, no thinking – this one moment will change you forever, then you have to repeat it again and again. So, if the mind goes to an event of yesterday, bring the mind home to the movement of the belly, gently but firmly. If the mind fantasises about the future, bring the mind home; bring the mind home to 'here in this body, now in this moment'. This is the practice of sitting.

**Watching** You can let go of trying: don't try to meditate, don't try to get it right, just be present with whatever arises in the body and the mind. Being present with the breathing, not changing it; being present with the sensations, not changing them; with the sound, your thoughts, your moods, don't push them away or draw them in. And become aware of the grasping, how we grasp at our likes and dislikes. Then bring your attention to the centre of your body just above the navel; take a seat in your belly and feel for the movements of the belly as you breathe in and out, just witnessing, not changing. Feel the rising of the belly, the falling of the belly. Memories and thoughts will come and go; let them come and go, do not follow them or push them away. So you take your seat as though you were at the cinema, going to watch the show – happy story, unhappy story, indifferent story, notice them and relax. Firmly take your seat of mindfulness at the centre of your being; do not leave your seat, and watch the dance of the mind, the play of the mind. It does not matter if it is a good thought, a bad thought, an indifferent impression; meet it with the same spaciousness, gentleness, openness. It does not matter, whatever experience arises, meet it as it is. The spine is upright, the mind is spacious.

### **Walking**

**Motion** So, place your attention in your feet, and begin to name the movements 'lifting' and 'placing'. How do your feet feel on the ground? – walking backwards, walking forwards. As you walk backwards you rest on your support, your ancestry; it is a beautiful movement for the pelvis and the spine. Walking naturally – lifting, placing, the big toe in line with the knee (that is part of the geometry of the body, important for balance) and have two fists space between the knees. Starting with movement of the hip, knee and leg; soft, moving from the hip, then gently uplift the spine. There is not a right or a wrong way of doing it, just awareness. Nowhere to get to as well. It is just information. If you approach life and meditation in this way it is soft, joyful, casual. If you approach with trying to 'get it right', you approach with tension. Lifting, placing – it gives you a lot of time to get there.

**Words** Naming the movement of the foot 'lifting, placing', I like this better than 'lift', 'place'; that is abrupt, more like a command, it also leaves more space to allow thoughts in. It can become three stages 'lifting, moving, placing'. Or as you walk you can say *I sva su, su sva I*, it is like a *mantra*, each step as a syllable. *Is there meaning in the syllable, or is it the sound?* It is the sound, there is meaning also but for now it is not intended to be like this, it is the sound. *What does 'I sva su' mean?* *I* is the first syllable of the text to take refuge in the Buddha; *sva* is the first syllable of the text to take refuge in the *Dharma*, *su* is the first syllable of the text to take refuge in the *sangha*. So there is a lot of meaning in these words; effectively when we say *i, sva, su* we are taking refuge in the Buddha, the *Dharma*, the *sangha*. These are *Pali* words. It is to train the mind to be with what you are doing, as you place your foot you say mentally *i, sva, su*. In walking practice and whenever

you walk, you use the three syllables - going for tea, going to the toilet. Walking wherever, whenever; it is not slow walking, it is a bit faster. Do it like pacing, as a technique to focus on your feet, so you can have any kind of measure you want. As you place a foot on the ground you say a syllable.

Begin less formally First establish the hollow body: empty from the top of the head down to your toes, imagine yourself empty, just the space inside. And do three times the *Om Ah Hum* with the sound, the gesture. And go more internally with the sound. Now you start walking and with each step you say one syllable, mentally. And this time you say the syllable as you touch the ground or as you lift the foot, *i sva su, su sva i*. Decide when you say the syllable – as you touch the ground or as you lift the foot. The position of the hands can be in front of your body, or even it can be behind your back. Don't go too slow or too fast. This *mantra* is going to support you training the mind, to stay with what you are doing at the time. Any *mantra* is a support to train the mind. Now I am asking you, you can choose to do *I sva su* or 'lifting, placing'. Stay with one or the other. *To a student demonstrator* – you can see she goes ahead now, the mind goes before the body. The idea is it happens at the same time. The point is to be in your body; so the moment you lift the foot you say 'lifting', the moment you place the foot you say 'placing', and notice is the mind with the body, or behind, or ahead? Not judging, right or wrong, just noticing. Walking to the Zendo, Maitreya House, to your cabin, lifting and placing your feet and saying *i sva su, su sva i*. I find this a very important practice (and what it means) every time you walk. Make a study of mind and body. Does the naming come before or after the body action? With the placing the feet should feel firm on the ground. So you have to be with what you are doing, be with each step; to calm the mind, to train the mind. It is very much going to help you be with the body; not ahead of the body, not behind the body. It has to be as you place the foot you mentally say that. And I would suggest that every time you walk, even in the night when you go for a pee, you mentally say *I sva su, su sva I*. I would like you to make a contract with yourself, how many hours in a day when you are walking you will practise saying *I sva su*: one hour, two hours, three hours; from now until lunch time, or from three o'clock to six o'clock? Or if you feel you can only hold it in the Zendo, 'from now until going out of the Zendo I will say *I sva su*'. Be honest, make a commitment to yourself – but I would like to know it! I am curious. It is good to make it something realistic, creative for you. I am sure you will forget, that is the point of mindfulness; the point is when you know you forget, you start again.

Easeful In walking, I want you to find a rhythm, a pace, each time you go out – to wherever – you establish the same pace of walking, so there is a continuity. So explore which is the pace that makes you more comfortable, more at ease; I want to see you always at the same pace. Not too fast, not too slow – this is how to maintain awareness, the same rhythm. I want you to get the quality of being at ease with yourself, it is very soft. .... (later) To keep the same pace, is it helpful? *I find it changes*. Yes, I agree, so set a different pace. Set your own pace but not slow, slow walk; though it may go deeper and slower, have not so much concentration on the physicality of walking. Do some walking (not walking meditation) and to find a pace, whenever you are walking. It can be going for a walk – I want you to get away from the idea that meditation has to be so formal, put your coat on and go for a walk down the lanes in the rain.

Formal Later in the retreat you do walking practice in a formal way for seventeen paces. So find outside a stretch that is your space, you choose a path and you stay with this path for the whole day. And you count seventeen paces of just a foot's length, by putting one foot directly in front of the other, and mark the start and the end of the measured stretch. Begin with a few breaths standing

and looking at the path in front of you, hands on the belly or by your side. Do the measured walk, then a few moments standing; then swivel on the heel, not lifting it, to reverse and mentally name 'turning' then stand for a few breaths. Briefly look at the stretch you have just walked – this is important, looking at where you are coming from - then walk again. Or you could return to the stretch walking backwards – once you have made the choice, stick to it. When walking, say mentally *i* when you lift the foot, *sva* when moving the foot, *su* when placing the foot. Don't force yourself to go slowly, just let it happen. The issue of slowness is as you are more focused you automatically go more slowly, no need to force it. If something arises during walking practice, stay with the walking practice. And don't admire the scenery, that is an extra which you don't need for this practice.

Namgyal Rinpoche's instruction was you mark the moment of lifting, moving and placing, almost like catching the intention. But don't force yourself to find it; go a little bit slower, marking the moment of changing. Take small steps and it goes slower, take your attention into your feet; not too much attention to the detail, just slow down. The quality of the moment of attention is not so dependent on going slowly. In the quality of the *i* you can be so present you have the same satisfaction as going slowly. Allow yourself to naturally go slower. When you notice the intention of moving, is it coming from the mind or the body? The mind telling the body what to do, or the body deciding to do it? Lifting, moving, placing, making small steps. At the end of the marked stretch, stop for a moment then notice the intention of turning, then you turn; all in awareness, putting your intention on what you are doing. Stand again, looking at where you have walked, then notice the intention to walk again. Walking practice is the most delightful practice, efficient; you make more progress with walking than with sitting. So many things are happening where you place your attention, approach it with great respect.

#### Question and answer

- *Why do we measure seventeen steps?* Because there are seventeen steps to attain full enlightenment.
- *What do we do with the hands?* You can position your hands, with the left hand holding the right wrist; loosely, or with the middle finger pointing to the earth, if you need more earthing. Or as in the meditation *mudra* of concentration, that is supporting the heart. Or the hands crossed at the palms over the belly. Or behind your back, that is a good one also, to feel your back-up. Not just the hands hanging by your side; for maintaining the focus it is better to have the hands together somehow, at your front or the back.
- *Are we to go barefoot for walking practice?* You don't have to go barefoot if it is too cold for you. It is a pity that it is so wet and so cold.
- *Can we do walking meditation with closed eyes?* Do it with open eyes to integrate, to stay in touch with the space around you.
- *Is awareness to be maintained?* It is not this sort of practice. You just do it, to be with the movement.
- *I'm noticing a lot of thoughts coming up. Do you know what to do with the thoughts? Bring attention back to the belly?* To the body, to the feet. *Also a lot of tension in my lower back.* The thoughts are part of the story. Come back to the walking, to your feet. The point is to be in the sensation, not so much in the thinking; to be in the walking.

#### Standing and lying down

For standing the knees, the legs should be soft and relaxed, the arms loose at the side - or there are three other suggested positions: hands on the belly, lower arms crossed over the chest (called the Egyptian position), and the prayer position against the heart area. You can lean against a wall, eg

your bottom touching the wall. Have the knees soft, not too bent, not too straight. Being aware of the rising, falling of the breath; talking to your body, communicating. Standing still and upright is physically the most stressful posture. So you may need to limit the time spent standing during sequencing, maybe to five minute breaks between stretches in walking practice.

Lying down is the posture of the reclining Buddha and - I am going to tell you something - Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, had a back problem. When he had the back problem he was teaching lying down, in the reclining position. It is the inner posture that matters. Having a back problem means he was human. You lie on the right side to protect the heart, the neck in line with a straight spine. The palm of the right hand goes under the cheek or under the neck or, if either is too uncomfortable, the arm can be straight out at right-angle; the left elbow should be a bit out with the hand resting on the thigh. The legs are together slightly bent. Feel the points of contact with the ground on the right side and be aware of the rising and falling of the belly; the eyes half-open, half-closed, with a soft focus straight ahead. The lying down posture includes your sleeping time, so you can spend less time on this posture, reflecting the time spent lying down during sleep.

## **A whole day of practice**

### **Formal sequencing**

This is the day when everything comes together, no more input, we practise. You are in silence of course. Begin with body work, deciding what does the body need – calming, strengthening? Then four blocks of thirty minutes walking, sitting, and any other particular practice which we may have done during the retreat. That could be to contemplate a text – read, with a good posture, a few times first; then choose an aspect to go deeper, by associative thinking. Or it could be to spend time outside looking at the aspect of impermanence – the changing light, the movement of clouds, of leaves; everything is transient. For walking practice: take a path in the grounds, measure seventeen steps by placing one foot directly in front of the other, heel to toe and don't cross someone else's path; this is yours for the whole time. *I sva su, su sva I*, or 'lifting, moving, placing', on each step. The idea is that you name as the movement is happening – not ahead, not behind. At the end of the measured path you stop, you turn, you stop again, and stand, and you look at the path you have just walked. So this should tidy up your mindfulness. Sit in the Zendo facing the wall, sit together to maintain the strength. Choose a place to be yours for twenty-four hours practice; come back to the same place, put your cushion there and return so that you are not searching, fighting for your place. When sitting, go directly into the belly, you become aware of the movement in the belly as it is happening, not behind or ahead. A story comes into your head? – come immediately back to the belly. I want you to be right there, more present, more alert. Noticing everything that is happening in your being at this moment. The key word is 'directly', no gap, no space for a story to come up. Your sittings are too loose – if you are too loose there is a lot of possibility for thinking, day dreaming, falling asleep. You sharpen your attention, if it helps to do this you can open your eyes, looking straight ahead with a soft un-focused gaze, slightly above the horizon. And repeat the cycle again, half an hour for each stage. You are looking for continuity of attention between different forms of practice.

### **The spirit for a day of un-interrupted practice**

On a long retreat, it is important to have at least twenty-four hours where there is no in-put. Walking, sitting - it is important to have a big chunk. Decide what to do, your own programme at your own pace. No body work – the walking is the body work. No bell, keep your own time. Start with breathing practice first thing in the morning, but after that go straight into sitting. Sit facing the wall. In sitting meditation, have no object, but if you get too much into the busyness, return to the

breath. I don't want you to feel too rigid, but at the same time I want you to focus. If you are the confused type, you want to set yourself something to do. For the averse type, you don't want to set yourself something to do, to be too rigid, otherwise you are going to push against it. One two-hour session in the morning between breakfast and lunch-time. Before starting the block, set up an aspiration, what you want to focus on. And to make a study of loving-kindness, 'I am too hard on myself'; in a sit, whatever arises, meet it with loving-kindness. It is not just endurance – you want eagerness, interest, newness. In your own time to go deeper into uninterrupted practice. And after each practice I want you to review the practice you have done and to make a few notes for yourself, spend time on integrating what has happened. In the afternoon do three hours, you can break it into two hours and one hour. And see the rhythm of the day: is it better at different times of day, more focused? Have meals on time, and be in silence of course. Do some practice, maybe eating, outdoors. Tonight before bed, put in mind the intention to 'get up as soon as I wake up and I am going to have an exciting day'. This is time for you to be alone in the practice. It is important that you feel a sense of freedom with what we have done – in any order you want, make it your own, allow it to go deeper into your being, play with it. If you don't know what to do, ask your heart. Sometimes the head has one idea and the heart another, so we corrupt the heart to agree with the head. Find your own rhythm, your own pace; play with all the things we have done, make it light. And just the once, within a period of sequencing, 'letting the horse loose': the instruction is to do anything you want, so long as it is not 'practice'. That is testing the practice, you are going to meet your desires, your fears. To mirror the state of your practice, you are going to meet your mind.

- *I'm very tired, can I rest after lunch or should I carry on practising?* No, take a nap. You have to take care of your body, take a balance between practising and exhausting yourself. Ask your heart.

### **On the last full day**

Today is a very important day, it is a day when you are not so intense so things will come up. This is why we let go of the intensity of the slow walk and the sitting, to be more casual, to let it happen. Go for a walk, lying in the sun. So it is easing out but maintaining mindfulness, not going crazy. Then the effects of the practice will come to the fore, to the surface. Don't feel that you have missed on something, you have not. The rest of the time is as you wish but ask yourself what is best for you to do, to integrate. I am not suggesting you start being busy, just no formal practice. It is important advice that Namgyal Rinpoche gave us - at some point you have to let go of formal practice and see what is there without the structure. You are responsible for how you spend today. Notice how quickly you let go of the formal practice, or how quickly you want to return to the safety of the formal practice.

The greatest gift that students can give to a teacher is their practice. So I thank you for your beautiful practice. There is an aura of attention at The Orchard when this practice is going on. The texture of loving-kindness, mindfulness - you cannot see it but it is felt. A feeling of grace.

### **Reviewing practice and meeting obstacles**

Allow the breathing to settle, nothing special. If there is tension in the body, cultivate ease.

#### **Review**

So what I want to tell you now is how to do a review after a sitting, walking or body work meditation or at the end of the day; after the practice we need to do a review. A review means to see what happened during that twenty minutes or half hour, or after a whole day's practice.

1. So the first question you ask yourself is how much conversation, how much dialogue, was going on in your head during the meditation? We may be in silence during a workshop or

retreat, so you are not speaking to someone else, but you are speaking to yourself a lot. So that is not really being in silence to yourself. And sometimes when you cannot speak to someone else, the speaking in your head becomes louder! All the channels of the radio are playing at the same time in your head! So when you review your meditation, think of it as from the beginning to the end, or from the end to the beginning. Maybe at the beginning there was not so much conversation; in the middle you were busy chatting about this and that, or a lot of fighting in your head; and calming down again by the end – maybe! You could write notes, or drawing is sometimes easier like a graph from 0 to 10 maximum. A review is not a criticism, it is not an apology, it is just what happened? It is honest – it is not ‘oh I was bad, oh I’m so sorry, oh my meditation today – so much conversation’. No measure of emotional judgement on it. How was it at the beginning, the middle, at the end? So you will see there is a pattern to your concentration. For example at the beginning no conversation, a little conversation in the middle and at the end, no conversation; that is my pattern. Then you know that you have to be vigilant in the middle to make the conversation less, so it gives you information.

2. The second question is about your body, so you are asking how much physical ease did you experience, in the body? Because at the end of a sitting practice you could be thinking of the leg or shoulder that was hurting, the head or whatever. And you forget there have been also many moments of ease, of calm, of softness in the body. So now we are focusing also on what is good, what is positive, not always on what is difficult. So what this does, it means the next time you sit you will be more alert. And the physical ease, maybe the left side of your face felt suddenly very soft, or your right hand touching your left hand felt very comfortable. So the feeling of ease at that moment is almost like beauty, beautiful, calm – they may be short moments, sure, but they happened. It could be just briefly in one part of the body, so be alert. You can take this physical ease into the next sit, to be more ‘with it’. Ease, calm, softness, beauty in the body – these are positives. But if you are too comfortable, for example lying down, there could be too much ease; that is a stupid meditation with no alertness going on, no wisdom.
3. And the third question is, how focused were you; how engaged, how absorbed in the practice? Meaning when the mind was going away, were you able to bring it back? You need to have been focused in order to do this review. So if the mind goes, that is normal but being focused means that you know it is going and then you bring it back. And it means that you have not lost the focus of your meditation. That is quite an important point. That when the mind thinks of the future, that you notice it and you bring it back – this is focus. When the mind thinks of the past, it has a moment of thinking of the past but you notice it and you say ‘no – here, now’. That is the focus; you have not lost your focus. We are training this monkey mind and when the monkey plays, you see it playing and you bring it back. And how you bring it back is very gently; you simply say ‘here, now’ like you are training a puppy. And if you are too strict, too severe with the puppy it will go crazy, you have to do it softly. You have to do the same with the mind – if you say ‘here! now! don’t you move!’ it becomes very restless, very frightened, rebellious; you want to keep the mind soft, spacious, that is really important because the voice in our head – you know, the ‘mother’ criticisms – can be so hard, hitting ourself ‘you got away again!’. You can see that ‘here’ and ‘now’ are words, but they have a quality. So at some point if you are really in the here and now it has a quality so you don’t need to say ‘here and now, here and now’, you stay with the quality; but when the mind goes you watch it and if it doesn’t return by itself you bring it back by saying ‘here’, and you will see it is fun!

4. The fourth question is how clear, how sharp was the focus; how much clarity, clearly present mindfulness? Sometimes we have the focus but it still blurred, misty, foggy; it is not very sharp when it should be crystal clear. Clarity is like a sunny day.
5. And the fifth question is an impression of what happened to the breathing during that twenty minutes, half an hour? Short, deep, short - an impression, so again maybe to draw it, to make it visual. You cannot remember every breath, but an idea of what happened with the breathing – in sitting, walking and the body work; not just sitting, the sitting is only one aspect. And how often did you come back to the breathing, or forget? If you stay in touch with the breathing it means you are also in touch with thoughts that take you away from the focus on breathing.

We know from doing the review that in the middle of the sitting there is more conversation, more problems with the leg – so we have to be like the warrior, we have to watch, mentally note, not give up. You stay with the practice, you notice that we have this continuity of awareness. You see, with all your answers, you see a pattern a little bit? So the practice is to understand the pattern, and it keeps changing. This is the aspect of impermanence, it is not fixed. We are all for half an hour sitting, looking as if nothing is happening, that we are doing nothing. But you see how much is happening and this is the aspect, this is the training of mind; getting to know the pattern and seeing how it changes, it comes and it goes.

*Question about distraction from rain falling on a leaky roof of the meditation hall, that I should do something about it.* You hear the rain so you say ‘hearing’ and then you return to ‘here, now’; but if you pretend ‘I have not heard the rain – here! now!’ it will not work because it is there! You lose the focus when you start making another story, then you have lost the focus. But to know that it has happened and you make a mental note and then you return, that is not losing the focus. That is very important, otherwise we are hitting ourselves, fighting. You have to keep softness and this is a very important aspect for ourselves because some of us are too hard on ourselves. We want some change in our life but we do it with really hard (*sound of slapping*) – you must, you must! And of course you do it for a short time and then you rebel – which you should because you are making yourself in a prison. So we have to train, but in softness, giving space, and that actually is the best training, the best mindfulness; you are watching not criticising, not bringing back all the time so quickly, so short, too strong. We let the monkey a little bit move around but we are watching it, the main thing is that you are there watching. When in your practice you feel aggressive, angry or frustrated you have been too tight with yourself. I know it is not easy, it is the biggest problem.

You in a way are the best judge of this. In a sense the practice that we are doing is aiming at making you well, happy, soft, generous, patient; you will have energy, you will have compassion, loving-kindness, and you will have wisdom. Anything else that is happening somewhere along the line you are doing something too strong, or not enough. The practice is meant to make us grow, to blossom, become a beautiful human being in order to help other human beings. But – this is where we cultivate the tools, the mindfulness – you have to measure for yourself; sometimes you do too much then too little, too much / too little. And you know when it is exactly right because there is this ease in the body, the mind is open and spacious, and then you have a lot of warmth for all beings – even your enemy; you feel good, you feel well, you wish them well and happy. ‘Enemy’ is a bit of a strong word, it is anything that creates difficulty in your life. Then you have a moment of feeling towards that difficulty in your life, that situation, that person; you feel soft, you feel warm, you feel generous, you have loving-kindness. This is the effect of the practice.

There is an alternative approach at the end of a practice, you can do a review of what went on in terms of the ‘four foundations of mindfulness’, a parallel review of your meditation and aspects to check in your life. During the practice, what was happening in your body? – change in posture, breathing, movement, temperature, tensions. Changes of physical sensations, see these in terms of the elements: the change aspect itself (this is the water element), solidity (earth), temperature (fire), quick movement or changes in the body (air). What was actually happening – mindfulness, not ‘good’ or ‘bad’, those are ideas of the body. If you are not aware, reading your meters, you are likely to go into an old state, an old being; and then, if you are not aware, you get trapped in them. The whole picture is gradually you get to know how you are triggered, what is pressing your buttons, to induce happiness or unhappiness. In a calm state you can get images, tastes, sensations maybe from the past. Stay with it mindfully, name it and give it space and its associations may come up, there can be a release from something in the past. Whatever you do, keep awareness of the four foundations of mindfulness and which is the more dominant: body, feeling, mind state, mind content?

If you feel that your practice is not getting anywhere, you need to check generosity in your life, giving. Practising on your own can be very self-orientated. Giving, letting go, are more important than concentration. Generosity, *dana*, is the first of the *paramis* (meaning going beyond, *para* is beyond). The opposite of generosity is holding on. Generosity is letting go, the hand gesture, *mudra*, is the right hand open, palm upwards, over the right knee; opening is giving, giving is opening. So if you feel your practice is going nowhere, go back to *dana*<sup>3</sup>.

In ‘just sitting’, be aware of the arising and passing away of every sensation in the body.

Your review may reveal **obstacles to meditation**, to concentration, these are the mind states of distraction: scattered mind, dullness, mental laxity, mental excitement.

- **Scattered mind**, this is inability to remain focused, too much conversation. You get carried away by your ideas and thoughts, get caught up by them. The scattered mind is agitated, it has quite a lot of energy. So if your mind is scattered during sitting, what do you do? The first thing is to recognise and name it as ‘scattered mind’ – ‘it’s not me, it’s a condition’. When your mind is scattered it needs something very big, very obvious. So you need to go back to the body, to the posture, to the earth element; something solid. Focus on the posture, on your knees on the ground, something obvious. It is the same in life, if your mind is scattered bring the attention back to the body, to be ‘here in this body now in this moment’.

The remedy, the antidote to scattered mind is mindfulness, continuity of awareness throughout the day. And patience; to keep bringing the mind back with repetition, returning to the breath in the belly. If there are a lot of external stresses, do body work and walking meditation. Mindfulness is bringing the mind back to the body; mind runs away, mindfulness brings it back. Being aware that you are in the Zendo, mindful of what is done in the Zendo. Your life is not your obstacle, it is there in your *dana* bowl for a good reason; the problem is how you respond to your life – in a state of suffering or freedom, imprisonment or liberation. If you don’t recognise the mind state, which is the response, you start to project it onto others.

- **Dullness**, drowsiness, sleepiness, boredom. A sense of being the opposite of scattered mind. At the gross level of the body this is more physical, it is quite a coarse state.

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<sup>3</sup> The six *paramis* are explained below.

Blanking out, disappearing is a sort of dullness. An under-current of thoughts that you cannot see or identify, is dullness. Too loose, too relaxed, not creative, no spontaneity. If your mind is sleepy, a bit dull, what should you do? Sometimes it is simply a matter of the condition: the room is hot, not enough fresh air, or even that you are too tired. Usually when you fall asleep it is to do with the level of energy in your body. So you need to have a cold water wake-up before you sit, and sharpen the mind with some fresh air. Energise through posture and breathing, and find more interest – for example through attention to detail. And check the practicalities – maybe your diet is not suitable for this work (avoid too much sweet food, potatoes), or you are getting insufficient sleep. If you are very tired, choose walking meditation.

- Mental laxity What do you do when your mind is present but not quite sharp, not quite clear? It is often the state of mind of meditating that you are present but not very sharp, not crystal clear; not really ‘with it’, there is a sense of going through the motions. What you should do is have more fire, more joy in your practice, more spark. This is more subtle than the previous two states, it means that you need to have more interest. The remedy is to lift the spirit, so checking your motivation is good, and when you do the loving-kindness chanting before sitting is good. To focus on the positive, arouse interest through investigation and turn the mind towards others. In meditation, if mental laxity creeps in, drop the attention into the belly and concentrate on the *hara* point (two fingers’ width below the navel), putting fire into the belly. Again you can practise it at other times, not just in sitting – in everyday life.
- Mental excitement So what do you do when you are very agitated, too elated? Excited with positive, pleasurable experience in meditation; too much stimulation, you cannot just watch the rise and fall of the belly. Too uplifted, you get caught, hooked in that high state; the problem is attachment, clinging. You need something to bring the mind down, so the remedy is grounding, by for example pacing outside; and to bring the mind down, usually by focusing on impermanence or death – that should do it! - and the suffering of others.

What other states of mind do you need advice on?

- *Numbing out?* Contact the earth, feet on the ground; contact the fact that you are alive, you are here. You need to occupy your space, through the earth.
- *Increasing pains in the body?* Take it as the focus of meditation, make a big study of impermanence, it comes and it passes away. Studying the body; noticing, experiencing it. As you go into the sensation you notice it doesn’t last; it changes in shape, in colour, in intensity. You go into the sensation, you give it space and notice how it changes, don’t make a big story about it.

You can experience all four obstacles just in one sit, meet them all with awareness. When your practice is stable, you don’t need these remedies, antidotes. Just observe the mind states; give them space and they release. It should be enough to just notice it as it is. First see your mind state, not to take it personally (to self or to situation), then do something about it – sooner rather than later. If the mind is dull, you can visualise a white pearl (a *bija*) at the brow, between the eyebrows, and focus on that for a few minutes, breathing – this will sharpen your attention straight away. It has to be very white, radiating, a bit shiny. Take your attention in and up, so your attention is on the pearl. It is basically to wake you up. If the mind is restless, imagine a black, oily, shiny pearl at the base of the spine, where you sit, deep below the navel in the root *chakra*. This also a technique to fall asleep when you are agitated. *What is the oiliness for?* It is to make it more alive, more vibrant.

If neither, if you don't know which you are, imagine a shiny blue pearl on the ground a few feet in front of you, at the end of your shadow – blue is for clarity. The intention is to stabilise, so you don't shift into dullness or restlessness, for you to learn to know when you could tip into either of those states. And if you have good wholesome moments, to dedicate them to all beings' awakening, for just a few breaths. You could recite -

*The four divine abidings*

*May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness.*

*May all beings be free from sorrow, and the causes of sorrow.*

*May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is without sorrow.*

*Without loving dear ones only, or being unfriendly to others,  
may all live more peacefully and abide in equanimity.*

So there are two functions: being aware of what is happening for you, and sharing with others. To be aware what puts you in an unwholesome state and ensure the conditions don't happen again; similarly with the wholesome, to be aware of what put you there, and ensure it does happen again and again. For this there is the practise of the **four powers** which are also called the 'four efforts'. I like the word 'effort' because it means you have to do something, it is not going to happen by itself!

1. The power to recognise unwholesomeness occurring in body, speech or mind in yourself and to stop it. Awareness of when an unwholesome state arises, knowing the unwholesome – this is *sati*, you have to develop a strong mindfulness.
2. To know the causes, conditions that led to that action and make sure it doesn't happen again. A 'condition' is not always psychological, it could be the weather, something you ate. What were the ingredients that gave rise to this emotion, that action? Watching, recognising, you need to be mindful all the time. Sometimes we reinforce an unwholesome state by ignoring it, not being aware of it, suppressing it. We need pure awareness; it all comes down to motivation, intention.
3. The ability to recognise when something wholesome arises – *sati* again.
4. To look at the conditions that led to the wholesome state, and knowing the skill and means to augment it so that it can happen again – this is mindfulness of the *Dharma*.

Look at the wholesome seeds in your life and how they were watered, and the beings that helped you to water them. The wholesome in life is that which supports growing, expansion in your life; unwholesomeness is what blocks. *Is it about positive and negative?* It is not simple. 'Negatives' can be wholesome because they force you to move forward, to overcome what is holding you back. In a wholesome situation you can get stuck and that holds you back, from going beyond, so it becomes unwholesome.

The practice of mindfulness is for grounding, so you are not stirred too much by physical and emotional 'events'. You can then go further, into insight practice. There are three different approaches here:

1. We don't want suffering, want it to stop. This is the first motive for practising meditation. It is oriented to the self, and usually it is the start of practice because there is too much suffering and you are seeking calm. So first to deal with my own negatives, what makes me

unhappy in my life, and find tools to stop it. This approach is called *hinayana*, the lesser vehicle (*hina* is lesser, *yana* is vehicle).

2. You have pacified what distresses you and now you are looking for more positives in life, you feel stronger, the orientation is different; it is more aligned to the positive, but still for the self. You begin to have more strength and skills to look at things as they are. Your well-being can overflow to others; you can become a giver, a nurturer which in turn makes you feel better. This approach is *mahayana*, the great vehicle (*maha* means great).
3. You are no longer trying to calm the negative or accentuate the positive, but cultivating an attitude of remaining calm whether things arising are good or bad. Just look at what is going on, not to reject the bad or draw in the positive, no preferences. This is insight practice, everything becomes the focus of meditation: *vajrayana*, the diamond way (*vajra* means diamond). Abiding in non-clinging awareness, without preference, watching. This is more skillful because it doesn't depend on what conditions you have; whether inner or outer, you just watch it transform.

This kind of practice – also called *mahamudra*, *Zen*, *Dzogchen* – leads to spaciousness, enough tranquility so you don't fall into either negative or positive; though there may be days, times, when you need just to stop the pain or get more positives, to augment. Go deep enough to watch the coming and going of good and bad with equanimity, it doesn't matter – just watch what arises as it arises and passes away, bearing witness. The study of impermanence, everything that comes into being is certain to pass away: once an arising has occurred, there is no way to prevent its passing away – bear witness again and again. You need care and respect, to be gentle with yourself and bear witness; impatience and bullying yourself don't work, because then you can't bear witness. Unbroken continuity of attention, a continuum of attention, of consciousness – *mantra* helps with that. Here we have outer supports – you are in a *dharma* centre, with a *sangha* - we need to create inner supportive conditions; supportive condition, that is the ground from which anything can happen.

## **Outer and inner support**

In order to do this deep work, you need certain principles.

1. Outer conditions, a conducive environment. Here at the Orchard we have beautiful peaceful surroundings in nature; and the Zendo is a very special place for practice, where so many hundreds of practitioners have gone before. It will be different for you at home. There is a big Zen centre in central Manhattan - a place of stillness within, surrounded by the bustle of New York city. At home you could set aside just the corner of a room for practice, with maybe a simple shrine, a picture of the teacher; it does not have to be elaborate.
2. The support of the sangha, the community of practitioners: the support of other students being together during workshops, and the wider *sangha* when you are at home. And, most important, always being mindful of the teacher's presence, and the back-up from lineage, wherever you may be.
3. Unbroken continuity of awareness, not so much peak time and then dropping. Flowing, one activity at a time, being 'here in this body, now in this moment', not in the 'there and then'. The aspect of impermanence – whatever arises, it doesn't last, 'this too will pass'. You need repetitive practice of tools that bring you back to deep calm, a stable centre. And humour, not taking it all so seriously! These are inner conditions.
4. To have care and respect for the practice, for yourself and for other students, to be more sensitive; slow down, to be in silence. Joyful perseverance is an aspect of 'care and respect'; keeping at it from a place of joy and loving-kindness, mindful of the 'potential and leisure' provided by our precious human birth.

## **Silence**

I would like to talk about the silent practice with you now. What sort of silent practice do you want, how deep do you want to go? I am talking about the form, tell me what form of silence do you want? For the benefit of all beings.

- *We are in opening the heart so it is good to have some contact without talking....I want to avoid the pollution of chatter.* So there is no talking; you can have eye contact, you can smile, but you don't talk. Maintain physical space, drop the concepts to have mental space and emotional space.

Silence is very important in the kitchen – the food is like medicine, so what you think and say we will eat later on. I would like all working in the kitchen to have a *mantra* going in your head: *sabbe satta sukita hontu*, may all beings be well and happy. If you feel the impulse to talk, you say three *mantras*. I would prefer you not to read any books, focus on the right now.

- *What does being in silence mean?* No talking! It is more than that, there can be strict silence. Now you are in silence but you maintain loving kindness. Physically respecting the space of others, no touching, maintain slow movement. Think of being in aura of loving-kindness, not cutting yourself off from others.
- *So what happens to spontaneity? Do we have to suppress feeling and emotion?* It is a training. Keep a feel of loving-kindness around you and within you. And you might find a different way of relating to people, without having to suppress your emotion.
- *Without non-verbal communication, how can we avoid bumping into people?* It increases mindfulness being in silence, you can detect the movement of the other person, in who goes through the door first.

Silence is not a punishment, it is increasing the mindfulness, respecting the energy. I find the silence increases our respect for other people, so if you want to keep that notion it is fine. I am not looking for strict silence, no contact. If sometime you have eye contact it is OK, but don't speak – think of it as being soft around the edges. I want you not to be so close together, not touching, respect the space of other people, their auric field. Specially when you are queuing for food. Give space, open your heart. You are always in dialogue, even in silence. Watch how you use silence; it can be used aggressively to push others away, in order not to face yourself. We are body, speech and mind.

**When you are in strict silence** it means no communication at all, so the energy that normally goes out is taken back into ourselves. Be serious with it. If someone talks to you, bow and walk away. Practise silence more thoroughly than you have ever done. No reading except practice texts from the teacher. No listening to music, no phoning. This is strict practice - no interruption, no eye contact, any stimulation interrupts the rising of stuff from the depths, positive potential and also negatives; you are in preparation to hear vibration in the depths. If you are driving and being at home, bear witness - don't engage with people, phone, open mail, do heavy digging. You need to protect the meditation environment; you cannot handle the two, the mundane and the sublime.

The Orchard is happy that you are in silence, there is a feeling of settling. The flowers are not so frightened any more! It is very noticeable, you must notice it yourself.

## **Support from the Dharma**

What does this mean? There are two meanings: *dharma* (small d) means all phenomena; the *Dharma* (capital D) specifically means the teaching of the Buddha. Mindfulness of the *Dharma*, remembering the skills and tools that have been provided through the teaching; this will be a continuing support for when you go home, in everyday life.

I have spoken of the need to be aware of what puts you in an unwholesome state. So, what unwholesome states most commonly arise in everyday life? The teaching tells us that there are ten **unwholesome actions** of body, speech and mind. You need to be mindful of this list so that when one of these states arises in you, you can do something to avert it; then you will have more *sukkhā*, good feeling, and less *dukkhā*, suffering! – and so will those around you.

There are three unwholesome actions of **body**:

1. Taking life, killing intentionally. In everyday life we are doing a lot of killing – walking on the ground, eating food, digging the garden. This may be necessary to sustain life. If you send good thoughts, energy to an animal that is being killed, that can be regarded as wholesome – transfer the merit of the practice to the meat you are eating. Make a good connection with that being, it comes back to awareness of what you are doing.
2. Stealing, taking what is not given, not offered. This is an aspect of generosity, the *parami* of *dāna*; not assuming that anything that is available is given, that you can take it. If you are creating an air of generosity, of making things available, people don't feel they are stealing when they take it. It is the same with support, advice – but it can come to a stage when to the giver it feels like taking, it is too much. It can be wholesome to set clear boundaries. Also with envy, for example you could manipulate to get something you want - look at what happens at meal times in Maitreya House; if you start to practise wholesome actions it can have a ripple effect, others join in. At death you cannot take any possessions or people with you, only the virtues you have accumulated, the wholesomeness. So every moment in the day is an opportunity to practise *karma*. See the inter-being-ness in everything – not self-cherishing, self-referencing.
3. Sexual misconduct, including over-stimulation of the senses. Inflicting harm or hurt, hurting someone's feelings, causing distress – for your own pleasure. Stop and review, check where you are coming from, the intention. Take this as the basic principle in all things, and your behaviour changes.

These are about generating harm for other beings, all to do with taking from others. We need mindfulness, to check our motivation.

There are four unwholesome actions of **speech**:

1. Lying, not telling the truth in order to deceive for your own self-gain; or holding back information so you appear in a better light than someone else. Intention to give misinformation, to fool or confuse someone for your own gain, own benefit. In all unwholesome actions, if the intention is generosity it is not unwholesome. It can be not speaking, not saying something, holding back when you could be speaking to help another, self-cherishing.
2. Slander, creating disharmony, stirring up suspicion about someone for your own benefit; it can be very subtle. Creating suspicion, saying something that is not true about someone. The result of this can be breaking up of community, of friendship. On this retreat we are attending to wholesomeness in speech through silence and the recitation of refuge.
3. Harsh speech – speaking our intention to harm, saying something you know is going to hurt someone, to disturb their peace of mind; it can be softly said but is done from a place of anger and nastiness. This has *karma*, it will come back to you.
4. Gossip, this is probably practised more than the other three. Idle chatter, socialising, not telling truth, fantasising. We should use speech in a precious way.

In all speech, watch what you say. When out of silence, watch what is your preferred behaviour in speech: 'don't associate with fools', people who are not practising studying the mind. Your circle of friends changes. At the Orchard we are trying to maintain quietness, silence, talking only about the practice or practical matters. We know how powerful thoughts are, all the more so when they

are translated into speech. We use speech to end the suffering, not to cultivate suffering: right speech, good speech. Is my speech helping to end the suffering? When you talk with someone, maintaining awareness of where you are coming from.

There are three unwholesome actions of **mind**:

1. **Envy**: this is like stealing, focusing on what you don't have - beauty, popularity, wisdom, skills; it is unwholesome because you are focusing on your negative, on what you don't have, an attitude of poverty and that is very depleting. And there is an idea of separation, that the other who has the success (or whatever) is separate from you. So when this emotion comes up, focus more on your qualities, on what you have got. Open your heart and be generous to yourself, and cultivate *mudita*, sympathetic joy, being happy for others. So you can share in their happiness, it is also your happiness; it overflows, and you benefit from it too. The wholesome has a tendency to expand, to ripple out – unless you separate yourself from it. The unwholesome has a tendency to contract.
2. **Wishing harm**, suffering to another; hateful behaviour, malice. This breeds hatred, aggression in the mind.
3. **Wrong view**, ignorance: not having the full picture, having only a partial view in everything we do. If you have too much opinion, you push away or draw in. Only fully enlightened beings have a full view, the rest of us have some unwholesomeness. So we must watch the mind, it comes back to training the mind.

Traditional **precepts**, which are a form of monastic vows, addressed unwholesomeness through abstinence (like the Christian ten commandments 'thou shalt not kill' etc). A contemporary form of the precepts takes a positive approach, they are given to support life:

**Precepts in positive expression**

- 1 *I will train myself to support, extend and appreciate the life of all living beings. I will live with a sensitive and responsible awareness for the whole ecology of life.*
- 2 *I will train myself to dwell more and more in the mind of spontaneous generosity. Daily I will give material support, emotional support, and an example to others of awakening in action.*
- 3 *I will train myself to use the senses to further awakening, explore Dharma, and to come to know the world more profoundly and more compassionately.*
- 4 *I will train myself to communicate in a skilful and compassionate manner.*
- 5 *I will train myself to be ever more directly aware of how nutriment affects the mind and body. I will eat, drink and nurture myself and others, in a way that supports awakening.*

Tarchin Hearn

The five precepts are a commitment, derived from those traditional monastic vows. Their advice will help you not to live this life driven by the ten unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind.

1. Respect for any being, you could take this one as an antidote to aggression driven by hatred.
2. Spontaneous generosity – an antidote to stealing, to greed; feeling richer leads to more spontaneous generosity.
3. Focus here on how we use the senses, can we get out of balance? Develop the senses to grow into a fuller human being. Use beauty, pleasure, to go further into the practice, not as focus for attachment. In the *Theravadan* tradition there is denial of the senses – no music, perfume - renunciant, no attachment. The five positive precepts are how to use the senses and life in positive ways, not 'no, no forbidden'. This way there is more expansion, richness, wholeness.

4. Is an aspect of *karma* - intention, volition and its translation into action. We can do so much damage with speech, be more in silence. Speech must be aligned with intention and action.
5. How does what I take in affect what I put out, become? The basic is food, and also touch and human loving-kindness; we all need to be touched well, a look as well as physical contact. Even objects – before you touch anything, or eat, regard it with loving-kindness. Doing this sort of mindfulness in everyday life is really the test of your practice.

### **The parami's, perfections**

The *paramis*, or *paramitas*, are a *Mahayana* teaching which means literally 'to cross over to the other shore', to the 'golden city', to awakening; so they help us to go further, beyond our limitations – they are an inspiration.

1. Generosity, *dana*: look at it as an opening, a letting go. To be more open and generous of mind, heart, body to all beings – not just loved ones, ones in authority, ones you hope to get something from. To all beings – why do we have to be generous and helpful to all? Contemplate how essential other beings are to you for survival in this life, you are totally dependent on other beings, we can do nothing on our own. Letting go of the unwholesome in body, speech and mind and cultivating the wholesome, the first virtue we have to focus on is the *parami* of *dana*. Stepping into the Zendo, have intention to practise for the benefit of all beings, not just for yourself. If all beings feels much, think of all the beings living at the Orchard –including birds, cats, insects. Dreariness, exhaustion will vanish at a flash because you are opening the heart, not just focusing on 'me'. You have to set the condition before you step into the Zendo. Feel that you are nurturing this being so that you can help all sentient beings. Just this feeling fills you with energy. We are receiving a massive amount all the time, the product of so much input, attention; it is your responsibility, your duty, to pass it on. Your practice will never flourish if it is just including you. If you really develop generosity towards other beings, you will receive from others beyond your imagination, in ways you could not have foreseen.
2. Morality, *sila*. Check your behaviour, in terms of body, speech and mind, to see if there is anything in your behaviour that could disturb someone else, like physical intrusion into the space of others while in silence. Talking during silence – this is disturbing the mind of others who are trying to practise. In the *sangha*, if one person can act like this, for the benefit of others, it ripples out for the benefit of all. Be more aware, careful. Check where you are coming from – it is the practice of purification, of awakening, of letting go.
3. Patience, *ksanti*. Opening up to someone's mistakes, which we all make; not just tolerating. The *Pali* word *ksanti* means peaceful, not to get agitated by the mistakes, the wrongs of others; you do wrong too, they are like you.
4. Energy, *viraya*. Imagine the heart open, focusing on the good of others, pure. Your energy is not bound into conflicts, pushing, pulling, avoiding, hiding, showing off, emotional upsets – so you have lots of energy which can be given to the practice. This is directly related to the first three *paramis*.
5. Concentration, *dhyana*. If you are doing all the first four, if you have energy, you will have concentration.
6. Wisdom, *prajna*. This is often what we want but we forget to go back to the first one; wisdom arises as consequence of all the other *paramis*

They are not so linear, if you practise just one of the *paramis*, you practise them all as they contain each other.

**Homage**

We finish by paying homage to Sakyamuni Buddha, who is the origin of all the teaching. So by paying homage to him, you pay homage also to the teaching. Without Sakyamuni Buddha the teaching would not exist, the Orchard retreat centre would not exist. So we pay homage.

*NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO  
SAMMA SAMBUDDHASSA  
Adoration to him, the blessed one, the purified one,  
the fully enlightened one!*

**Dedication**

And to end, as we began, with the *Brahma Viharas*:

*Aham avero homi, abyapajjho homi, anigho homi,  
sukhi attanam pariharami.  
Aham viya sabbe satta avera hontu, abayapajjha hontu, anigha hontu,  
sukhi attananam pariharantu.*

May I be friendly, calm and free from ill-will and may I live in happiness.  
As I am, so may others be friendly, calm and free from ill-will  
and may they live in happiness.

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**Notes**

The intention has been to present Sonia's words as she spoke, to preserve the flavour and the spirit of her teaching. Anything else is in italics: contributions from students, texts, editing links, other languages (mainly *Pali*).

Only two significant aspects of the teaching have been omitted:

1. instructions for body work exercises / movements, which are learned from demonstration and experience;
2. the *sadhana* texts for deity practice (*vajrayana*), which traditionally are available only to those who were present during the practice and thus received direct transmission of energy from the teacher.

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