

Practising the Jhānas

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Suitable both for those who wish to refine, consolidate, and further their practice of the jhānas, and also for those who are not yet familiar with jhāna practice, this retreat provided an opportunity to establish the meditative bases for the practice of the jhānas and to support their development.

Exploring the place of the jhānas in a wider life of practice and particularly in the deepening of insight into emptiness and dependent origination.

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Orienting to This Jhāna Retreat

Welcome, everybody. Really, really warm welcome to each and every one of you. I know that I know some of you, and there are some of you that I don't know and I haven't met yet, and I'm really looking forward to that. And especially, welcome to you, and a welcome to you if you're new to Gaia House. So welcome to the retreat. Welcome to Gaia House, to everyone. I'm really happy to be here, happy to be able to do this – more than happy. I've been quite excited actually for a little while. I'm really glad. Let me please introduce Sari. Some of you will know her, but many of you might not. Sari is with us, and at the end, if you can see, is Kirsten, who some of you will already know – and not Robert. [laughter] I will explain what's happening there. So we have Sari and Kirsten, but I'll come to that in a minute.

I've done a lot of teaching of *jhānas* individually, one to one, but I've wanted to teach a group *jhāna* retreat for, I think, about sixteen years. So finally, with some very strange sort of conditions that had to come together to actually allow this to manifest. I feel, in a way – actually, for many reasons – it's a kind of a small miracle that this is happening. Originally ... well, I'll come back to that in a sec. Yeah, many reasons that make it a small miracle that we have this time together, and this opportunity, and this chance for something that I think is such a beautiful realm of possibility for human beings and for meditation practice – such a treasure trove. So it's a really, really precious thing for me to be able to teach it, and I hope by the end of it you'll realize also how precious it really is.

It's partly a miracle because it's quite complicated for me health-wise at the moment. There are a lot of things I need to do just to be able to be here, etc. I have a lot of medical appointments over the time we have together. There's a lot of practical stuff, just getting my medicines in gear. Don't need to go into it, but a lot of stuff there.

Originally, I asked Robert to come and assist us, and he said, "I'd love to. I need to check with my employers." They came back and said, "Well, we won't be able to tell you until ..." – I can't remember when it was. So we said, "Let's just gamble; it'll be fine." [laughter] And it turned out that they said, "No, you can't have that time off." So Robert's going to join. Kirsten, it was her idea – the whole retreat was her idea in the first place, so we've got her to thank for that. There was a strange set of circumstances, and it was her idea. And Kirsten, very kindly, she had been planning to sit the retreat and have this time to nourish her own practice, so she very kindly stepped in to take Robert's place until Robert arrives, I think in five or six days or something. So at that point, Kirsten will be relieved of her teaching duties, and be able to just give herself to her practice, and Robert will step in. We'll obviously let you know. You may not notice because you might be so deep in ... [laughter] We'll let you know.

Another part of the small miracle is that Sari has a family, and a lovely little baby boy, a toddler, Eliel, and because of his young age, could only be here if *he* could be here, and that meant her partner Hongda needed to be here. So they are here as a family, and you will see them wandering in and out. You will probably see and hear Eliel playing in the Gaia House grounds, and it's his playground, right? So those are part of the conditions that allowed this retreat, and I think it's actually a lovely thing, you know. It's a really delightful thing.

[inaudible question in background] Actually, ask the teacher. Ask the teachers. Seriously, yeah, because – I’ll get into it – a lot about this practice is very individual, okay? It can sound formulaic or technical or whatever, but there may be reasons why exactly that sort of thing, at some point, might be really helpful, and actually not so helpful for others, or the same person at different times. But generally, he’s going to be around. You’ll see him, you’ll hear him, and it’s a delight.

[5:38] So tonight, quite a lot I want to get through, so I hope you all had a good rest, and are feeling bright and refreshed. I want to say mostly stuff about orienting to this retreat, and what that involves, and things to bear in mind during the retreat. So originally, part of what allowed this retreat to come up – I can’t remember exactly – was that Gaia House was going to shut down for a period for some major building renovation works. Kirsten had this idea, and I can’t remember exactly, and then they asked me, “Well, would you do *this* while that’s going on?” And of course, “Oh, so Gaia House is going to be a building site with *da-da-da*, and you want me to teach a *jhāna* retreat?” [laughter] And I said, “Sure.” Because – and I really want to emphasize this – it’s okay to have noise. Right from the beginning we’ve got a different attitude. We’re not coming in here, putting the blinkers on, putting the earplugs in: “Anything, everything – it’s all bothering me. I just want to shut everything out.” No, there’s an attitude of openness and inclusivity. We do not want our *jhānas*, our *samādhi*, to be brittle. You know what ‘brittle’ means? It means something shatters very easily. We want it to be soft, pliant, open, open-hearted, etc. One of my teachers, Ajaan Geoff – some of you will know him – when he moved to Thailand to become a monk, he had hardly meditated before. He was in the monastery, and this monastery had just moved. In fact, they were building a new site for it. So where he learnt to meditate initially was a building site. And no one was like, “Oh, that’s a terrible problem.” It’s just, “It’s fine. What’s the problem?” So a different attitude to all this that’s much more about openness – not brittle. And so Eliel, Sari’s son, that’s all part of it.

When someone asked the Buddha, or in the context of his teaching (I can’t remember exactly; he said it a few times): “What does *jhāna* depend on? What does *samādhi* depend on?” And he said, “It depends on happiness. *Jhāna* depends on happiness.”¹ Now, he could have answered all kinds of things, and a lot of us would expect him to answer, “It depends on nailing your mind to something, and then you’ll get to *jhāna*.” Right? That’s the way most people think about it. Or it depends on getting away from people who make noise, and being in, maybe, a sensory deprivation tank, whatever the Pali for that is. But he didn’t say that. He said “dependent on happiness.” So that’s interesting, you know. That’s really interesting to reflect on.

I have a sense that many of the things I will say tonight, it’s possible that you may not realize just how significant they are. I know I haven’t met some of you yet, and I’m already insulting you [laughter], but somehow we have to get the view right. We have to get the view right (the view is the platform), and the whole relationship right. So if I say something like that – “Oh, the Buddha said, ‘*Jhānas* depend on happiness’” – that should set you thinking. Well, I see some of you writing it down. It’s important. Then I have to take that with me through the retreat, because that has implications on a moment-to-moment level, on a micro-moment [level], about your choices, about your attitude, about how you’re relating to whatever it is you’re paying attention to at the moment – the breath or whatever it is.

[9:47] So what I'm saying tonight, what does it have to do with the relationship with practice, and how important that is, and the relationship with *this* practice, and the relationship with the goal, and the whole conceptual framework? This is absolutely key. How are we going to listen? How are you going to listen to Dharma talks? Can you listen on your toes? Do you know what I mean by that? I mean just what I said – like if something comes out like “*Jhānas* depend on happiness,” I can kind of let that wash over me and “hmm.” Or, maybe it barely registers. Or, actually, “Hmm, that sets me ... maybe I should reflect on that, and recalibrate, and do something about it.” So that's what I mean by listening on your toes. Obviously sometimes I'm going to unpack things and elaborate and explain, but sometimes a bit more work from the listener, a bit more active from the listener is really helpful.

Okay. Let's start with just a couple of practical things. The daily schedule, as some of you might have noticed, is pretty open. There's not a lot on there. I don't know if you've seen it, but it sort of says “Breakfast, lunch, dinner,” I think. [laughter] So what that means is this hall is open twenty-four hours a day for the duration of the retreat, and you can sit in here, at any time, for as long as you want. Okay? Generally speaking, once you get into the rhythm, you might, for instance, be doing a walking period and then it's twenty minutes before lunch, and you know you have to have lunch at a certain time, because you're on lunch wash-up, let's say. You can still come in here for twenty minutes, you know – just whenever it is. If you have the time, though (and I'll explain this more as we go on), you probably want to give a sitting a bit more to see what happens, a bit more than twenty minutes – you know, forty, forty-five minutes, an hour or something, to see what happens. But basically, it's an open schedule. People will be coming and going whenever, except 6:45 to breakfast is everyone in here. You can arrive early for that, so you can arrive at 4:45 or 5:45, but once we hit 6:45, you can't come in or leave. Basically, it's a group sit. We want everyone here at that time just to cohere together. And what was the other one? 9 p.m., the same thing. Again, you can arrive early, you can stay much later, you can stay well into the night, whatever, but during that period – let's say 9 to 9:30 – you wouldn't arrive or leave.

Okay, we're going to start with the teachings, aim to have a block of teachings from 4 to 5:30, every day, in the afternoon. That's the aim, but we may change that. And we may change it either just a little bit – “Oh, we need to start at 3:45 today, or whatever it is, or 4:30, or whatever” – or we might change it quite drastically – in other words, “No, we're shifting everything to the morning.” Okay? So you need to keep your eye on the noticeboard, and just see. If it doesn't change, it's just 4, like it says, and it will probably go till 5:30, but partly, again, dependent on – I'm taking some new drugs that I'm not used to yet. I'm not sure how it's going to be. So it will depend on a lot of different things, but we'll aim for 4 to 5:30 every day. Okay? But check it. It means check until 2:30. It probably won't be changed for that day until 2:30. You understand? So up to 2:30, just check once in a while, so you know.

So ‘open schedule’ – what does that mean? It means that the onus of responsibility is on you guys. Right? It's on you to find a temporal structure and a practice structure that works for you. The onus is on you to be responsive and sensitive to your practice, and the needs, and the ebbs and flows, and the ups and downs, and “What is needed right now? Do I need to go out and do some walking? Do I need to sit longer with whatever is happening? Do I need to actually go for a walk, and open my mind, and touch the beauty, and be touched by beauty? Do I need a cup of tea?” What it also means, having an open schedule, is that obviously try and be relatively quiet when you come in, but basically, people will

be coming and leaving at any point, and so the job of the comer or the leaver is to try and be relatively quiet as you set up yourself and leave. And the job of the person who's already here when there's a comer and leaver is to be spacious. And it's part of that, "We're not into brittle *jhānas*. We're not into brittle *samādhī*." You understand? It's cool. Someone's coming to practice – how wonderful, right? This is really, really important. Don't underestimate how much – particularly a *jhāna* practice – can get derailed into a kind of burrow tunnel of irritation, for example. When you set up goals, that can happen. So two jobs: for the person who's here – openness, warmth, welcoming, non-brittle *jhānas*. The job for the comer and goer is, "Yeah, I'm relatively sensitive – people are practising."

[15:54] Okay. So one of the interesting challenges of teaching a group retreat of *jhānas*, rather than teaching individually, is that you all are at completely different levels, have different backgrounds in Dharma in terms of what you've been taught, and different amounts of experience with the *jhānas*. It's a roomful of very ... everyone's different. How to teach a group that has different levels like that, and different backgrounds, and different experiences? As I said, I've taught a lot individually, and usually when I teach individually, I don't even use the word *jhāna* for a while. And I might not even use the word *pīti*. We'll talk about these words. *Pīti* means rapture or ecstasy or something like that. I don't even use that. I'm more just listening to what the person is reporting, and if they use a certain word – "Oh, it feels bubbly" – then I'll go with that. And then I want to really work with their vocabulary and their sense of things and their experience as it unfolds, and at a certain point, we introduce the *jhāna* language and framework and map.

That's not really going to work for a group, so still there's this challenge, how to do that. There will be interviews, and we'll explain later tonight, I think, about the interviews, how that will work. Plenty of interviews, in fact, lots and lots of interviews – so lots of chance to really ask, and get a lot of feedback, get a lot of guidance about all kinds of things. But there will also hopefully be quite a few Q & As, so a lot of chance for you to ask in both the interviews and the Q & As whatever is pertinent and whatever is relevant to your practice now at that point. So in terms of this "you're all at different levels," take advantage of the meetings and the Q & As, because the teaching will be moving along at whatever rate, and it's only going to kind of coincide at a certain point with where you're at in your trajectory.

We're open to teaching, we *will* be teaching, all eight *jhānas*, and we want to emphasize keeping them really alive. So it's not like you do one, and then you forget about it, because "I'm just into the eighth *jhāna*" or whatever. We want to emphasize keeping them alive. What I want to kind of encourage is each of us to find the playground at your edge – your playground at your edge. I'm going to explain more what I mean by that as we go on, and tomorrow, etc., and other days, but it means, "Where is the edge that I'm kind of learning new stuff? I've mastered *this*," and I'll explain what I mean by 'mastery' – "I've mastered *this* before, and now this is my edge. I can kind of get it sometimes. It's not what I really have, you know, what's just no hope of doing. It's at my edge." And that becomes your playground. That's where you hang out most, and that's where you work, and that's where you play, and that's where you learn. So each of us needs to find where that playground is, right now, and most of your time, you will spend in that playground.

Now, in terms of the teachings, let's say that playground is, "I'm just learning how to get into the first *jhāna*." Okay, great! That's absolutely fantastic. That's your playground. You need to probably be

there for a while. And a few days later, you know, I might talk about the first *jhāna*: “It’s great. It’s right on target,” and then you are still in that playground, and you need to be. And now the teachings have progressed, and I’m talking about the second *jhāna*. Fine, no problem. You stay in your playground. This is a different way than some of you might be familiar with, but I really want to emphasize that. You know, people are so different with *jhānas*, but really one month or two months of retreat time (that means you’re doing nothing else but meditate) is not too much to learn one *jhāna*. Okay? So we have three weeks, which is a fantastic amount of time to really get a sense of territory and material and open new things, but in terms of the way I want to teach (and I’ll explain why as the days go by), I want to emphasize this kind of playground idea. Pacing is really important. It’s part of the art.

What’s this going to mean in terms of listening to teachings? Does it mean you take notes about what might come, what might be relevant for you in four days’ time, or two weeks’ time? It’s a little tricky, you know. But basically, you’re going to get a lot of material, some of which is not relevant for you now. Then we could say, “Well, I’ll listen to the recordings,” or you could make notes. I mean, you can always ask, of course. But I don’t know any other way of doing it, or any other way of doing it in a way that *I* would feel is fruitful. So everyone’s going to have that issue at some point. If you’ve done *jhāna* practice before, as I know some of you have, and you think, or you have a sense, “Well, my playground is ...” Let’s say you think, “Oh, my playground is the second *jhāna*,” or “My playground is the sixth *jhāna*” – doesn’t matter, whatever it is. Please, in the next few days, if you have a sense, “Oh, I know all the rest. This is where I’m at,” please check with one of us, and get it sort of confirmed, if you like, because people mean very different things by *jhānas*, and people mean different things by ‘mastery’ and where we’re at.

I will explain why I feel this is important, but just come and check. We may say, “Great. Okay, yeah, second *jhāna*, about there. This is what you need to do now. This is your playground.” Or you might feel like, “Oh” – it might work both ways – “No, I only know the second *jhāna*,” or “My playground is the sixth *jhāna*.” And actually, we feel, “In terms of the kind of level we’re talking about, or mastery we want, we reckon that around the second is your playground.” So just come and have that kind of dialogue with us. Or it might be the other way around: you think *da-da-da*, and we say, “Well, no, that’s cool. You’ve got that mastered. You can go on to beyond where you think you are” or whatever. But just check, because this idea of ‘playground’ is really important to how things are going to kind of ferment in a way that’s going to be really fruitful – how the seeds are going to get planted so that they really bear lovely, nourishing, lifelong, nourishing fruit. So that’s why I’m emphasizing this playground business, and I’ll come back to it.

So you’re mostly in your playground until you kind of get mastery of that level (and we’ll explain what we mean by ‘mastery’). You might do, let’s say, it was the third one. You’re still going to be a little time in the first and the second, if the third is your playground. And occasionally, the mind or you will just – something beyond it will open, and great, have a little fun, *occasionally*. But mostly, this is my playground; this is where it’s delineated. I’ll explain all this again, but we’re not going to teach like, okay, let’s say, it’s the fifth *jhāna*, then every time I sit down I have to go, “Breathe, one, two, three, four, and then the fifth” or whatever. You can just dive right in. Most of your time is in your playground. And even if you think, “Oh, yes, that,” whatever, still there should be really quite helpful teachings pertaining to what seem to pertain to levels that are below where you’re at. So everything we

have to say about really basic practice, working with the breath, or *mettā*, whatever it is, that should still be useful to you, even if you've gone beyond that.

So the way I would see *jhānas* is they're potentially lifelong explorations. There's so much gift available there, so much profundity of resource and beauty, so much subtlety to explore, so much to explore that you don't find written. It's not in the suttas; it's not in a lot of other stuff that you find written. There are all kinds of possibilities here. So I want to invite you to have that really long view, and part of that long view is this playground business.

[25:20] If you've been on retreat at Gaia House before, or lived here or something, you might know that you can get to Newton Abbot *that* way, up towards Denbury on the lanes – it's south. You might also know that you can get to Newton Abbot *that* way, north. You can also get to Newton Abbot *that* way, east. And you can also get to Newton Abbot *that* way, west. It's just the way the lanes work around here. [laughs] Why am I saying that? Partly because I would say that first, I thought, "Well, if you can get to the first *jhāna*, then they're all open to you." But actually, I'd like to even modify that statement and say: "If you can get *pīti*, if *pīti* can arise, if this lovely well-being can arise, then the whole territory is open to you." So the whole territory of the *jhānas* is open to you. What that means, practically speaking, is what's really significant is, "How do we *get* that *pīti* to arise?" Or "How do we *allow* that *pīti* to arise?" is a better way of putting it. The lovely news is *pīti* is just like Newton Abbot. [laughter] Only in some respects! If you've been there, you might be relieved to hear that. Meaning that it doesn't really matter how that *pīti* arises, and I would say *anything* goes. So any kind of (quote) 'concentration' practice that you might have heard of already, or that you *haven't* heard of, or whatever. It might be an insight practice. It might be something else. It might be something that you describe to someone, and they're like, "What the hell has that got to do with concentration?" or whatever. If it gives rise to that *pīti*, if it allows that *pīti* to open, it's great. It's good. We'll give more details to what I'm saying now.

So there are all these different possibilities, and in the first few days of the retreat, a couple of things: I'm going to put out quite a few different possibilities of what I want to call a 'base' practice or a 'springboard' practice. So like breath, or *mettā*, or insight practices, or whatever, or different ways of working with the breath, energy body, etc. – these are what I might call a base practice to work towards getting into the *jhānas*, or a springboard into *pīti*, whatever. What that means is for the first – I don't know – five, six, seven days of the retreat, there's quite a lot of teaching. There'll still be one session a day, hopefully, but there's quite a lot of material, because I want to make sure that for someone that it doesn't work to go *that* way to Newton Abbot, they have *that* way. And if you're not sure, "Well, I don't know, I've tried these different ones. I'm not sure," then you can try a few things. This is really important. There will also be, amongst all that, all kinds of other information, teaching that should be helpful, but it will be more dense in terms of teaching in the first week or so.

Insight ways of looking can also give rise to *pīti*. And by 'insight ways of looking,' I actually mean very specifically – some of you will know – the practices that I've written about in my book, *Seeing That Frees*.² So if you don't know what that means, or you're not familiar with it, just forget it. We won't be giving a lot of teachings about that, but I'm just saying that right now.

Insight can be used – we'll explain this again – as an occasional unblocker that unblocks the energy, that unblocks contraction and clinging, and allows well-being and *pīti* and *samādhi*. So that's

one way of using insight practice. Some people use it as their main thing. It's the main thing that opens up *samādhi* and well-being and *pīti*. It unfabricates. Insight practices unfabricate. They lessen fabrication, and that's very key. We'll come to explain that more.

So if you're not familiar with what that means, 'insight ways of looking,' and all that, just leave it, forget it. Here's something: if you already know that practice X, whatever practice X is, reliably and easily for you, takes you into *jhāna*, or gives rise to *pīti* that's kind of stable and you can work with it, if you already know that, stick with it. There's no reason to change that. You've got something that takes you to Newton Abbot, and then you're good. If you're not sure, then try some of what we'll be gradually offering in the next few days. But really, then we want to settle to one base practice, one springboard practice, okay?

The talks on this retreat, I'm mostly going to talk really about technique, in the broadest sense of the word – art, let's say; the art of *jhāna* practice, the art of *samādhi* – and also about, as I said, view, the view and relationship and framework, how we're seeing that. It's so crucial. So I'm almost entirely just talking about that. There will be no big, new, philosophical conceptual frameworks that blow your sense of existence, etc. [laughter], unless some of you don't already know how I would put the *jhānas* into a framework, and how I would see insight, in which case, then, it might be like, "Whoa, what's that?", because it's quite different. But generally speaking, I'm not going to be doing that. I'm not going to be trying to do it. I won't bring up really radical questions that kind of get you all agitated and turn everything upside down, etc.

So it's mostly really just about the art of *jhāna* practice. What does that mean? I don't know. It partly means, in relation to the stuff I said earlier, that you're responsible for your inspiration on this retreat. You're responsible for your sense of inspiration, because I'm not going to be telling any stories. There are no poems. There's none of all that stuff.

The Buddha said, "*Jhānas* are dependent on happiness."³ Of course, *jhānas* give rise to happiness – I mean, tremendous happiness. And really, if you've not experienced the *jhānic* realm, it's happiness, I think we can safely say, that you will not have tasted something like that before. It's really, really extraordinary – something really, really remarkable, and that opens for a human being.

So *jhānas* bring happiness, but they also depend on happiness. So you're responsible for your own inspiration. You're responsible for your happiness as the basis of your *jhāna* practice – without stories, without poems, without interesting philosophy, etc. So how are we going to do that? Where does that kind of base happiness come from? I'll say a little bit now, say a little bit later.

(1) Appreciation. So much about this practice is really about taking care of your heart. At every level and every direction, what does it mean to take care of your heart? And again, you may not realize just how significant some of this is. And if you haven't practised this way before, if you're used to very different ways of thinking of retreat, thinking of what it means to be a practice, you may not realize just how significant this is. What does it mean to be here in these days, together, in community, in a beautiful place in the countryside, and to make sure every day that the heart is encouraged to feel appreciation, and to reverberate with appreciation for your fellow meditators, for the Dharma, for the Buddha, for the beautiful nature, for the coordinators at Gaia House who set this up, for other helpers (and I'll introduce them later) – all the conditions that came [together]? What does it mean to take care

of appreciation, to be on retreat, orienting and supporting the heart to be in an appreciative mode? This is way more significant than most people would realize.

(2) Gratitude. This is all part of the same thing. Taking care of inclining the mind and the heart to gratitude, to seeing what there is to be grateful for and to feeling that gratitude every day, a number of times. You can do it formally. You can do it informally. It could just be woven into your natural way of being – hopefully it becomes that.

(3) Beauty, beauty is so important: the heart, the eyes, the senses are open to beauty.

(4) Connection – with each other, with nature.

(5) Openness, generally. Openness of being, openness of heart, love of the Dharma – these are the kind of things that nourish, that will allow that base level of happiness on which the *jhānas* can then be built or opened, whatever metaphor you want to use.

(6) In a word, *muditā* is the Pali word. Oftentimes it gets translated as sympathetic joy. I would prefer the translation ‘**appreciative joy**’ or ‘**spiritual joy**.’ It means it’s not just the joy in someone else’s happiness. It is that, and it’s all those things I just talked about as well. That’s what *muditā* means in its broader sense, and that’s, I think, how the Buddha meant it.

All that, while at the same time, your primary focus, and your primary intention, and you’re spending most of your time doing *jhāna* practice, working on that in formal practice. So yes, connection with nature is important. If then you feel moved by the great Devon God of Mud and Rain to create a great mud sculpture outside to express your connection, no! [laughter] Not on this retreat. Another time, great, and it might be, “Oh, it’s really soulmaking.” Another time, okay? Most of your time is in formal practice doing *jhāna*, doing towards the *jhānas*, but the heart is open, and you’re taking care of that nourishment.

Or similarly, connection with each other. It’s a silent retreat. I guess we’ll speak about that. So most the time it’s formal practice. Can I feel, can I have that openness, can I have that connection with nature, with each other, without having to kind of act on it so kind of, let’s say, disruptively? Open-heartedness, in a nutshell, the openness of heart, of soul, of being, easily outweighs, easily out-trumps, let’s say, focus or concentration, in terms of its significance for *jhāna* practice. Openness of heart, openness of being. That’s not to say focus and concentration is not important, but just relative importance.

[38:13] If you’re familiar with Soulmaking Dharma practice, one way of adding to what we’ve just said is part of what makes you happy here, while you’re here, is that you have a fantasy of the retreat. If you’re not familiar with soulmaking, just forget about this; it doesn’t matter. I’m not going to explain it. I’m just throwing it out very briefly. Just don’t worry about it. But you need a fantasy (in the good sense) of the retreat. You need a fantasy of yourself as a practitioner – you know, a juicy, soulmaking, beautiful image fantasy of yourself, something that’s operating in the background, a fantasy of the tradition. These *jhāna* teachings have been going for thousands of years, passed on from teacher to student, etc. Thousands of years. There’s a tradition of these arts, these beauties, these treasures being passed on – fantasy of all that. Fantasy of the whole tradition; it’s all part of it. That’s part of your happiness and nourishment. But on this retreat, it doesn’t become so dominant that you then go into a whole big imaginal practice about all that. Maybe occasionally, if you need to kind of recalibrate your

whole, “I’ve gotten into a real rut here or whatever it is, or I’ve gotten really tight” or whatever, but generally not.

These fantasies operate in the background. They’re almost subliminal. That’s what I mean when I use the word ‘fantasy’ as opposed to ‘image.’ They’re almost subliminal. They’re just kind of really nourishing and supporting, lubricating our whole sense of what we’re doing, giving moisture there, giving beauty and depth. So if you don’t know what that means because you’re not familiar with it, just forget about it; it doesn’t matter.

But you’re going to have to, because of the schedule, because of the teachings, because we’re not going to be at the front a lot – we’re not going to be doing, you know, every twenty minutes, piping up and say, “Can you feel your bum?” or whatever – you have to generate and sustain the energy without the teachers leading a lot of meditations, and with the open schedule. You have to generate the energy and sustain it.

What’s really helpful also is to open your intention. Why are you here? What’s it serving? Who are you serving? Your sitting, your walking, your standing, your showing up consistently in the hall, or people see you out there doing the walking meditation in the walking room, etc. – that’s a tremendous gift to each other. It’s so supportive when someone sees you showing up, again and again and again. It’s an inspiration. It communicates commitment. You’re helping each other by doing that. What’s my intention? Open the intention beyond just me and my practice and how I feel. Why am I here? What am I serving? Who am I serving? Don’t assume you are irrelevant. How common it is – one of the pathologies in Western culture (mixed with its opposites, often) is to just not realize how relevant we are, how we make a difference. Yes, *you*, as an individual, your presence, your character, your soul, your vibe. Don’t assume you’re irrelevant. Don’t assume you don’t make a difference. Don’t assume that in silence you don’t make a difference.

So open up the intention. This is really important. And again, it could be just a natural part. It could be something very brief. It could be something you do formally, again and again. And, then, of course, the intention for all beings: why are you here? Who are you doing this for? Who are you serving? What are you serving? Again, your happiness and your equanimity – you set a goal: “Oh, I heard about these *jhānas*. I want to get them,” and then it doesn’t go so well, and then we need equanimity with that. That’s the whole thing. We’re going to talk about it. Part of what gives us equanimity is I’m not just doing this for myself. I’m showing up when it is going really not well, and it sucks, and it’s raining again in Devon, and whatever it is. And I’m doing this for other people. That’s part of what keeps you steady through the ups and downs. Open up the intention.

Does everyone know what the word ‘inertia’ means? Anyone not know what that means? Okay. Well, inertia, briefly, it’s a thing from physics. So something that’s stationary, you need to work to make it move, and something that’s already moving, you need to work to make it change its movement – either stop or go in a different direction. So what I want to say is: watch out for inertia. Watch out for inertia. How often, especially – a lot of you have been practising for years, if not decades – and how easily we can kind of just do what we usually do. And we kind of avoid the effort or the discomfort or the disturbance of trying something new in practice sometimes. So there’s even a default, certainly a default way of working with the breath: “I just always do it this way,” or a default way of breathing. It’s unconscious. “I just always breathe. I don’t really pay attention to how I breathe,” and it’s a bit

uncomfortable to try and play with the breath and make it breathe differently. Or which practice we do: “I tend to stay away from *mettā*” or whatever it is. Or, as I mentioned earlier, there can be inertia about how we listen to Dharma talks. So I maybe always go into this kind of like ... [laughter] and it’s just like ... [laughter] You know, let it just wash right through. So maybe if you’re used to that, what would it be to listen on your toes, and really listen with a discerning mind? “What does that imply?”, and “Oh, what are the exact differences between ...? How is that different, what I just heard, to what I’m used to hearing, or what I think I know?”

One of the fruits of *jhānas* is malleability of mind. Everyone knows what ‘malleable’ means? It means shapeability. **Actually, one of the most significant – we’ll talk about this – one of the most significant fruits of *jhāna* practice is malleability: malleability of consciousness, perception, mind. Like so many things, *jhānas* lead to malleability.** Guess what? Malleability leads to *jhānas*. In other words, it’s a condition for *jhānas*. So malleability now is the opposite of inertia. You’ve got to get in there and try different things in your playground: “Oh, I’ve never played on that whirly swing before.” Well, get on it and give it a go. And that might mean something very subtle about what you’re doing, or it might mean a different practice, or whatever it is. *Jhānas* lead to malleability, malleability leads to *jhānas*. You won’t access *jhānas* unless you’re willing to be malleable, and you play and you play, and get into trying different things. You’ve got to be, in a way, practising on your toes, ready, responsive. We’ll talk a lot about this.

So malleability, on one hand. At the same time, with it, we want firm, clear, simple intention or resolve. It’s a kind of a complement to malleability. In other words, we are here to do *jhāna* practice. I’m very clear: that’s my priority. That’s what I’m here for, and that’s clear. It’s very simple. It’s complex what it *involves*, but the *intention* is simple, and it’s a resolve, and it’s firm. It’s clear, simple, and firm. Again, this is *immensely* significant. It doesn’t sound like a big deal. It will make or break your practice, dependent on some intention, if you’re not taking care of that. So when I say ‘*jhāna* practice’ (and again, I’ll elaborate on a lot of what I’m talking about here), I mean including the hindrances, including working with the difficulties. When I say ‘*jhāna* practice,’ I mean also working with the difficulties, the yucky stuff, the sludge, and slogging away through it, etc. I mean also, when I say ‘*jhāna* practice,’ the whole relationship with practice, the whole view of the self doing the practice, and trying to do the practice. I mean the whole relationship with goals and effort, the whole conceptual framework of all that, the self as meditator. All that is included in what I call ‘*jhāna* practice,’ not just the lovely bits about how to move from the second to the third *jhāna* or whatever.

[48:21] So malleability and clear, simple, firm resolve in doing *jhāna* practice. What that means, practically speaking, is it’s too much to then add, “Oh, great, three weeks at Gaia House. *Mettā*’s always been easy and familiar to me, and when I’ve tried breath practice, I always get this kind of constriction in my throat. Maybe I’ll use this retreat to see if I can clear up that constriction.” No. Okay? I mean, it may happen, it may not happen, but don’t make it an intention. As I said before, or to say what I said before in a different way, go with whatever practice is easiest for the well-being, the *pīti* to arise. Listen to what I’m saying. I’m not saying, “Go with whatever practice you feel you can stick with the object the longest for.” Go with whatever practice is the *easiest for the well-being to arise*. Okay? So I’m not trying to fix this constriction in my neck. I’m also not going to, “Oh, three weeks, I can also develop my yoga practice, and get into that, or perfect my lotus pose or whatever, or

kick my caffeine habit or whatever.” All of these may be really good things, but once we start expanding the intention that way, it actually, in a subtle way, starts to fray something.

Okey-doke. So I mentioned the hindrances, and I really want to stress this point (I’ll say it over and over): I’m including that in *jhāna* practice. By ‘*jhāna* practice,’ I mean a very big picture, including the times when it’s really not going well, and those particular difficulties, and how we relate to them, and how we work with them. They are – sometimes I call them – they are the dark, rich underbelly of *jhāna* practice: the hindrances, the stuff we really don’t like. They have their own gold, they deliver their own gold, if I work with them the right way. And I would dare to say, if you spent a whole three weeks, and you never made it to any *jhāna* at all, but you got wise in relation to the hindrances (and I’ll explain what I mean by that), this retreat would still be worth its weight in gold. **Hindrances are life afflictions. They don’t just come in meditation. They affect our life, and to really know how to work with them, and to be wise in relation to them, it’s a tremendous, tremendous bonus, a gift, a benefit.**

So that whole yucky side, the difficult side of practice, the hindrances, is just as valuable as the loveliness, okay? I’m not bullshitting when I say this. I really, really mean it. If we can find, open up some wisdom there, relate in a wise way – I’ll say more about this, but two principal things, what I mean by ‘wisdom.’ I’ll repeat it later. It means that we don’t believe the hindrances any more. We don’t believe the stories they spin. So if you can move towards not believing the hindrances, that’s massive in your life. That’s such a huge gift. **If you can also move towards being okay with hindrances arising without it having any sense of implication about your self, or your worth, or your value as a meditator – in other words, you’re not taking them personally, not believing them and not taking them personally – if you can move towards those two kind of places or stances in relation to the hindrances, that is absolutely magnificently huge.** It doesn’t sound so sexy, it doesn’t sound so glamorous and glitzy and whatever, but in terms of what it delivers for your life, it’s huge.

So I’m including all that. It’s part of the framework. And again, all this, what I’m saying now, implies something in your practice. It implies something about your intention. It implies something about your view. It implies something about your attitude. So it will make differences in terms of moment-to-moment stances, views, perspectives, relationships, attitudes, heart qualities, etc. Don’t let it be just me, “*Blah blah blah.*” This is part of you being on your toes. You’re translating this. [snapping fingers] What does it mean in this moment now? “Oh, yeah, that’s ...” What does it mean to just turn around the whole view, open up the whole view of what we’re doing? Because who has not heard a talk on the hindrances before? Who has not heard ten talks on the hindrances before? Who amongst has not heard a hundred? [laughter] What we want is to *change* something, and the way we – well, we’ll get into the hindrances more later on.

Let’s broaden this. From the hindrances, let’s open out right now to talk about emotions, and particularly difficult emotions, in the context of a *jhāna* retreat. Context, context, context. I really want to emphasize or offer a context for the whole of the path, and then place this retreat within that larger context, okay? **To me, I feel, of fundamental importance – I feel really strongly about it – our whole path, the movement we make, the opening, the learning, the development we make on the whole path, it needs to include a development, a deepening of our psychological awareness, certainly in relation to ourselves, but also in relation to others.** And that’s a whole big subject. To me, that’s part of the path. It’s part of the path nowadays much more so, and we can talk about this another time, perhaps. It’s

different than when the Buddha was alive. We have different psychologies. The whole sense of self is different. The implication is actually what liberation *is* is something different nowadays. I'm not going to get on a sidetrack by that, but we can pick it up.

What it means is, these days, liberation needs to include a certain depth and breadth, and capacity, and sophistication, and sensitivity with regard to what we might call psychological awareness of self and other. **The whole path, for me, and the way I would teach and portray the whole path, is it must include within that emotional discernment and emotional capacity.** The heart is big and can hold *a lot*. It has a range, a whole range, emotional range – all kinds of emotions, not just *these* kinds. That there's, in the emotional discernment that's part, to me, of what an awakened being has or does or is, that there's a tremendous amount of subtlety there with regard to the emotions and the discernment and the working with emotions. Also with regard to the emotions and the whole path: healing – that we are healing; we have healed; we understand that; we're capable of working with that. I'm just making a list now. We're perfectly happy regarding the emotions as 'real,' and having real causes, and relating to them and caring for them as real entities with real causes. *And* we're perfectly happy regarding them as thoroughly empty, and not real, and not being really caused by real things. There's a range of view, and we're skilled in many different approaches and perspectives regarding the emotions.

So this, to me, is the bigger context in regard to emotions on the whole of the path. Now we're on a three-week, or whatever it is, 23-day *jhāna* retreat. We're setting this retreat in context, in that much bigger context where we want all of that list of what I just said with regard to the emotions. **Now, for this three weeks, our first choice with regard to difficult emotions – with regard to joy and things and peace, we'll talk more about this as we go on – but with regard to difficult emotions, our first choice is simplifying: psychologically simplifying, and letting them quieten, or encouraging them to quieten.**

Now, if someone does that, if that's their *only* relationship with the emotions for the whole of their path, I'm not okay with that. I'm really not okay with that. But if someone doesn't know how to do that, and cannot move into that gear, I'm also not so okay with that. **When we allow the emotions, difficult emotions, to quiet, when we simplify all their complexity – and their complexity can be beautiful and very important at times, but on this retreat, this is what we're doing on this retreat. This is our primary, our first choice way of working, of relating. When we simplify and quieten them that way, there's still care there.** We're not being hard or dismissive or brutal in any way. There's still care there. So it's the first choice. It's not *always* – we're not always; there are some other options and second choices there. It's a temporary preference, set in a much bigger context.

Some of you, I know, have been working very hard recently as activists in different areas. Some of you, I know, in regard to climate change, in all kinds of things, Extinction Rebellion, and things like that – climate change, species extinction, whatever it is. And I don't know where you're at now. It's all very recent. It's all very much alive and in our faces. You may still be feeling that passion and that burning, and there may be grief. I don't know. There may be some grief around all that. It's around. It's up for a lot of people. I certainly feel it. It's really important. That passion and that grief are really important.

Some of you – certainly in this country, and maybe even in other countries – might be feeling grief, maybe even upset, at the recent election here. You may. You may not. Some of you – and again, I don't know – some of you may be feeling grief in relation to me and my situation, my health, and probably

dying, etc. And of course, there may be other things that you're feeling are impacting the heart right now – difficult to bear; there's a sense of loss, of things falling apart or whatever. Related to what I said before, I want for you that you have a really very wide and deep range of approaches for your soul. I want that for your souls, so that you're able to open to grief, and really open, but you're able to hold it and hold it well, hold it in a way that heals. I want that for you, and I also want that you can decide sometimes *not* to pick it up, and instead go for the positive, the joyful, the *jhānic* direction, the quietening of emotions, which happens in *jhāna* via joy anyway. You go through the bubblyness and the joy, and then things start to quieten. So here on this retreat – although I want *all* this for you – here on this retreat, as I said, the latter approach is primary, this quieting.

This is a big deal. There's no danger, I think, if you are not sure. There's no danger of not being able to find the grief later, okay? It's important to say this. If you have three weeks where you tend to make a certain direction of choice – not pushing it away, not shutting it down, just “I'm not so much going there” – there's no danger that you won't be able to find it later on, *if* it's authentic, say, grief or whatever, after the retreat. There's no danger that you're going to get locked in some kind of mode of relationship with your emotions or your heart that you're kind of locked into this mode of not feeling certain emotions. No danger at all. Okay? Three weeks, you can practise this malleability. There's no danger of those things. Again, we want the gift of flexibility, of range.

So I don't know, right now. Let's take a few minutes, okay? I just want to follow this up for a few minutes. If there is something that has affected your heart, *is* affecting your heart, something to do with loss – anything: it could be in relation to nature. It could be in relation to social situations. It could be a personal relationship or whatever, a loss or impending loss. If you have some sense of something is falling apart or potentially falling apart, some grief, some overwhelm, if there's something like that, let's take a moment. Maybe come into a meditation posture, just for a few moments together. I want to do something.

[1:03:25, guided meditation begins]

So it doesn't matter what it is. It also doesn't matter if there's nothing in particular. But it may be, as I said, that your heart is impacted, is finding it hard to bear what human beings are doing to the earth, to our own, the ecosystem, the planet that keeps us alive and sustains our civilization, what we're doing to the other species. It may be there's a personal loss, or the possibility of a personal loss, some relationship, someone you care about or love, or there has been that loss. It may be that you're feeling grief or dismay or anger at some of what's going on or what goes under the heading of political – but it's not really political, it's ethical: the rise of nationalism, racism; seeming corporate stranglehold on democracy; simply the prevalence of stupidity. Anything like that.

Just in your meditation posture, let the uprightness and the firmness of your posture help you. These are big deals, big movements, big changes, asking a lot of us. Let your posture help you – open, grounded, upright. So bring whatever it is, or whichever ones of those, bring them to mind. Just bring them lightly to mind. No need to get into a whole story. Just get a sense of what is happening, what might be happening, and how it affects your heart, how it affects your soul.

Let your attention and awareness include your whole body, the whole space of your whole body. That's your base, that whole space. Open up the awareness. You're letting that whole space be in touch with these challenges, these difficulties, these happenings, these developments. Upright, open. Just notice how your heart is right now. Whole body – keep that whole body space open. Keep opening the whole body. Don't let it shrink. It *will* shrink; keep opening it.

And feel your heart in response, or how it responds to these situations, whatever it is. Let there be a little spaciousness, a little softness around your heart's response. Whole body. But then, not so much emphasizing the spaciousness or the softness. Let that be there, but rather, how do I want to work? How do I want to live in response to this loss, this falling apart, whatever it is? How do I want to manifest in relationship to it?

I'm not talking about the practical details: "I'm going to do this. I'm going to sign up for that. I'm going to get a job doing this." I mean just the quality of being, the stance of being, the relationship, the resolve – heart, soul, being, whole body. What am I devoted to? With all this that I'm potentially facing, that we are potentially facing, what am I devoted to? It doesn't matter about the details. Can I get a sense of it in a way that makes a difference to my sense right now? It might be the Buddha. It might be the Dharma. Maybe you use the *rūpa* at the front of the hall, of the Buddha there. It might be a certain image that you've worked with, and that's what you're devoted to. It might be something a bit more abstract like goodness or beauty or love. Get a sense of what you're devoted to, so you're holding your body, your heart, the difficulty, and this sense of devotion.

Can you sense that devotion in the body and in the way it shapes the body, in the way it energizes the body, in the way the body forms itself around it, in the way the body aligns with that devotion? Connecting body, devotion. Heart, soul, body. Can you get a sense of how the sense of devotion actually energizes the body right now? Inner stillness. There's a sense of resolve there. Can you feel it in the body space? We're not going into practical details: "I resolve to do this every day. I resolve ...". More the *energetic* sense of resolve, of devotion. Can you feel in the sense of devotion in the body, in the sense of resolve, can you feel that there's strength there, and you feel it in the body? There's uprightness there.

Not suppressing anything here, but in this alignment of the heart and the mind, the soul, the being, the body, with what we're devoted to, in relation to what is difficult, the resolve and the devotion, the energization, the uprightness – this becomes a kind of minimum base of happiness. There's well-being in this state. Equanimity is here, well-being, uprightness, energy, etc. In relation to what we've said with this, certainly with regard to *jhāna* work, this kind of basis of strength, of stability, of a very base level of happiness there. And it transfers to our life, for our work or whatever we're doing. It builds, expands our capacity to serve. Of course, the *jhānas* do as well.

[1:12:21, guided meditation ends]

Okay. So you can just gently come out of that now. Do you get a sense of what I'm talking about here? Does it make energetic sense? Yes? So that was very quick. That's one possibility with difficult emotions, and as I said, there are so many other skills, etc. But this kind of thing, it's important, given –

and I know some of you have come from a lot of busyness in activism, etc., or whatever it is right now, and other things that are going on.

Okay. Kirsten or Sari. Which one of you ...?

Kirsten: Thank you, Rob. So I also just wanted to say a very, very, very warm welcome. It's really lovely to sit with you here. I really, really enjoy it, and I'm so delighted, Rob, that after nearly two years, actually this can happen. So I'm really very touched and grateful and appreciative that Rob, after sixteen years wanting to teach this, finally has three weeks to do so. I'm really, really delighted – delighted to be here with you.

So here we are landing together. So Rob gave each of us five minutes, so now I'll try my very, very best.

Rob: It doesn't matter! [laughs]

Kirsten: So what I would really like to speak a little bit about is how we create this container together. It's really so lovely for me to sit in this hall, and already having a sense of being welcomed in this vessel of Gaia House. These important gifts – at least in me, something feels really welcomed, you know? I can relax already a little bit. Can you sense this, just arriving here?

And also really appreciating what Rob alluded to here, that we all are participating in this. We are all contributing. We're all participating to enhance, to make this vessel even more beautiful. And we're all needed, we are all needed in this. We are all active ingredients, important ingredients, needed ingredients – welcomed and appreciated ingredients. I really want to welcome you all into this.

I think one very beautiful, beautiful ingredient is all those shared intentions of non-harming; this shared celebration of our moral sensibility, one could say – our ethical consideration. I think this is something uniquely human, you know. This is something that makes us human. So really inviting the explorations, the examination. This territory of moral sensibility, one could say, is a way to celebrate our humanness. It's a way to celebrate that – what is precious in the human heart.

And traditionally, of course, as you all know, these moral sensibilities, this intention of non-harming, is expressed in the five precepts, and I just will name them in a moment. I really just want to name them. I really want to just bring them into the room. I want to make them part of our *maṇḍala* here. And of course, you all are aware that they are somehow just headlines or gateways to actually very powerful, actually quite unfathomable explorations of what it may mean to be alive.

And as Rob said before, when we were speaking shortly up in the teacher wing, they're a great foundation for *samādhi* – a way we can appreciate our heart, we can appreciate each other, and this precious gift of safety, safety to each other. Listen, step into it. Really see if you can step into this beautiful intention – or this beautiful pathway of intentions they actually evoke. That takes a training, to not intentionally harm or kill another human being. When you resonate with the beauty of this intention, this point of reverence, we together, here, undertake a training to not take what has not been freely given, and to respect each other's property, and respect all that is given to us. We undertake the training to not harm another with expressions of our sexuality. This doesn't make one's sexuality wrong, or is a moral statement, but we give each other the freedom not to look at each other in this way, so that we can be at ease in this way with each other. We undertake the training to not intentionally hurt ourselves and others with our words. And of course, this might be mostly internal

speaking, but we pay attention: how do we speak in our practice, to ourselves and to each other? And we take a resolve to not take any substances that cloud our mind, because we really want to explore the depths of what is possible for this human consciousness. We want to explore, we want to inhabit, we want to really know it deeply, what is possible here. And of course, this doesn't mean that you stop taking any medication, you know. Of course, look after yourself. So how does this ring with you?

And when Rob was speaking, and I was just sitting here a little bit, first of all, to see already this appreciation in your faces. I don't think it's a projection. When Rob came in – you know, just a lot of appreciation to be here with us and with him. And then also maybe having this sense for a moment to appreciate each other in our intention, in our precious gift, that people can actually feel safe around us – this precious gift of the intention of non-harming. And delighting, you know, to be welcomed in the community where this is a shared intention, but also I think, really, really important to delight in the goodness of your own intention. To delight, that your heart actually feels really moved to incline itself in this way.

Thank you. I'm really looking forward to practice with you, and may you all have a wonderful retreat with delights and joy.

Sari: Hi, everyone. It's really lovely to sit here together, and I felt so much appreciation listening to Rob, and being here together, starting and embarking on this journey together. A really, really warm welcome from my side as well. And at the same time with appreciation, I can feel a sense of a little bit of wobbliness, sitting for the first time on this side in the hall of Gaia House, instead of that side with you. But seeing all your friendly faces brings so much encouragement, and I feel a sense of support and friendliness and heartfulness in the hall. So I'm very much looking forward to our time together, journeying through the territory of *jhānas*, and all the exploration and sharing and learning together.

I was just wishing to say a few words about silence. Silence, that is such an essential part of this retreat container, and also so much supporting what we are doing here together as we're exploring the mind. And as we're creating conditions for the *samādhi*, for the silence of the mind also to deepen, and hopefully, the silence can be, at the same time, a resource for us, really deeply nourishing our heart and mind – can be almost like a companion on the journey for us, hopefully. And this is also something that we are cultivating and creating and nourishing together, the kind of part of the container that we can be offering ourselves the silence, and offering each other the silence – a gift of silence which can really help ourselves and each other in becoming more sensitive. It's really so supportive. And hopefully, we can still enjoy each other, and feel each other's support, as it was talked about; that we can support each other in the silence, and feel a sense of community. It would be so much more difficult to do this retreat by ourselves at home.

So we were thinking that there would be a practical way to support our exploration, a practice of supporting silence, and we are very much offering this possibility, and also encouraging you to hopefully make use of that. And we will be bringing here a basket where you're very much invited and encouraged to bring and leave your mobile phones for the duration of the retreat. So you could bring the phone and mark it with your name, and we will take care of the mobile phone, and you will surely get it back in the end of the retreat. This could be actually also part of this ritual of simplifying and

renunciation, and letting go, and also for the sense of creating the condition that can support ourselves and each other to make the most of this journey.

So this basket will arrive here, I think, right after, but it will be at least available until tomorrow morning.

Nathan: It's there.

Sari: It's there. Thank you, Nathan. And you're very welcome to bring your little friends there and leave them with us. I'm really, really, really happy and grateful to be sharing this journey together, and meet you in the interviews, and wish you all a very, very fruitful retreat.

Rob: Thank you. So we've already been sitting for a little while. I'd like to do a guided meditation, but I think we probably need to move a little bit, so why don't we take two minutes, and just move your body however you feel like you need, whatever's going to be good, because we're probably going to be a little bit longer. We're going to sit. So just shake it, wiggle, stretch, whatever it needs.

¹ SN 12:23.

² Rob Burbea, *Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising* (Devon: Hermes Amāra, 2014).

³ SN 12:23.

Counting Within the Breath (Guided Meditation)

Okay. As I mentioned, we're going to be offering, in the first – I don't know – five days or so, quite a few different practices for you to try, or not. Like I said, if you already know Newton Abbot, it's fine. It's okay. But still, some of them can be really worthwhile. This one I want to offer tonight, it seems that it's not that well-known, so it might be quite new to most of you, maybe. It involves counting with the breath. Like I said, it may be breath isn't even your thing, it turns out, but that's fine. We're just offering some things.

Now, many people are familiar with counting. You count breaths up to ten, right? That's quite common. Or you just count indefinitely – 3,790 ... Or one counts up to ten, and then sometimes one counts before the breath, or after the breath, right? That's quite familiar? Yeah? What I want to do now is count *within* the breath. For example, if I take a long breath, for the duration of that long breath, I can count: one, two, three, four, five, etc., down till nine. And then at nine, at the cusp of the breath, at the turning point of the breath, when that's the longest comfortable breath, the longest possible comfortable breath, then I turn it around: nine, eight, seven, six. And then if I do a slightly shorter breath, I can do a breath that, at the same rate of counting, the length of breath would fit to six. So it's about two-thirds. Then I can do a shorter breath, which would be three – so one, two, three; three, two, one. I could go to one, but we're not going to do that.

So that's it. Let's do it. I'll explain why I'm offering it after we've done it, and say a few more things. Very simple.

[3:00, guided meditation begins]

So meditation posture, we'll talk about that later, but it's upright, comfortable. It needs to be comfortable. Upright, relaxed, open. The posture should reflect the state of attention, the state of consciousness – this balance between uprightness and alertness and energization on the one hand, and relaxation and openness and softness on the other hand. Somehow the posture, someone looking at you just gets a sense of that poise. Somehow that posture captures all of that. And then the mind has it as well. The consciousness, the *citta* has it. So find that posture. Establish yourself in that posture. Feel the posture. Feel, sense, how the posture reflects that poise I just talked about, between those sort of complementary qualities of the *citta*, how the posture expresses that balance.

Just take a few moments to feel, while you're still feeling the whole posture, feel the connection, the sensations of contact with the cushion, the bench, the chair, with the feet or the legs on the floor. Then open it again to the whole body. I mean the whole space, a little bit bigger than your anatomical, physical body. You're sensitive to that whole space. Many times, your attention is going to shrink – countless times. You just keep opening it up to that whole space.

Now, this may be a little tricky, this first part. I want you to keep that whole-body awareness, and keep opening it up, keep returning to it, as many times as you need it (which will be many, many times). So you notice when it shrinks, and then you open it up. It might be a little awkward at first. You start to breathe. You do not need to move a lot of air. What's the longest comfortable breath that you can take? It needs to be comfortable, and in fact, you *don't* want to move a lot of air. We're not hyperventilating or anything. It's just very subtle, long, slow, smooth, and comfortable as possible. And see if you can kind of gauge what it would be to put a count to nine of that, and then a downwards count from nine to one on the out-breath. It takes a little while just to estimate, and kind of get a feel what's about the right length. Let it be comfortable. Find what's comfortable. Open up the awareness to the whole space of the body. Open up that awareness. Keep opening it.

Take whatever time it takes to gauge the right length and the right sort of speed of counting, if you like. Whole-body awareness. Long, slow, comfortable breath. The longest comfortable breath that's possible. Not a lot of air. And with the counting, take your time to get the sense of the pacing of the breath and the counting. Once you've found that, just stick with that. One to nine, nine to one, with this long, slow, comfortable, smooth, and actually relatively subtle breath.

And what am I concentrating on here? You've actually got four things, potentially, that you're holding together in your attention. Potentially three or four objects:

- (1) The breath, this long in-breath or out-breath, and the sense of that, the sense of where it is.
- (2) You've got the whole energy body, the whole space of the body, and what that feels like. You're holding that. You're sensitive to that as well as the breath.
- (3) If you have a visual imagination, you have a third thing that you're concentrating on, holding in mind, and that's the visual sense of the numbers, the numerals, right there: 1, 2, 3. Bring some energy. See them, bright, bright like the sun. White, golden light. Bright, shining, with the breath, with the whole body.
- (4) And you might, as well, have a fourth, which is the aural, the inner hearing. You're hearing yourself say each number: one, two, three. So you have maybe three, maybe four objects here: the whole body space, how that feels; the breath; and either or both the visual sense, the imagination of the number, and the aural sense. Let yourself hear them, loud and clear – not shouting, but loud and clear.

So four things your attention has to hold together, coordinate, and really open yourself to, give your attention to them.

Don't worry if you don't have a visual imagination. Just go with the inner hearing. If you can do both, great. Keep stretching that attention – the whole body, whole body space, filled with alive, alert presence and sensitivity.

Let this long breath open up the sense of the body. Meet every number. Be there. Sense it, alive. If you're drowsy, make those numbers brighter. Make them louder. Keep opening up the awareness – the whole space, larger than the body. Keep opening it, again and again and again. To have to keep all of these three or four objects at once helps, gives the mind something to do. You can still play with giving an emphasis to one of them, or another one of them. But always you keep the whole body sense. Never lose that, even if it's in the background.

Then when you feel ready, let the breath become just a little shorter – still pretty long – to the count of six. So whatever the same pace of counting and breathing, it's a breath that's about two-thirds of that size, and you have a count of six in, and six back down on the out-breath. You've got all these objects: the whole space of the energy body, the breath in and out, perhaps the visual sense of the numbers, and the hearing internally of the numbers.

Perhaps you might begin to notice *when* it is, in the cycle, that you tend to space out a little: "I always kind of miss the beginning," or "I'm not quite as present at the end of a cycle," or "when it turns around," or whatever it is. Just a little less bright, maybe. A little less alert, a little less there. See if you can notice where that is for you right now, and just apply a bit more intention there. Really show up then. Intend to show up. Make it alive there. Be really present.

Keep opening up that attention, whole body space, again and again and again. Fill it with awareness. Fill it with alive presence. Inhabit the whole of that space with sensitivity. Make the numbers, make each number loud and clear, and/or bright and clear to the inner eye.

And then when you're ready, allowing the breath, supporting the breath, shaping the breath to a shorter breath, to the count of three at the same pace. It's a relatively short breath. Comfortable, smooth. Quite slow. Whole-body awareness. Whole space, filled with presence, alive, bright. Each number.

Make it work for you. What do you need to do right now to make this work for you, make it come alive? What helps? If you want, for a few breaths, you can play with – if you've got a visual imagination – imagine the numbers behind you. Usually we construe things in front of us. What if they're behind us? Just play. Whole-body awareness.

When you're ready, coming back to the slightly longer breath with the count of six. Comfortable, smooth. Opening the body with the breath. Opening the attention to the whole body. Holding this multiply-aspected object in the attention, engaging with it, open to it.

And then, again, when you're ready, just returning shortly to the longest breath, with the count of nine. The longest comfortable breath, smooth, slow, long and comfortable. The numbers bright, loud, clear. Opening your attention. Opening the body.

[29:20, guided meditation ends]

And when you're ready, just letting your breath return to normal, whatever that is right now. Seeing if you can keep this whole-body awareness, and opening your eyes when you're ready.

How was that? Was that difficult, awkward? Yes? For everyone? Anyone find it helpful at all? Yeah? Some people? It may or may not be helpful to you. Beware of what I said earlier, about inertia. Why do I even offer this one? A couple of reasons, which are worth going into. Most people, at the beginning of a retreat, you may feel like your mind is a box of frogs, and you're very agitated or whatever. Most people actually suffer from low energy. Their mind might also be a box of frogs as well, but there's generally a pretty low energy, and the long breath will energize. It energizes your energy system, and it will open the body that way and energize the mind. Mostly, at the beginnings of retreats, that's often what's needed. Or a busy day, etc. – again, you might feel frazzled and agitated, but actually there's (maybe *as well*) a low energy.

So the long breath is really, really helpful in bringing energy. In this particular practice, it's tricky, because it takes a while to get used to it: “How do I actually find a count of nine to that? And how long? And that's too long, and it's uncomfortable, and then it's not smooth,” etc. But it's a really powerful practice. Don't underestimate. That practice, what we just did, actually even just the first stage of it, just with the nine, could take you right up to the edge of the first *jhāna*, potentially. So don't underestimate its power, if you want to play with it. If you don't, that's also fine. But bear in mind what I said about inertia.

If you *do* want to play with it, you can do it any time. I mean, it can be a good start to the practice. It can be good at the beginning of the retreat. But it could be something you're doing in three weeks' time, or three years' time or whatever – it's just part of your practice that you use, either a lot, or now and then. Really any time. If you find it helpful, it can be developed as something really quite helpful.

Why? What's the advantage here? Maybe it's obvious to you. When we count within a breath, it's like we're putting more pegs for the attention. There are more pegs for the attention to grab hold of, right? In the same period of time, one in-breath, let's say, there's not much there. It's very easy for the mind to get lost. The mind's given more to do here, and more to kind of really peg the attention in. And the pegs are clearer, and louder, potentially, and brighter, and all that's going to allow the consciousness to kind of coalesce more in an energized way. So it's there if you want. Some people, some portion of people, will find this extraordinarily helpful, if you bother to develop it, if you take the time to develop it. For other people, it's like, “Okay, whatever.” But it's there.

[33:47] Okay. Tomorrow, Kirsten and Sari will lead a session for anyone who wants any input, or advice, or feedback, or help around your posture. It's important for *jhāna* practice that you're comfortable, that actually your body is comfortable. I spent the first – I don't know how many years of my meditative life really uncomfortable in my body, and it was only when Christina suggested to me, “Why don't you alternate postures, and sit cross-legged?” I had some soccer injuries, both knees. “Why don't you just sit sometimes on the floor, and sometimes ...?” And that's the point where my *samādhi* took off. It actually allowed my body to be comfortable enough. It's really important that the posture is supportive. So do come, get some input, ask in interviews, etc. And consider that, for some of you, it's a lot of stress on the body to sit all day in one posture. If it's not, it's fine, but if it is, then consider alternating postures – maybe kneeling, and whatever it is.

In *jhāna* practice, we *are* interested in working with pain, so that *does* have its place in *jhāna* practice very much. It's very important. But we're going to do that later. You can't start with that. It doesn't work so well. First get comfortable. Let's get the thing going, and then we can introduce allowing the pain to be there, and relating to the pain within the *jhāna* practice. But that comes later.

Good to move as well. You'll be doing a lot of sitting, a lot of slow walking and standing. It's good to move in the day. So if you've got a yoga practice, or qigong, or whatever, yeah, that can be really helpful, moving the energies, taking care of the body, etc. I suppose – I don't know – maximum, like an hour a day, or something like that. But it can really be supportive, you know, if you're sitting a lot, and walking and standing a lot.

Also, go for walks. In other words, go for a walk out there, off the grounds, with the idea of enjoying yourself, and opening the heart, taking in the beauty, appreciating, opening the senses, etc. So *do* do that. The question of whether – we're still on movement now – you should go running or not, that's a sensitive one. It can vary from individual to individual, and the same individual at different times. Sometimes running, or that kind of more vigorous exercise, is exactly what we need for the energy to get a bit more circulated [when] it's getting very stagnant. Other times, running is actually just disturbing the energy. This is part of the art and the responsiveness. You're going to have to feel and get a sense, "Is this going to help right now? I actually don't know. I'm going to try. I don't know." But it's there as a possibility. If it's something you do, it's something you want to pay attention to: how is that affected, etc., the energy, the body?

As I said, a lot of interviews on this retreat. Tomorrow, or rather after tomorrow until near the end of the retreat, we're going to be signing you up for interviews. So you look on the board, and you see, "My interview is at such-and-such a time, with this teacher, in this room." So you have to check, "When's my interview?" Yeah? Tomorrow, though, what we'll do is, if you feel like you want an interview – some of you have been here for a while; some of you may have things on your [mind], whatever it is – if you feel like you could benefit from an interview, please put your name on the sheet of blank paper marked "Who wants an interview tomorrow?" It's already up there. Please put your name, and one of us will see you tomorrow. We'll give you a time, etc. And I think, yeah, at some point we'll stop taking interviews tomorrow, and that will be it. But that will be some point in the afternoon. If you know *now* that you're going to want an interview tomorrow, put it up now, because it helps us plan our times and rooms and things like that. So you may not want one; that's fine. Probably the next day, we'll tell you when to come, and then we might change that. We'll see how that goes. But there are going to be a lot of interviews.

And with the interviews, again, on this retreat, please see it in the larger context. Usually on a *vipassanā* (insight) retreat, bring *anything* into an interview – anything about your life, or about whatever difficulty, or some situation, or relationship, or whatever it is, and we can talk about it. On a soulmaking retreat, bring anything, and we look at it: "How can it become soulmaking?", etc. On *this* retreat, what we mostly want to hear about is what's happening in your *jhāna* practice. It's not that we're not interested in the rest of your life, but part of the supporting conditions, we're really kind of containing the content of the interviews. So that's what you bring: what's happening on the cushion? What's happening in the walking? What's happening in the way you're thinking about the practice? I

mean, not 100 per cent, but generally speaking, we want to try and do that. And that, I think, will be really helpful.

Okay. If you've got any business left over, things you need to take care of, calls you need to make, emails, if you need to write an email or whatever it is – hopefully not, but any business, if you can do that tonight, that would be great. It's going to be so helpful, way more than even for a usual retreat, if you can just put unfinished business aside, and just really get into enjoying being here, relaxing and opening. So if you *can* do that tonight or, at the latest, first thing tomorrow morning, really do that as a gift to yourself. Just have it done.

Last thing: let me introduce, because of the complexities of my situation, and practicalities, and my needs, I've got three helpers on this retreat. They won't necessarily all be here at the same time, but they'll be coming and going, and you will see them. Sometimes there might be situations where they need to sort of jump to the start of the lunch queue and stuff like that, so can we just – everyone see them, so we know who ...? Do you want to stand up, guys? Please. This is Laurence, and right at the back is Lea, and Nic. Okay? So you will see them coming in and out. They're going to sit with us when they're here, but they'll be coming and going a lot, and as I said, they might need to do stuff. So just so you know what's happening there.

Last thing: slow down. But don't slow down *too* much, meaning we're not doing that very slow Mahāsi thing, if you know that – lifting, moving, placing, etc. That's not the pace that's helpful for what we're doing, okay? Neither is too speedy. Eventually you can be either very slow, or very speedy, and it's fine within the context of a *jhāna* practice. At the moment, we want a pretty slow, comfortable thing. Why? [silence] Okay, I'll tell you. [laughter] Because it's the pace, at first, at which you can move around and keep the whole-body awareness. Now, one way or another, whole-body awareness is going to be part of this practice. It might be very secondary. It might be a background thing. But it might be a foreground thing. When you get to *jhāna* – I'll talk about this more – it's all about whole-body awareness, anyway. But moving slowly around enables you to kind of keep that basic, whole-body awareness, that basic mindfulness. Too slow, and you get into the details too much, and you're just backing up the queue for whatever – people want to go to the toilet. But it's also a different practice. Too fast, it's actually hard at first. So that's why I'm saying "slow down." It's part of the whole kind of energetic awareness we want to gradually cultivate, this bubble of resource. So find that pace where actually that's what you're doing when you're moving around – you've got some sense of the whole body, and the energy of the whole body. That's the sort of pace.

Okay. Long evening. Thank you for your patience. Sleep well, and have a good night's rest, and we'll see you – well, 6:45 to 7:30 here for the sitting, and then there's the posture session. There's the ritual with the phones. There are all kinds of things tomorrow. But see you tomorrow at some point, yeah? Okay.

[*Transcriber's note: this closing was followed by some practical retreat information, omitted in this transcript.*]

The Energy Body and the Whole-body breath (Instructions and Guided Meditation)

As I mentioned last night, the first – I don't know – five or six (something) days will be quite dense with teachings, and then it should get a little more sparse. So again, it's quite a lot to get through. Fortunately, there are only *jhāna* retreat people on tea wash-up tonight, so if we go a little into the teatime, it shouldn't really affect anything, because those tea wash-uppers will go as a team to do that, right? But let's see how we do. It shouldn't be that long.

Okay. I want to start with a guided meditation in a minute, and then talk some after that. Again, as I mentioned last night, it doesn't really matter how you get to Newton Abbot, and you can go in what look like completely opposite directions, and you still get to Newton Abbot. And actually, they take roughly the same time or whatever.

So yesterday we offered this counting that, for most of you, will have been unfamiliar. I think tomorrow and the next day we'll offer techniques which are much more familiar, involving concentrating, focusing on the sensations that go with the breath at certain points in the body. The classical ones are upper lip, or nose, or in the abdomen. So we'll also offer that in this kind of buffet or smorgasbord, whatever, of what might work for you. And there are certainly possibly other practices that we're not even mentioning that are viable, that may work really well. Yeah, definitely. We'll offer a few.

So if you don't like this business about whole-body awareness and the energy body, don't worry. We will get to a much narrower focus as an alternative, not as a better or worse – as a perfectly equal, viable alternative. We'll get to that another time. But today, I do want to go a little bit more into what I call the energy body, or working with the whole-body breath. Energy body is a big subject, and it's actually quite hard to sum it up in a sort of pithy sentence. It's a concept that grows, that's elastic, that has all kinds of avenues to it. But what I want to talk about today a little bit is energy body for *samādhi*, okay? For those purposes. And I'm just going to say a little bit. I'm not going to do a whole exhaustive thing.

[3:17] Two terms to get a little bit used to: one is 'whole body.' When I say 'whole body' on this retreat, what I mean – and I'm not going to say it every time, so every time you hear 'whole body' from now on, what it means is your felt sense, in the moment, of this whole space, actually a little bit bigger than your physical body. That whole space, that's what 'the whole body' means, and the felt sense. So when I say "attention to your whole body," "awareness of the whole body," that's what I mean, okay? A bit bigger, a bit larger than your physical body. But I'm really talking about the *felt sense* of that whole space, okay? So 'whole body' is shorthand for that. If I mean something else, I'll try and say, "No, I really mean your toes," or whatever it is.

Okay. That's one vocabulary term. Another is just 'energy body.' What does this mean? Some of you are very familiar with this, some a lot less. Again, it's hard to pinpoint what actually is meant by that, but if we just start very simply, it's the vibration, the feeling, the texture, or the energy of this, of that space. That's really what we're talking about when we say that, just as an introductory idea. So texture, vibration, feeling, energy is slightly different than what we're used to: I can feel the sensations of my backside pressing on the chair, or if I stub my toe, I feel those sensations. They're slightly

different kinds of sensation. So we're actually talking about something that's a little bit more subtle. I remember being taught this by a monk when I was living in the States, and then going on a Mahāsi retreat, and having an interview with the teacher there, and explaining to him how I was working with the breath with this whole body. Of course they're very into mindfulness of body in the Mahāsi tradition and all that. He said, "What are you actually *paying attention* to?" So even for a long-term meditator, it was a bit of a baffling concept. Certainly in our wider culture, it's like, "What do you *mean* when you say 'vibration,' 'texture,' 'feeling,' 'energy'?" We're not trained with the kind of quality or poise of attention that reveals that kind of realm or stratum of experience. It's just not in our culture. I mean, it's *getting* in the meditation culture, but like that story says about that teacher, it wasn't around. It's [around] a little bit more now.

So texture, feeling, vibration, energy, as opposed to sensation of contact or that kind of thing. But even this, these are vague terms, and it's more pointing in a certain direction, in which hopefully your experience will begin to open up, and you start to get more familiar and confident with all that.

Second aspect that I would like to pinpoint about when we say energy body: the sense of the body – and especially as we're talking about energy body for *samādhi* – the sense of the body is integrated. This area, this space, feels like one whole, as opposed to "my feet are kind of over there, and my head is up here, and it's all made of bits." As we move, certainly as we move towards *jhāna*, towards *samādhi*, it gets more and more integrated. It really feels like one body area, one realm or one texture of experience. So we could define 'energy body' like that, or let's be a little bit more helpful, I think, and just say that's the direction. It's going towards this sense of an integrated space, an integrated experience, body area.

Secondly, for integration, and related, is homogeneity – like milk, you know, homogenized. What's homogenous there? Not only is the *experience* homogenous, or tending more and more towards homogeneity, but the *awareness*, too, is homogenous – meaning I have less and less of a feeling of my awareness being *up here* [in the head area], kind of peering down at my body experience, *down there* somewhere. It's more like the awareness inhabits equally, homogenously, the whole space, and even a little bit bigger. So the whole thing is integrated and homogenized. And we could make that a *definition* of energy body awareness, but let's just make it – this is the *direction*. This is what we're kind of working towards. After a while, that just becomes the norm. It just immediately is integrated and homogenized. But like so many things in *samādhi*, we kind of ease it toward. That's what we're working towards.

Let me say something else before we do our meditation. I've noticed [this], and it may be true for other people apart from me. So again, we're talking about energy body with respect to *samādhi*. Now, *samādhi* is a cultivation. It has a direction. It has a goal that we're interested in. We're wanting to develop something. We can relate to the energy body just, "How does it feel?", "What's happening there?", "Oh, that's interesting. Can I accept that? Can I open to it?", etc. That's fine. That's one way of relating to energy body. But with the whole *samādhi* practice, we're actually interested: can I coax this space, this experience, this energy body? Can I coax it into something nice? Can I encourage that? There's a directionality and a desire there.

So with respect to the energy body, with respect to *samādhi*, it may be – in terms of how coaxable it is, what actually is possible to open up – it's actually much more sensitive in this context to something

like temperature of your physical body. So sometimes I wrap in blankets, or it's a cold day, so wearing a sweater, etc. I've noticed that if I dress like I would be comfortable in the house or wherever I am, or put a blanket on if I'm kind of like, "Yeah, it's a little cool," put a shawl on or whatever, I don't feel too warm. I feel fine. I feel comfortable. When I come to the *samādhī* practice, if I take that shawl off, a lot more opens up. Now, it's not like I take it off and then I'm shivering and my teeth are chattering. It's the kind of difference that usually I wouldn't even think about, I wouldn't need to make. If it's a hot day – let's say it's really hot, and I'm sitting in a t-shirt, and it's uncomfortably hot – this doesn't happen. So it's something, weirdly, to do with the shawl or the sweater or whatever.

So I may be the only human being that that is the case for, but I would encourage you, again, to experiment. Careful of that inertia. You might have the opposite. You might find that, "Actually, no. I need to be a little warmer." So what's the criteria? It's not, "Am I comfortable? How do I like it?" I don't like cold. I don't have anything apart from skin and bones, for a start, and my ancestry is North African, so I don't like cold. But it's not about that. We're always interested in what helps the energy body experience. It's this ongoing experiment. What helps? Check. Know yourself. You have to be willing to experiment with something like this. I'm just throwing that out as a little thing.

Okay. Let's do a guided meditation to start, and I'll talk later.

[12:38, guided meditation begins]

It's worth taking those few extra moments to really find that posture. Again, don't be lazy about this. Are you sitting, are you doing, just how you usually do, without paying much attention to it? Or are you taking the trouble to really find ...? It *feels* a certain way. When the posture reflects that kind of ideal balance between uprightness, alertness on the one hand, and openness, softness, receptivity on the other hand, it actually *feels* a certain way. We need to get it in the groove, and then, actually, you'll feel that affect your mind. So it's worth taking the trouble. Even if you've been meditating for thirty years, it's worth just finding that.

Again, starting by feeling the posture, feeling that balance of qualities that are beautiful – dignity, nobility – that are expressed by that balance between those complementary faculties of the *citta* or qualities of the *citta*. There's actually a poise, an uprightness, a firmness in the balance. It feels balanced, and it affects the *citta*. Feel the openness. Feel the receptivity, the softness in the body. Can you make it a little bit more open, a little bit more soft right now? What would you change? Can you feel the uprightness, the resolution, the alertness in the posture? What would you change to make it more right now? Subtle changes. Are you *willing* to change something in the posture right now?

So feeling the beauty of the posture. And then, when you're ready, opening up the awareness to embrace, to include, the whole body. What that means, again, is that whole space, a little bit bigger than your physical body. Just getting a felt sense of what that whole space feels like. Inhabit the whole space. Bright, alive sensitivity permeating, pervading that whole space.

So you don't have to get rid of any image of your physical form, your hands, your legs, your toes, if that's there, but you also don't have to reinforce it. What we're more interested in is the felt sense, the texture, the vibration of this space. So not a problem if there's an image of the body, but you don't have to reinforce it either. Eventually, that begins to fade. How does it feel? So the awareness will keep

shrinking. It will shrink a thousand times. And just keep opening it out to just a little bit bigger than the physical body space, and fill that with alive awareness, presence.

And then, keeping that whole-body awareness, just noticing the breath as it comes and goes. And noticing how it affects the whole body, how it affects the sense, the felt sense, of that whole space, how it feels in the whole space or makes that whole space feel. Of course, that changes with the in-breath, with the out-breath, at different points. Whole-body awareness, noticing the effects of the breath.

And then, when you're ready, beginning to establish this longest breath. Right now, not with a count. We'll leave the counting out. What's the longest comfortable breath? Not a strain, but way longer than you would usually take. Slow, smooth, comfortable. You don't need to move a lot of air. Relatively speaking, it's quite a subtle breath. So whole body space, felt sense of that; longest breath in and out – long, slow, smooth.

Now, can you notice this whole space, the whole body, can you feel the expansion of that whole space with the in-breath? And just what does that feel like? So it's not just your ribcage and your lungs; the whole body, that whole space, including where your feet would be, your head – places we don't usually think of as breathing. Actually that whole space is expanding. What does that feel like? And with the exhalation, there's a kind of opposite movement. What does *that* feel like? So in the whole space, attuned, alive, filled with awareness; the longest breath. Just how does it feel, the expansion and the contraction with the breath? Really tuning to that and feeling it.

[23:00] Keep with the long breath, the longest breath, even if it feels a little awkward. You can just gently work to make it comfortable, smooth, slow. That's the first work. The second work is the attention collapses countless times. No big deal. Just open it out again, stretch it. And then, third piece of work, fill that space with real bright presence. Fill that expanded space with bright presence. Tuning to the feeling. Keep opening the space to the whole body, the attention to the whole space.

Okay. So keeping this longest breath, keeping this whole-body awareness, is it possible to add an awareness, a sensitivity to notice – *can* you notice, is it possible, that with the in-breath, there is also a sense of energization? The in-breath naturally, organically energizes the whole space, and you can feel that, or see if you can feel that. How does it feel? Can you feel it right to the edges of the space, the whole body? Can you tune to, even enjoy, open to, this experience, the sense, the feeling of energization with the in-breath?

And with the out-breath, there's something like a feeling of relaxation, of letting go. It also has a certain range of feeling, of tone. Can you notice that? Can you feel that? Can you open to that and enjoy it? Energization through the whole space with the in-breath; a kind of relaxation, easing, letting go with the out-breath. Qualities of energy that fill the whole space with the in- and the out-breaths. So this is what we want to tune to, open to, really feel.

Open, opening the body with the breath, with the breath energy. Letting the breath energy open the body. And the attention, the awareness, open to that whole space and how it feels, over and over and over. Right there, in the moment, alive, feeling it, opening to it – even subtly enjoying it.

Now let's try one thing. If you can, imagine the breath coming into the body at the solar plexus. So obviously, usually we think of the breath coming in the mouth, the nose. Just imagine it coming in at the solar plexus. That's, maybe, even a kinaesthetic imagination. And this long breath coming in at the solar plexus, longest breath. How does that feel? How does it make the whole space feel, the in- and

out-breath, the longest breath in and out, there at the solar plexus? How does it affect the whole body, the whole space? Maybe you notice it's just the same expansion and contraction, or energization/relaxation. That's great. If that's what you notice, then tune into that, just as you've been doing.

But people are different, and some people notice as if the breath comes in there, perhaps, and there are currents that ripple out or emanate out from the solar plexus with the in-breath, for instance going *down* the body and *up* the body at the same time. The wave or the current of energy, the double current, up the body and down the body, from this point of the solar plexus. So you may notice that. How does that feel, if you *do* notice it? No problem if you don't notice something like that. You might want to try imagining it. Can you imagine the feeling, a kinaesthetic imagination, the breath coming in at the solar plexus, and currents going simultaneously in opposite directions, up the body and down the body? Just play. Imagine that. Whole body space, longest breath. How does it feel? Over and over, opening the attention, sensitive to the whole space, the whole body. Letting the breath open the body. The breath energy, letting it open the body.

Last thing to try for now. You may want to stay with that point in the solar plexus, or just go back generally to the whole body. It really doesn't matter. Whatever you feel works for you right now. But put a question in there, as something to experiment with: what length of breath, what kind of breath, really feels best right now – actually gives you the nicest feeling in that space, allows the space, the whole body, to feel most pleasant? And it might just be comfortable. So is it keeping this really longest breath? Is it a very short breath? Is it somewhere in between? Is it a kind of very, very subtle breath, or a grosser breath? Smooth or coarse? What feels best right now? What way of breathing feels best right now? You have to experiment.

So not just your default way of breathing. Not just let it go, "It feels comfortable because I'm used to it." Not just the default. Play. Experiment. It might be that this longest breath, and the way it really opens up the body, that's what feels really good right now, or even a little bit good. Or it may be that a much shorter, subtler breath feels somehow, perhaps, more soothing, or more gentle, and that's what feels really good right now, or somewhat good. Whole body space. Feeling how the breath, how the different kinds of breath, make that whole body space feel. Tuning to that, intimate with that, open to that.

What you're really doing is bringing a kind of sensitivity to the whole space, the whole body, and a willingness to play and experiment a little bit. It's all very light.

And when you're ready, just opening the eyes, coming out of the meditation.

[42:34, guided meditation ends]

Okay, so let's just briefly recap what we just did. These are things to play with, things to experiment with, if you want. You may find some or all of them useful at different times, and you incorporate, or none of them – whatever. So the posture: even if you've been meditating for thirty years, it's really worth taking the trouble. After a while, posture matters less for *jhāna*, but at the beginning, it's going to matter a lot, and this balance thing. So that's one thing. I'm not going to repeat what I said about 'whole body,' etc.; just what we did in the meditation. Longest breath, in this case, we started with – it

doesn't have to be. The same principles apply. Three kinds of things to pay attention to: **(1) the expansion and contraction of the whole space.** Not just your ribcage, but the whole space, and it feels a certain way. **(2) Second thing: the energization and relaxation, again, that you can feel in the whole space.** **(3) The third aspect, actually, which we'll pick up again, is the possibility that, within that whole space, you notice certain currents of energy.** Some do, some don't. And if you find that you just imagine them and then you can feel them, great, and it feels good, and feels helpful – just go for it. Imagine them.

So those three things to work with, and then this piece about what way of breathing feels good right now – the longest, very short, coarse, smooth, etc. So often, we just go into a default breath, and the only reason it feels comfortable is just because we're used to it. At that moment, it may well *not* be that helpful in terms of really energizing, and opening, and healing, and soothing, and moving towards *samādhi*. So we have to be, again, willing to let go of our inertia, if it's there.

Okay. I don't know – I'm not sure the right name, but I remember taking lots of yoga classes years ago, and stuff like that, and there's a way that some teachers would encourage us to breathe while we were doing the postures. So it goes like: [strained breathing sound]. Yeah, *ujjayi*. No, we don't want it. Why? Because, great as it might be for all that other stuff, it keeps the breath coarse. That's why you *hear* it, because it's coarse. And again, like I said yesterday, *samādhi* is more dependent on open-heartedness than focus. I said that yesterday, right? I'm also going to say *samādhi* is really about increasing subtlety and refinement, much more than it is about focus. I want to emphasize that, and I'll explain why as we go on. So if I'm keeping the breath kind of coarse, either just because I'm used to it or whatever, or because – I don't know – it's a sound that I've associated with breathing or whatever in a certain way, I'm actually preventing myself deepening in *samādhi*, because the breath needs to get subtle, the mind needs to get subtle. The journey of *samādhi*, the journey into *jhānas*, is a journey into increasing refinement and subtlety, and we could say it's more *that* than it is into increasing ability to nail your mind to something and stay there all day, or whatever it is. Changing the view here for most people, who think very differently about what we're doing.

As I emphasized, with the length of the breath, and the kind of the breath – and we'll get more into this, if you're experimenting – what we want is a sensitivity that permeates the whole space, and a responsiveness, a responsiveness: I'm willing to respond to what feels good, what feels less good. Sensitivity, responsiveness, and willingness to experiment and play. So those principles – sensitivity, response-ability, and willingness – right now, we're talking about them in regard to the length of the breath and the kind of the breath. As we go on, and get more and more, and deeper and deeper, those same qualities – sensitivity, responsiveness, and willingness – start to apply to more and more aspects of the whole movement of *samādhi* and the deepening of *samādhi*. We become sensitive in relation to this, this, this, this, this, this, this, and responsive in relation to this, this, this, this, this, this, and willing to experiment and play. So right now, we're just talking about length and kind of breath, but those principles are absolutely key, and they're the *opposite*, again, of inertia (that we talked about yesterday).

So with the length of the breath and the kind of breath, it's a bit like riding a bike with gears, a bicycle. You get a sense of what gear is actually helpful now. I *could* stay in this gear to go up this hill, but it's going to be a lot of work, you know? *This* gear feels better. Or when I'm going downhill, you

know? Or if you've improvised music with someone, or improvised dance with someone, it's got to be exactly what I've just said: sensitive, responsive, and willing to try stuff and do stuff differently. If you're improvising a dance together, or you're improvising music together, or whatever it is, or theatre or something, if you're making love, it's got to be that. I mean, it can *not* be that, but then your experience together, or you and the breath, or you and the energy, is going to be a lot more limited, right? So these are really key principles, opposite of inertia, opposite of whatever is the default.

Okay. Let me say something. I'll say it now, because I might forget to say it at the end, okay? It really should go at the end, but I'll say it now. In between formal practices – so in between sitting and walking, and when you're just moving around or whatever – as I said last night, what we want is a general kind of whole-body awareness, a general sort of awareness of this. Remember what 'whole body' means? It's how this whole space feels. If you can get the kind of energy body sense within that, great. But at least to start, the whole-body awareness, and a general, light kind of mindfulness, okay? This is very relaxed though. So I said yesterday about not too slow, not too fast, etc., just to help. But what I'm talking about is a kind of awareness as I'm moving through the day: as I'm in the lunch queue, as I'm doing my job, there's this whole-body awareness, but the whole feel of it is quite relaxed and open. So again, sometimes we get used to paying attention in a way that's a bit tense, a bit heavy. You can almost *feel* someone like that, when they're in that mode. If you can get a sense, it's like the space feels relaxed. It's not heavy, intense attention. Intense attention has its place, and we'll talk about that – the energization of attention. But what I'm really talking about as we move around is a kind of open, easeful attention, and an open, easeful body, and they go together. So it may not sound like a big deal, but if I've got that a little bit wrong, again, I'm not actually allowing the whole dough to rise here; I'm not allowing the process to cook properly.

So again, the question – it becomes a question, as a seed inside: what helps? Right now, in this moment, what helps me to get into that kind of poise, as I'm moving around, as I'm going to the toilet, whatever I'm doing? That kind of relationship, that kind of state of energy body awareness. What kind of stance or pressure do I have to have? Do I need to kind of loosen off and relax a little bit, or actually do I need to bring and cohere my attention a bit more? So always there's a question, and the question invites us into this playfulness, responsiveness, sensitivity – the whole deal.

And, in addition to that, as I said last night, just to say it again, we're also, as we're moving around, in between formal practices, we're cultivating, supporting, and inclining the *citta*, the heart and the mind, towards appreciation. We're taking care of that base – nourishment, in the deep sense, in the soul-sense; well-being; *muditā*, as we said. Yeah?

Okay. That was longer than I anticipated, but shall we break that, then? Thanks.

An Introduction to the Jhānas

We're not too pushed for time, but I don't want to be too long. I want to talk about just an introduction to the *jhānas* and a little bit of an overview. Again, what are we doing here? Why are we doing it? What are we talking about? What's the area we're talking about? So again, just to start with a bit of vocabulary, there's this word *jhānas*, and I'll talk about that, of course. But there's also this word *samādhi*, which many of you will know. There's also the word *samatha*. *Samatha* tends to mean 'calm'

or ‘tranquillity.’ *Samādhi* is more of an umbrella term – at least that’s how I use it, and I think that’s how it was originally used in the texts. *Jhānas* are a subset of *samādhi*, if you like. And *samādhi* – it’s actually quite hard to define, but it’s something like a state of harmonious well-being of mind and body. Mind and body are gathered, coherent, harmonious, in some state of well-being. Actually, even that’s not *quite* accurate: “Well, in the formless *jhānas*, is there a body?” Well, there *is*, kind of, and you can still have pain somewhere, but it’s not really overtaking. So it’s hard to get an exact definition. But I use it as a kind of umbrella state. There are lots of ‘insight states’ we could talk about, for example, that are still states of *samādhi*. Because of the insight, because of the letting go, there’s a kind of harmonization, a cohesion, a unification of mind and body and awareness and bodily experience – all that [is] cohered, unified, harmonized in some sense of well-being. And there are lots of different flavours of well-being, as we’ll talk about. That’s what I mean by *samādhi*.

The eight *jhānas* are a subset of that. And the Buddha described them – in fact, he talked a lot about the *jhānas*, a lot, a lot, a lot, way more than he talked about mindfulness, interestingly. I’m going to read you, quite briefly, the Buddha’s description. He’s talking to a bunch of monks:

What, monks, is Right Concentration? [This is the Buddha talking.] There is the case where a monk, quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskilful qualities [it’s actually “withdrawn from *sensual desire*, withdrawn from unskilful qualities,” the Pali], enters and remains in the first *jhāna*: rapture and happiness born from that withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation [accompanied by thought]. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and happiness born from withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal.¹

He describes it kind of technically, the *jhāna*, and then he gives a simile:

Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together ...

In those days, they had bathhouses, and that’s where you would go to have a bath and a wash. And there would be someone there who mixes soap powder with water to make your personal bar of soap for your bath, okay? And so this person, this bathman has this soap powder and water, and it’s a skill to get it mixed right, so that it’s not just a liquid mess, but it’s got enough moisture in it that you can give it a good rubbing and ... you understand? There’s some skill in that.

[So this] bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder [soap powder] into a brass basin, knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder – saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without – would nevertheless not drip. Even so, the monk permeates this very body with the rapture and happiness born of withdrawal. There’s nothing [no part] of the body untouched, [etc.]

That's the first *jhāna*. Basically, you've got rapture (and we'll talk about this), *pīti*, these nice, really nice physical feelings that are not coming from sensual contact. I'll talk much more about this. And you've got happiness, and that feeling is pervading the body. The mind is really settling down there and feeding on it, and getting into it, and really alive to that, the first *jhāna*. Second *jhāna*:

With the stilling of directed thought and evaluation [with the stilling of thought], he enters and remains in the second *jhāna*: rapture and happiness born of composure [born of tranquillity], unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation, [and with confidence, with this] internal assurance. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure [sorry, rapture and *happiness* – I have to 'doubly translate' here] born of composure. Nothing in the body remains untouched.

And then the simile:

Just like a lake with spring water welling up from within [you have to remember that this is a hot country, so this is an *appealing* image], having no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and with the skies periodically supplying abundant showers, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters. Just so, the monk permeates and pervades this very body with the rapture and happiness born of composure. [And] there is nothing of that body that isn't touched [that way].

Third *jhāna*:

With the fading of rapture [with the fading of *pīti*], he [the monk] remains in equanimity, mindful and alert [this is different than what we usually mean by 'mindfulness' here] and physically sensitive to happiness. He enters and remains in the third *jhāna*, and of him the noble ones declare: "Equanimous and mindful, he has a happy abiding [a joyful abiding]." He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture [divested of *pīti*], [so that] there's nothing of his entire body unpervaded with that happiness divested of rapture.

So he's got 'pleasure' here, which – the Pali is *sukha*, so I mistranslated that. The simile:

Just as in a pond with blue, white, or red lotuses, there may be some of the blue, white, or red lotuses which, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water [their petals never come above the water; they're immersed in the water], and they flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips. And nothing of those blue, white, or red lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water. Even so, the monk permeates this

very body with the happiness divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure, [etc.]

Fourth *jhāna*:

Furthermore, with the abandoning of happiness [it says “happiness and stress,” but], he enters and remains in the fourth *jhāna*: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain [neither happiness nor pain]. He sits permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by that pure, bright awareness.

Just as if a man were sitting wrapped from head to foot with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend, even so, the monk sits permeating his body with a pure, bright awareness. There’s nothing of his entire body unpervaded by that pure, bright awareness.

So these are called the ‘form *jhānas*,’ the first four, and then there are four what’s called ‘formless *jhānas*.’ We’ll talk in a lot more detail. I just want to briefly give the Buddha’s descriptions. Then, after the fourth *jhāna*:

With the complete transcending of perceptions of physical form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance [in other words, solidity], and not heeding perceptions of diversity [of many things, of manifoldness], he enters and remains in the sphere of infinite space [the fifth *jhāna*, infinite space].²

Then, sixth *jhāna*:

With the complete transcending of the sphere of infinite space, he focuses on ‘infinite consciousness,’ and he enters into the realm of infinite consciousness [sixth *jhāna*, formless *jhāna*]. He enters and remains in the sphere. He sticks with it, develops it, pursues it, and establishes himself firmly in it.

That’s a strapline, in this case: he sticks with it, sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, establishes himself firmly in it. After that comes the ‘realm of nothingness,’ seventh *jhāna*: the realm of nothingness. So space has collapsed, and there’s just nothing, but not a ‘nothing’ in a space, not just an empty space.

And then the eighth *jhāna* is called the ‘sphere’ or the ‘realm’ or the ‘base’ of ‘neither perception nor non-perception.’ There’s not even ‘nothing.’ It’s very hard to put into language and to describe that, right at the limit of the possibilities of perception, neither perception nor non-perception. I’m not even perceiving ‘nothing.’

So very briefly, those are the eight *jhānas*, as the Buddha described them. Some of those descriptions are very limited. We're going to have to fill that out, and we will do so as we go along.

Teaching is contextual, I find. I would say different things, I *will* say different things, dependent on who's in front of me, dependent on what my sense of what you need is, but also what your background is, and what you might have heard elsewhere. So if we're talking about the *jhānas*, which we are, there will be things that, actually, I wouldn't even mention myself or emphasize, if it wasn't likely that you had already heard this or that elsewhere, or read this or that elsewhere, and therefore, you might be assuming that "This or that is true," or "This or that is the case," or that "It therefore follows that ... something else." And I might not think that whatever that is, or the assumption coming from that is helpful. So obviously, I'm going to be emphasizing, in this retreat, teaching from *my* experience of the *jhānas*, and my experience *teaching* the *jhānas*, and what seems to me, after many years of teaching the *jhānas*, what seems, *to me*, to be significant. What opens that treasure? What is the treasure here? What are the treasures here? What makes a liberating difference?

I'm going to contradict myself a lot, okay? I'm going to say one thing, and then I'm going to say something that sounds like it's a complete contradiction. For example, I might say, and I *will* say, "These eight *jhānas* – it's really important that they're very clear and discreet, that there's a kind of quantum jump from one to the other." But at another time, I might say, "You know, the whole thing is really one continuous spectrum, and it's really not that discreet. So don't get too hung up on that."

I might say that some of us, some of you, maybe most of you, and maybe most people, really need to forget the whole question that goes on: "Do I have it now? Is this it? Am I in a *jhāna*, or am I out of a *jhāna*?" And focus, rather, on enjoying, on just really maximizing your enjoyment, and getting the most enjoyment in the moment, and developing what needs to develop to enable you to enjoy it more, and just drop that whole question: "Is this it? Where's the edge here? Do I have it?" Don't dwell on where that sharp definition is. So I might say that.

And then I might, and I will, also say something like: you know, when I, when we talk about *jhānas* as we're teaching it, we really mean something *breathtakingly* nice, *breathtakingly* beautiful, really a revelation. You know, if you've not experienced the second *jhāna* or the third *jhāna*, it's really a revelation. You might have had lots of happiness in your life, be very content, and all kinds of things, wonderful things happened which you rejoiced in, and lots of peaceful times, and nice holidays, and relaxing moments, and all that. We're talking about something of a whole different order. We're really talking about "Wow, wow," something very, very beautiful, something really exciting. And you *should* be excited. I *like* people to be excited about practice. It's a good sign. It's a healthy sign. [15:54]

I can think of quite a few instances over the years where someone's come to me, and – I don't know how to say this – they've been exposed to *jhāna* teachings elsewhere or whatever, and they come into an interview. Then they're describing their experience or something, and they say, "So I think I broke through to the sixth *jhāna* yesterday." And I say, "Oh, how was it?" And they say, "Yeah, it was nice." And ... [laughs] No! That's not ... that *can't* be. It absolutely *can't* be. Now, either they're faking a kind of Buddhist equanimity: "I'm not supposed to be attached, so I'll just say it's nice, but secretly I'm like, 'Wow!'" But in this person's case, I genuinely think it just wasn't that big a deal. So that's not what we're talking about.

So actually, those definitions *do* become quite important. We're really talking about something, "Yes!" It's really something else, you know? When there isn't the excitement, when there isn't that kind of "Wow," it's not going to make a difference to your life. This person's describing something; it might have been a relatively new experience, but there was nothing in that experience, or having that, that was going to make much difference to her ability to let go, to her life, to her sense of existence, to her sense of self and world. It was just, "Oh, okay. That was the sixth *jhāna*. Tick." Okay, I'm really interested in all this making a difference. So I might say that, "Look, it's important that we're talking about *this* territory and not [that]." And I might say, "Forget about all that, and don't worry about the definitions." I'm going to contradict myself a lot, and I reserve that right. [laughs]

I might also say, on the one hand, "Look, it's not about just focusing more intensely or nailing your mind, your attention, to something for hours, and then expecting something to happen. It's not about prioritizing the intensity or the steadiness of focus." And I might also say, to the same person at a different time, or to another person: "More intensity, just more intensity to the focus. Energize that focus." Most people, I think, it's the first one: too hung up. I'll explain this as we go along, today and other days. It's too much thinking in the wrong way about what we're trying to do. We're prioritizing the wrong things. The priorities we're making may be not that helpful, not that fruitful.

Why all this contradiction? Well, because the nature of all things is that we can look at them in different ways. That's partly what it means to say they're empty: you can look at it like that, and it's true; you can look at it like *that*, and it's true. And those can sometimes even be opposites. But partly also just because different people at different times, or the same person at different times – sometimes they need to hear *this*, and sometimes they need to hear *that*, regarding the same issue. And it might be opposite. It's always the case with teaching. It's *always* the case. That's partly why it's interesting teaching a group. In a Q & A, I might say something, yet someone sitting next to that person might need to hear exactly the opposite.

Yesterday I used this word 'mastery.' I just sort of threw it out there. It's a traditional word. I can't remember what the Pali means, but let me say what *I* mean by it. I said we're aiming, or I would like us to aim, or to think about 'mastering' each *jhāna*. What I mean by that is a few different components to that. I mean a really thorough familiarity with all the *jhānas*. If we're talking about *any* *jhāna*, to say I mastered the second *jhāna* or whatever, it means a really thorough familiarity and intimacy with all of its aspects. A *jhāna*, actually, can manifest differently. It has different aspects, different flavours and tones within it. If I just dip in and dip out, I don't get to see: "Oh, sometimes it's like this, and it has that quality, and *that* quality, and these different ranges of depths, etc." Different levels within each *jhāna* – you can divide certain *jhānas* into different levels (and they're almost discrete as well), manifestations, etc. I mean a thorough familiarity with all that. Also, by 'mastery,' I'm including in that meaning, really, a whole set of skills, a whole kind of artistry that's involved with regard to that *jhāna*, in terms of working. I mean also, thirdly, that one can enter it at will. Let's say it's the third *jhāna* we're talking about. You don't need to go: "Number one, number two, number three," or "Breath, number one, number two, number three." You can actually just remember it. The cells and the *citta* just remember it, and you just have a subtle intention, and it comes back. Or second *jhāna*, or whatever it is. I'm just intending for it to come up, and there it comes.

So with a lot of practice, that's what I mean by 'mastery.' That's included. You can go directly from nothing to any *jhāna*, just with a subtle intention. It doesn't need to be so much like, you know ... [snaps fingers twice] like that. It's probably more like a fader switch, more like a dimmer switch, yeah? But that's partly what I mean. It doesn't need to be preceded by its preceding *jhānas*, doesn't need to be preceded by its base, whatever base practice, springboard practice of *mettā* or breath or whatever you're doing.

I also mean that you can access and sustain that *jhāna* pretty much in any posture, and when you're going for a walk. It means you're doing a loop around *there* for an hour in the lanes, and you can be doing that pretty much in the fourth *jhāna*, or whatever it is, if we're talking about mastery of the fourth *jhāna*. I also mean that a *jhāna* – this is part of mastery again – that you can really sustain it and remain in it. I'm going to come back to this. There's a word I want to use: 'marinate.' I'm going to come back to this. This is really, really important. We need to sit in a *jhāna* a long time. It's doing a lot of work on the cells, on the being, on the *citta*. It's fine to go through for two seconds on the way – that's all fine, but the real work happens when we really just get in and sit there for a long time, and really let that change our habits, our mental habits, and our energetic habits. It's really *doing* something different to mind and body, and that takes time, and it takes putting myself in it and staying there for a while.

'Mastery' also means navigating; I can move from that *jhāna* to any of the other *jhānas* that I already know, and I don't have to go sequentially. Let's say I'm working on my mastery of the third, then I can go from the third to the first, or from the first to the third, or whatever. Yeah? Or the second. So that includes what I call 'leapfrog.' I can 'leapfrog.' Yeah? This is partly what I mean.

[23:44] 'Mastery' might also mean that I can modulate. So again, if we go back to this idea that a *jhāna* isn't really one thing – it's a territory. It's a realm. And like a lot of realms, it has different (as I said) flavours, aspects, regions, levels. And I can modulate, move between those different levels, and actually, eventually, also bring in other qualities to mix with it, like mixing cocktails. I can add a bit of this and a bit of that, and get an even nicer cocktail, or a different cocktail. In that process of learning to mature, it probably will be the case that what I originally thought was, say, the first *jhāna* – after I've gone through all that mastery process, by the time I finish, the first *jhāna* actually feels quite a bit different, and I understand something different. As Ajaan Geoff used to say to me, "Stick Post-it labels on them at first." You know those sticky labels? They just come off. It's like, don't erect a whole sign that "That's the first *jhāna*." You say, "Okay, I think this is first *jhāna*, but let's just put a Post-it label now." We'll go through this process, and they'll change over time as you work on them. They also change retrospectively. Once I get used to the third *jhāna*, the first *jhāna* is transformed indirectly by my repeated experience in the third *jhāna*, okay? We have to be a little bit easy, loose with the labels.

So 'mastery' – I mean that for all the eight *jhānas*. Now, as I said yesterday, we are where we are. Each person, you're where you are. And what we're really interested in is your – what did I call it? – the playground at your edge, *your* playground at your edge. Because that's the big picture: eventually I want mastery of all that, but we are where we are, and the way I'm going to get mastery is by playing in that playground that's on my edge. That's what's going to give me mastery of that playground. And at a certain time, when I get that mastery, then the playground just shifts – either by itself, or I just have

to a little bit shift it. And then I'm in a new playground. That's my work. That's my play. That's my digestion, yeah? That's the way I would like to think about this, or encourage.

The Buddha has a sutta – I can't remember what it's called, but it might even be called something like the *Stupid Cow Sutta* or something like that, the *Foolish Cow*.³ Very briefly – I'm not going to read it because it's too long. But he basically describes a foolish, inexperienced mountain cow who is happily eating pasture in a field, and looks up and sees another field over *there*, and thinks, "Ooh, I bet the grass is nice over there! Let me go down there, and I'll eat some of that nice-looking grass." And because this cow is foolish and inexperienced and whatever else the Buddha calls it, the cow tries to do that, but actually is not very sure of its footing, even where it's standing, gets stuck in some ditch or something between the field, can't get to where it was planning to go – that other, nicer-looking pasture – can't get *back* to where it was happily eating before, and is just stuck in this ditch. "Just so, monks," *da-da-da-da*. The idea is: wait until you master that place before moving on. That make sense? Very brief. Yeah?

And now, a contradiction. [laughs] So that's mostly the emphasis, *and* sometimes there's really a kind of magic involved in all this stuff. Sometimes you'll find, "I'll just try it. Just try. Just try something." You think, "Oh, I couldn't possibly get *da-da-da*." Just try it. Sometimes the mind will just do something that you think, "Wow, that's amazing," you know? So yes, mostly this idea about mastery and playgrounds, and *sometimes* – again, some people, at different times, it's like, just *try* something that feels it's beyond you. So, contradiction.

Once you really get into all this, and if you will, if you have the patience and really what boils down to the love and the desire, actually, if you have the love and the desire, the eros, and you do develop this kind of mastery, then it really begins to feel like the *jhānas* – they're almost like dimensions of being, if you like. They're beautiful, amazing dimensions of being, treasures, treasure realms, enchanted realms. And they're there, and they're available for us. And this becomes a part of one's life, and a part of one's sense of what existence *is* and what the cosmos includes. So they certainly give a sense of dimensionality to our own being, but they also become almost cosmic, in a way. And one gets to feel that they're realms that are kind of 'already there.' They already exist.

There's the tea bell. This is absolutely ridiculous. Should I just keep going? We'll check in and ...? All right. And now you get to the juicy bit. You want it, yeah? [laughter] They really feel like they're realms that are already there, as if they just kind of exist, like a realm exists. This begins to get obvious around the third *jhāna*. It's much less obvious in the first or second *jhāna*. But after a while in the third *jhāna*, you really feel this is like an enchanted, paradisaical realm that is just sort of *there*, and I get the blessedness of being able to enter that, and hang out in that, and come out of that, etc. And it's only that we need to *find* them. They're *there*. Or they're like radio stations, like frequencies. I never listen to the radio, but you have these presets, right? You can put in Radio 1 or whatever it is, right? It's just like that. Or the old style, where you actually tune the ... thingy. Similarly, you might press the preset, and still it needs this fine-tuning. You know, the old ones used to have a big knob and a little knob that was the fine-tuner. Anyway, it doesn't matter; they're like radio stations. They're in the air anyway. So it begins to be, it's not like I'm huffing and puffing to make this *jhāna* happen. It's like they're *there*. And what we're doing is tuning to something that's already there. We can have this sense of them, is what I'm saying.

Or I used to feel like it was a bit like a wardrobe. It's like you've got your wardrobe of clothes, and they're all just lined up there. And you can reach in, and "Okay, today I want to wear my pink glitter onesie outfit," and it's right there. And I can just pull it and use it. They're all just available. So we begin to have this sense of them.

If you come to me at the end of the retreat and say, "Oh, it was fantastic. I never had any *jhāna* before, and I got to the eighth *jhāna*," I'll say, "Oh, what a shame," because – I mean, it'd be good, obviously, but actually, there'll be no way that you would have gotten into the way we're talking about with this playground and this kind of mastery. And this is – again, it's my opinion, my emphasis – this is what's really going to make a difference. This is what's really going to be a treasure that affects the being, okay? So going too quickly through, we're not actually getting that treasure and the maximum value. Or it's a bit like a tourist going on holiday, and you go, and in your mobile phone, you take the photo of whatever it is, and then you send it on your Facebook to your friends, and they 'like,' and you 'like' what they sent you. And it's all like, "Okay, been there, done that." But it's not the same as really being there and living it.

So they're not achievement badges. We really want something so profound, such a profound treasure. We want it to work on the being. We have to linger. We have to live there. We have to, as I said, marinate, absorb – not just *get* absorbed, but almost absorb the *jhāna* itself into our being, get to know it intimately, so that the cells, the mind, the habit patterns of mind, etc., and energy are affected. [32:39] And in that way it makes a really long-term difference to one's life, a long-term difference.

I remember talking to someone reporting after another *jhāna* retreat that they did, and it was their first time, and they said, "Oh, I had a great time." And they'd just whipped through all of them. But it won't be – and this is a while later now, and I can tell [for] this person, it hasn't become a profound resource. Okay, so they had a good time those ten days or whatever it was. Nothing has altered in their sense of existence. Nothing has altered from that *jhāna* practice in their sense of existence, of self and world. Maybe they didn't *want* anything to be altered in their sense of existence. Sometimes we get quite attached to our sense of how we think the world and the self is. We're attached to a certain view, etc., philosophy, whatever it is. This person had a good time, but so what? So 'marinate' means a long time, and many times, in one *jhāna*. It's part of the mastery, okay?

Some of you may not be aware of this; some of you will be very aware of it, or a little less so. There are all kinds of opinions and arguments out there in the Dharma world about how to demarcate, "Is this *jhāna*? Is that *jhāna*? What did the Buddha mean? How do we define it, etc.?" Some of you will be kind of oblivious to all that. Some of you will be, you know, exposed to that – all kinds of opinions. "Do I have it? Is this it?" Different teachers saying different things, writing different things – who are you going to trust? And why? If you *are* exposed to that difference of opinion, who are you going to trust? And why are you going to trust? Or which version, which definition are you going to trust? But more importantly, why? Or if I change that question, what *matters* here? What's important? There's all this charged opinion about this stuff. What actually matters here?

We *could* say, one *could* say: well, if your experience matches the Buddha's descriptions, as I just very briefly rushed through and read out, if there is an extraordinary opening to well-being or different kinds of well-being, if there's a really deep sense of different kinds of beauty, if there's a really profound sense of resource that's coming from that, if the practice of whatever it is you're doing brings,

in an integrated way, insight and freedom, and it makes sense as part of the path in an integrated way, then *if* we need to make definitions and demarcations, that would seem pretty good to call that a *jhāna*, right? If it's all that. *And* I can still improve its quality. I can still say, "Okay, that's a *jhāna*," but I can still work on improving it.

Sometimes all these opinions and what we bring to these questions – I have another question, which is: can I be more intelligent than I am being in relation to these questions? Some of you have not even been exposed to all this stuff yet, so you say, "Why is he going on about that?" But some of you will be. Can I bring more intelligence to these questions? I'll say what I mean by 'intelligence' in a moment. But I mean more than scholarship.

So we're here. I'm teaching this. I'm giving a certain emphasis and a certain range. I would say, you know – I guess I've already said this: I teach *jhānas*, or the *jhānas* that we're talking about here are really breathtakingly extraordinary experiences. They lead naturally onwards. So there's a way, organically, that one *jhāna* will just ripen and mature into the next, just like what the Buddha described, and one has that sense as one's going through: "Oh, wow. Here I am 2,500 years later, and my experience – I can really get the sense of what he's talking about there." If there is a strong and deep building of confidence through these practices, and love of the path, if those are fruits too that you can feel, if freedom comes out of it and a capacity more and more to let go, to be okay with more and more, if transformation comes, if insight that liberates comes, and the insight that comes is congruent and integrated into the path – all that, it's like, that's the package that I want to encourage.

But also that there is – and here's that word again – responsiveness and intelligence. That's part of the deal too. Some *jhānas*, when some people describe them, they're completely unresponsive states. One is supposedly so deeply absorbed, one actually doesn't know where one's been, and one can't make any changes or responsiveness within that state. I'm going to come back to this. Why would I want something like that? It might *sound* better – because it *sounds* better, doesn't it? Is it? Can we bring intelligence and boldness to our questioning? Something *sounds* better. A lot of people are saying maybe it's better. *Is it better?*

So by 'intelligence,' I mean a certain boldness. I mean much more than scholarship: "Well, I go back to the Buddha, and this Pali word means ..." – that's all good, but I mean more than that. I mean a wisdom to discern what is essential. Right now we're talking about *jhānas*, but this actually applies to the whole of the path. Can I develop a wisdom to discern what is essential, what is important? What's important to know? What's important to understand? What's important to develop? And what is secondary? Oftentimes this faculty is not very developed in meditators. In my opinion, I find a lot of students or whatever emphasizing, kind of mistaking what's secondary for what's primary, emphasizing what's not so important.

And what I said yesterday about listening on your toes – do you remember that? Everything that I'm saying, this should set you recalibrating, rethinking, reorienting: "What does that mean? What do I ...?" You know, please don't just be passive about it. This is actually quite a big deal. Do I have that wisdom to discern what's essential? What's secondary? Do I have a nose for it? Do I have a nose, an intuition, an intelligence? Can I develop a nose for it? Because sometimes, some of these arguments, it's like quibbling over what's insignificant, what's secondary. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, it says *parimukham*. The meditator, with the breath, sits down at the base of the tree and puts their attention

parimukhaṃ. *Parimukhaṃ* means something like ‘around the mouth.’ So they say, “Oh! Okay. Well, the Buddha means this is really the place to pay attention.” And then people arguing about that – does it really matter? Is it really important? Does it make a difference? Does it make a difference if I keep the breath or my primary object? Some people say, “Absolutely. You can’t let go of the primary object. If you’re doing *jhāna*, you need to keep the breath. You need to keep the primary object.” We’ll see, actually, that you can do it both ways. We’ll come back to that.

Some people say, “It’s only a *jhāna* if the senses close, if you can’t hear anything.” Well, the Buddha didn’t say that. And does it matter? Again, it *sounds* better. If I make the definition, “It’s only a *jhāna* when the senses close,” that sounds like it’s a better thing, right, than if they don’t close? Would it? I mean, most people would say it sounds better. I don’t know if it is. I think what I want to say is, can we bring a kind of discernment and intelligence to these questions? Which are important, and which are not? What’s important? What’s secondary? What fruits will I get from pursuing questions that are actually not that important? Taste the fruit. Be nourished by the fruit, by the juicy flesh of the fruit, and not worried about the pips and the pith of the apple, etc.

These questions are related to – what is our conception, and what is our emphasis, what’s the main point of *jhāna* practice? And again, if you read certain things, or if you listen to different teachers, either explicitly or implicitly, you’re going to hear various views from different teachers and different teachings about, what is the main point here of *jhāna* practice? For some people, some teachers might emphasize, we’re really changing the habit of *papañca*. You know what *papañca* is? The mental proliferation. The primary thing you’re doing, and the primary point of *jhāna* practice, is to change that habit, and actually eradicate that habit of *papañca*. So the whole thing, really, the purpose is a movement to simplicity, to having or developing a mind that’s simple, that doesn’t get complicated and embroiled in *papañca*. That’s one view. Now, that might be explicitly stated, or just, you have to kind of listen a bit more to the totality of someone’s teaching and hear, “Oh, that’s their thrust. Okay.”

Another person will say, “What’s the point of *jhāna* practice?” And it’s really that what you’re doing is developing a kind of power in the mind that, like a laser beam, the attention can dissect phenomena, because in dissecting them, that’s what insight is. I chop things. I see them really, really fine, down to the atomic details. And that’s the point of *jhāna* practice, is to develop this laser-like attention.

And/or – there might be combinations here – someone might say, “No, what we’re developing in *jhāna* is the ability to sustain unwaveringly the focus on something, unwaveringly hold the mind or attention on something.” The assumption there is, as if automatically, holding the attention on something will reveal the reality of that thing, will reveal the way things are. If I can just stare at this thing long enough, it will reveal the nature of it. It will reveal the way it really is.

Now, sometimes this isn’t explicitly said. You have to kind of hang out with the whole totality of a person’s teaching, or a certain drift of teaching, and see, “Oh, that’s the assumption. That’s how it fits in with the whole path.” Is that true? If I stare at an atom or, let’s say, an electron long enough, just staring at it long enough will not reveal the nature of the electron. Or anything else – if I stare at an egg long enough. I have to *do* stuff with something. And certainly in quantum physics, the electron – it’s only when I start doing different things that I start to encounter what’s most interesting about the true nature of the electron. And I start to realize, “Oh, it’s actually dependent on how I look, and whether I

look, and what I do, and what's around it." So it's not just staring at something. Again, why am I saying all this? Because so much, we arrive at situations like this with the idea: "It's really about, how long can I stay steady with my attention on something?" I don't want to say that's unimportant, but I just want to shake up the sense of what we're doing and what's priority here, and what may be important, may be less.

Another context might be, someone very rarely, stage by stage, you go through eight *jhānas*, and then you go to the next stage, which is the experience of the Unfabricated. That's quite rare, but it's there. For me, I would say, as I said last night, there are resources that come with the practice of the *jhānas*, that really enable, really help us to let go. We say, "Let go, let go, let go, let go." Once I'm this rich in this beauty, once I have these treasures available to me, it becomes much easier to let go. I don't need the food to be nice. I don't need this or that. Who cares? I have so much, abundant – oh, my cup runneth over! – so much overflowing well-being, and delight, and pleasure, and happiness. I can let go of all kinds of things then. So that's one of the functions, this deep resource, as I would see it: I can let go of clinging to things.

I also, secondly, begin to understand the whole process of fabrication of perception, how the mind can fabricate less and fabricate more. And in moving through the *jhānas*, I begin to understand that. That's also one of the reasons, one of the points.

And a third reason is the mystical opening, the kiss of the mystic. For me, that's a really important point and reason. I want my sense of existence, my sense of world, of self, of other, to open up. And it will be in the impress and the opening of these beautiful realms and experiences. That's a point, for me. That's one of the main points.

Okay. *Jhānas* alone will not liberate one totally. They won't bring you to the end of *dukkha*. And I think probably, say, most Dharma teachers would agree on that. There may be someone who disagrees, but I don't know. But definitely, most people agree on that. *Jhānas* alone will not liberate totally. But I want to say, nor will insight alone. Nor will both *jhānas* and insight, the combination. So ... [laughter] Okay, let's end there. [laughter] Just kidding. No. We need the combination. We need the combination if we're really talking about big, wide, deep liberation, we need the combination of insight and *samādhi*, and as I said last night, we need the psychological work. We're a whole different species now than we were in the Buddha's day. Yes, of course, there's lots that's the same. The whole way we feel our self, the whole aspirations and what we consider normal in human relationship, with ourselves and with others, and what we want from life – I'm not going to go into that, but there's a whole range of psychological work that, if we're talking about liberation nowadays, for *us*, for you and me, needs to include all that. So yes, *samādhi*; yes, insight; and yes, psychological work; and yes, the cultivation of virtues and the beautiful qualities – *mettā*, and generosity, and compassion, all those – those four together, let's say.

So why the *jhānas*, and why the mastery? Because they're part of that mix. [50:37] That's one reason: because they're part of that mix, and the *jhānas*, when they're mastered, will give more insight in relation to fabrication. They'll give more resources, etc. They'll give more of that. We open ourselves more to the mystic impress and the kiss of the mystic.

But one thing I really want to emphasize, and maybe a style or an approach that I want to emphasize: I would say, or when I thought and reflected, what do I really emphasize when I teach

jhānas, apart from what I've just said? I would also say – and you may have heard it and be familiar with it – I would say, I would emphasize sensitivity, subtle discernment of different qualities of being, different qualities of heart, of energy, different frequencies of vibration and energy. Sensitivity, subtle discernment, refinement, attunement: these are the things that I would really like to emphasize, or bring into the picture of the way I would like to teach, and what I would like to communicate and kind of transmit.

All those qualities – sensitivity, attunement, subtle discernment, refinement, beautiful, beautiful capacities of the soul, so all those, plus this framework that I would like to give about the *jhānas* – they allow the *jhānas* or *jhāna* practice to then fit in very easily and congruently, and in a very natural, integrated way, into emptiness practices. They just work – we're talking about the same things: sensitivity, attunement, refinement, subtle discernment. We need all that in emptiness practices and the way they deepen. In Soulmaking Dharma practices, we need sensitivity, subtle discernment, refinement, attunement, all of that. In emotional work, whether it's with ourselves or with another person, again, we need sensitivity, refinement, attunement, subtle discernment. In healing as well, I would say, healing the emotions, healing the heart, those capacities/capabilities are also very much part of what I would regard as part of healing. In relational skill, sensitivity, subtle attunement, refinement – you see, those same kind of developments are actually part of *jhāna*, emptiness, soulmaking, emotional work, healing, and relational stuff. There's something very integrated here.

But as well as that, or more than that, all this opens – the *jhānas* themselves, and this kind of “Why practise them?”, what I'd like to emphasize – something to do with the beauty of existence. So if you ask me, “What's the point of *jhānas*?” I wouldn't say, “Yeah, so you can really stay steady with something, and then you can be clear about what it is.” It's something about opening more and more, or to more and more of the beauty, the beauties of existence, inner and outer. As I mentioned earlier, there's something of magic here. And again, that's what I would like. You start to feel yourself as something of a magician, a magician in these realms, a magician who can, let's say, conjure these realms, or who has access to these realms. There's something of magic in the whole thing. And there's certainly something of art. And so this is the kind of flavour, orientation, scope, feel, attitude, view that I would really encourage, and those are some of the reasons why. [54:46]

Related to all this, you can see that a person's emphasis or definition of a *jhāna*, of *jhāna* practice, depends on their idea of what insight is. If I've got that idea that insight is a kind of ‘drilling down,’ a drilling down through the strata or layers of rock, of illusion or construction, then what do I need? I need a sharp tool, a laser beam. So then the idea I have of *jhāna* practice needs to go with that idea of what insight is doing. I view my *jhāna* practice as the development of this super-intense, super-hard sustained focus, and what I tend to emphasize then in the teaching of *jhānas* is more intensity, more sharpness, more concentration, more focus.

If I think of insight as *seeing clearly*, meaning seeing in more detail, then again, I tend to focus, I tend to think of the *jhānas*, and emphasize in the teaching of *jhānas*, something like that. Maybe I need to see in detail, for my insight, the process of aggregates in time. Maybe that's what I regard insight as: if I can just see the momentary arising and passing of the aggregates, the five aggregates in time, that's what insight is. And so my *jhāna* practice needs to set me up so I can see, like a magnifying glass, and very fine, and I can see that – if that's what I think insight is, if that's what I think ultimate reality is.

You see? We're working backwards here, and it makes an implication on what we think a *jhāna* is, and then what we tend to emphasize within the *jhāna* practice.

Or again, as if I – I've said this before – if I can just *stare* at something long enough, the reality, the truth of it will be seen, because I'm just staring at it plainly. If that's what I think, if I think 'plain staring' reveals reality, if that's what I think reality is, something that is revealed with 'plain staring at, plain looking at' ... yeah?

Or I'm 'sharpening' my mind, so I just zip through eight *jhānas* back and forth, and then do some insight practice. I've sharpened Mañjuśrī's sword so I can kind of atomize things. There's a relationship here between the way the goal is seen, the way insight is conceived of, the way *jhāna* is conceived of, and then what we come to emphasize within *jhāna* practice. That's why I said, if I want a liberation that actually does have sensitivity in it, and attunement, and relational skill, and psychological awareness, and want to understand about emptiness as something very different, to do with ways of looking and fabrication, then I'm going to have to think about *jhānas* in a very different way. Or rather, it's better, it's more congruent to think about them in a certain way.

It's true: you can pick up certain phrases where the Buddha says in the suttas, "With his mind imperturbable," "With the *jhānas* you can cut through a mountain,"⁴ and all that. They're not that common, but they get extracted and then repeated over and over. And dependent on what you've been exposed to, you come to believe that's what's important: imperturbability, the unwaveringness. And actually, the Buddha just said it in a little phrase once or twice in the whole Pali Canon. And somehow, over history, it comes to get repeated by teachers, *da-da-da*, and that's what we think.

Or 'no thought' – we tend to think *that's* the most important thing. Now, I remember, after I'd finished a year retreat, and I went for a Dharma Yatra in France, and they said, "Well, will you come and tell the people about your year retreat?" And I said, "Sure, okay," and I think I just answered questions or something. I can't remember. But the first question was, "A year, wow. Did you ever experience a time when the mind stopped thinking?" It was the first question. So, "Yeah" – as if that was the most important thing. And how much, in our meditation, we get to think, "Oh, that's it." We measure it by how much thinking there is. "Is it going well? Is it not?" So these things are insidious, these meta-level views, and they get into the nuts and bolts of how I'm regarding *this moment* in the meditation. This moment, "Hmm, I'm thinking." Who *cares* if you're thinking? Does it really matter? Is the thinking making you miserable, or is it the *view* about the thinking that's making you miserable? Is that thinking even getting in the way of *samādhi*, and well-being, and bliss, and ecstasy? These things are really, really important and insidious. Again, what does it mean to be bold? What does it mean to be intelligent? What does it mean to question these things?

So what happens if we start with the goal? Start with the idea – now, people will construe that differently: where we're going, and what awakening is – but start with the idea, what is insight? It means understanding something about the emptiness of things. I'm rushing through this now. But there are only ways of looking. There's no way, independently of a way of looking, that something really is. [1:00:47] There's no privileged way of looking. There are just ways of looking. Things are empty. Insight is the practice of ways of looking that liberate, and ways of looking that fabricate less. I'm intending to talk about this in a lot more detail. I'm just going quickly now, sorry, because I'm rushed.

What that means is that what we practise, and what we're left with at the end of practice, is

malleability: malleability of perception, malleability of view, malleability of way of looking. This is a goal and a starting point in practice – more than agility, more than the ability to move quickly between the *jhānas*, actually, to really shape the view, and let the view and the experience of things be shaped, through a whole range, and feeling the impact on perception.

The Buddha called the *jhānas* “perception attainments.”⁵ But we very rarely hear that, because again, what historically gets emphasized is “no thought, imperturbability, laser-like” ... yeah? But actually, just as commonly, he called them “perception attainments.” And what on earth is a perception attainment? So this I would like to emphasize: perception attainment. We’re training certain perceptions, and to think of it that way, more than “I’m training my concentration.” Again, I’m going to contradict myself and say, “Train your concentration,” etc. But what if we think about it as training certain perceptions? And that has a significance regarding emptiness that I will come to.

So we’re developing these resources, we’re cultivating virtues, we’re developing our psychological and emotional skills, and we’re training certain perception attainments. If I want my awakening, my liberation to include – and some people don’t care – but *if* you want it to include the beauties of sensitivity, attunement, deep intelligence, responsiveness, pliability, malleability, discernment, subtlety, how do we need to think about the *jhānas*, and what we emphasize, and how we practise them? And if you decide that you don’t care about all that stuff, then that’s fine. You can think about them differently.

Yes, definitely, we *do* want to increase and develop our focus and our concentration. But we also, and oftentimes more importantly, are interested in this development of deep, profound resources, of training the perceptions (*what does that mean?*), the relation of that with emptiness understanding, and the development of all these lovely, lovely capacities and capabilities of attunement, sensitivity, subtlety of awareness, beauty, magic, art.

Okay. I’ve finished, but we haven’t talked about walking meditation yet, have we? No. So, we’ll need to expand this gradually. And again – I’m just going to be very brief now – it’s because you’re all in different places, with different histories. If you’re familiar with energy body, walking meditation is with energy body awareness. Actually, if you’re already familiar with *jhāna*, then you can start: here’s one end of my walking meditation path. I’m standing. I stand as long as it takes to get, let’s say, whatever it is, the *pīti* or the well-being, the happiness. And I just hang out there. If it’s nice, I’ll hang out. I won’t even walk, okay? I’m just standing, and I’m in that. Okay? That’s quite an advanced stage already, if you can just get there. I’m just mentioning that. And then, if I do that, then I walk, and I’m concentrating in the whole body space on the *pīti*, on the pleasure. I don’t care about my feet. I don’t care about the sensations. I’m walking back and forth with the pleasure, and that’s what I’m concentrating on – if you’re there already; most of you won’t be.

If you know energy body already, same deal. Okay, I stand, feel my contact, etc., all that, and then open the space and just, what’s the feel? What’s the texture? What’s the vibration of the energy body? And then I walk back and forth with that. And I have to find the pace of the walking that enables me to sustain that and get into that experience. Yeah? So it might be really fast. It might be really slow. It might be in between. It might change as I’m doing the practice, yeah? And if at any point I want to stop and stand and just get it back again, just stop and stand and get it back again. And I might spend five minutes at the end of the path. It doesn’t matter. What helps me get that energy body awareness, and helps me get into it and in touch with it?

If you're still not quite sure what the energy body is, then see if you can just walk up and down with a whole-body awareness, okay? So just the sensations in the whole body. In other words, in terms of our choice, the least preferable is just the sensations in your feet, okay? It's fine, it's good, and if that's what you want to do or all you can do, that's great. But there's a kind of a movement here, with maturation.

Okay, last thing. The rhythm in the day of formal practice, sit-walk-stand – we're going to say more about this, much more, later. But basically, again, it's up to you. What feels like it's helpful right now? So if you're sitting, and it feels good, and you feel into it, sit longer. You don't have to sit forty-five minutes. You could sit just as long as it feels like it's productive and fruitful, and you're having a good time. If then you begin to *not* have such a good time, see if you can just work with it. Play your edges. See if you can expand it, okay? But basically, you're following what feels fruitful. And if you're out walking, and you're just really into it, and it's going really well, just stay walking longer, or standing, or whatever, right? So there's a kind of rhythm that's individual and variable, and you're responsive to it, yeah? You have to be sensitive and responsive. Okay?

And then there's this – you know, we talked about going for walks, and if you do yoga or qigong or whatever, also time to just chill out and have a cup of tea. The day needs to breathe. In this kind of practice, the day needs to breathe. So sit, walk, sit, walk, sit, walk – may not be that helpful. It might be helpful for other practices. On this kind of practice, the day needs to breathe, and we need to be responsive. Different rhythms at different times – what's really working right now? What's supporting right now? If this is the first time you've not had a fixed schedule, then set yourself a fixed schedule, you know, if you're feeling at sea, and just go with that. But as time goes by, you'll begin to be more fluid, and it will be more responsive. Okay? Sorry so long.

Let's just sit for one minute together.

[silence]

Thank you, everyone. Enjoy tea. There's no need to rush, because it's only you guys or whoever it is doing the clearing up. So take whatever time you need, and the whole thing just rolls. We're on an open schedule, yeah? But the hall is open all the time, so enjoy tea. See you tomorrow.

¹ E.g. AN 5:28.

² E.g. AN 9:35.

³ AN 9:35, *Gāvī Sutta*, or the *Cow Sutta*.

⁴ AN 6:24.

⁵ AN 9:36.

Focusing on One Point (Intensity, Directionality, Subtlety) (Instructions)

Teaching this retreat is a big stretch for me, just because of everything that's going on with my health, and what that needs, what that requires. I just had a meeting with a nurse this morning, etc. And as I said at the beginning, in a way, that kind of impacts the unfolding of the teaching. I have to be at the hospital at this time and all that stuff. So things are getting squashed together in one session, one long session, that otherwise, if I had a choice, I would pace them over, you know, morning, evening,

afternoon sort of thing. That's just part of the deal. It's not perfect, but it is what it is. And in my experience doing/sitting lots of retreats is that often, when the conditions aren't perfect, that's often, for some weird reason, when the retreat is most fruitful.

The other thing about the teachings (and I said this, again, at the beginning) is that everyone needs different things at different times, and so I feel quite concerned, or anxious, even, just to make sure you all have what you need. But it's actually an impossible situation. So we're just unfolding things, and for some person, something that's said on day five, it would be, "I wish I'd heard that on day one," you know, etc. I don't quite know how else to do a group retreat. That's part of the territory here. That's part of the challenge here. Hopefully, still, it works, and it's helpful.

I want to try, I want to divide the teaching today into three sections, maybe four, depending on how we do for time: instructions, a guided meditation, and a short-ish talk, a shorter talk. Let's start with a bit of instructions, actually. Again, a bit of a context – just slight context. I was going to say this later, but I'll say it now. You could say all the *jhānas*, but certainly we can say the first four *jhānas* – by definition, they include, or even, I would say, what's really primary in them is that the whole body (as I said when I ran through those descriptions that the Buddha gave) really feels very, very nice, and different *kinds* of nice. And in a way, that's what characterizes each *jhāna*: the *kind* of nice that the whole body space feels. By definition, axiomatically, a really pleasant-feeling, nice, lovely energy body experience is part of where we're going in – actually, you could say any of the *jhānas*, all eight, in a way, because the absence of any sensation at all in the formless *jhānas* is actually very (in its 'acquired taste' kind of way) extremely pleasant. But anyway, the first four *jhānas* all involve a really nice energy body experience. So all the practices that we're doing are going towards that. That's what they're aiming for, just by virtue of – we're aiming for *jhānas*. As I said, *which* base practice or *which* springboard practice, whether it's working with the breath like *this*, whether it's working with the breath like *that*, whether it's *mettā*, whether it's something else, whatever it is – they're all intended in that direction. That's what we're trying to get them to do.

For, I don't know, *most* people, the first port of call in the niceness will be what we call *pīti*, and this pleasantness that I'll talk about as we go on. But basically, what you want at this point is to be narrowing down into one practice: one base or springboard practice that you feel is the one that feels best for you, and the most reliable, easiest, that well-being arises from that – physical well-being, mental well-being. And we keep that practice all through, even after you've got eight *jhānas*, because even when you know eight *jhānas*, there are going to be times when you need to go right back to your base practice and use that. So that's your thing in terms of *jhāna* practice. Later we can add to it and have others, but basically, at this point, a lot of you, unless you're already well into the *jhānas* and know what works, like I said, and you already know it, and you just – "That's my base practice. I know that's what works best" – basically, you're still trying to find that, and narrow it down, and say, "That's the one for me."

Now, within that, because (as I said) *jhānas* are, by definition, different kinds of really lovely states of the energy body, different flavours of really lovely states of the energy body, we can kind of, again, think backwards from "Where are we going?" We're going to some kind of lovely state in the energy body. I can get there in two ways. We're back to the whole Newton Abbot thing, kind of.

(1) Either I say, “Oh, if that’s part of where I’m going, why don’t I start with that anyway, and **start with the energy body experience**, and just help it in creative, responsive, sensitive ways to become nice – nicer and nicer.” I’m starting with something that’s very close to where I’m headed anyway. That’s one way of going about things.

(2) Another way of going about things is, for instance, **taking one spot, like at the upper lip or the tip of the nose or the abdomen**, and just paying attention to the sensations there, and really, really paying attention. And in time, other factors develop, one of which – it sort of comes *out* of that – is the *pīti*, which can then be spread into the whole body. So not better, not worse; they’re just different. One is starting with something much similar to where you’re going; one is starting with something that actually doesn’t look that much like where we’re going at all, okay? Because at some point, this (as I’ll explain) will expand to a whole energy body experience. Not better, not worse, just different people find different things work better. But that’s kind of what we’re doing: either the direct route or the more indirect route. The more indirect route is more common, but *why* that is – you know, it’s just how it is. Everyone’s different.

Why do I spend proportionately more time teaching about the energy body and all that? It’s probably partly because there are more possibilities there. It’s more unusual, so people need to hear – most of you have probably spent a long time paying attention to the breath at the nose or the upper lip or the abdomen or something. So the energy body is more unusual, and there are more possibilities there. There is probably an infinite amount of possibilities in terms of how creative it becomes, how playful it becomes, how imaginative it becomes.

And I find, over many years of teaching, that for a lot of people who have had very little development or opening or joy from paying attention at one point, opening up to the whole body is often a revelation, and things really start to move then. As I said, though, it’s not the case with everyone – at all. So we really want to find what works for you. This is so, so important.

If we talk now, the first section of today’s teaching, I want to talk about taking a narrow spot, classic spots – rather than the whole body, the classic spots are, as I said:

(1a) **The upper lip**, somewhere between the top of the lip and the beginning of the nose, so that whole area there.

(1b) Or **the tip of the nose**, just inside the nostrils, *anywhere* around there, all that whole area. It really doesn’t matter. The question is, when I pay attention to that location, where can I most clearly feel the sensations of the breath as they come in and out? And there will be sensations of the breath, the friction, really, of the breath moving across the skin or the tiny hairs of the skin there. Or there will be sensations of, for example, the in-breath is slightly cooler, because of the temperature, than the out-breath. The body has warmed the out-breath. Temperature, sensation – you must have heard this a million times. That’s one classic spot.

(2) Another classic spot is somewhere down in **the abdomen**. And what you’re paying attention to then is, naturally, when we breathe in, there’s the expansion, really, the rising of the abdomen as you inhale, and the falling, if you like, the falling back of the abdomen as you breathe out. And it’s that sensation of the movement of the abdomen, those sensations that go with that double movement, rising and falling. And that’s what you’re paying attention to. And people feel it in different places, or it could be a slightly larger area. It doesn’t matter. But what you’re really paying attention to – there are more

gross physical sensations, at first, than what we're talking about with the energy body. But those are the two classic places. Instead of primarily having this wider space of the whole energy body, we've got a narrower space. It's a narrower spot.

If I think of the word 'concentration,' and I automatically think of a narrow focus, this is just a prejudice and an indoctrination. It does not necessarily mean that at all. It cannot possibly mean that in Buddhadharmā. It cannot possibly mean that. In fifth *jhāna*, infinite space, I'm *concentrating* on infinite space. That's the exact opposite of a precise point. So it *cannot* mean that. It might be helpful, for some people at some times, to choose a small point, and then, as I said, it goes through a whole process. But that's not what concentration can mean. It's not like concentrated laundry detergent or a concentrated sulphuric acid: "I've got *this* much in *this* amount of space." It's a complete misconstrual. May be helpful to do it that way, may be not helpful, but that's not what *samādhi* means at all.

So there's a small focus, and it may be very helpful, but I'm going to say, you've heard so much about working with the breath this way. I just want to throw out three or four things:

(1) One is, even though we have a small, narrow spatial focus, I would suggest it would be very helpful to have a background awareness of the whole body. So if I say – and some of you are far away – can you see my hand? Can you focus on my hand, even if it's not that clear? Can you focus on it? Can you focus on my hand and still have a background awareness of the whole room behind me, what's also in your visual field? Can you switch those visual fields, so what's in the background is more in your foreground psychologically? That's what I'm talking about. So when there's a small focus, it's really helpful to have the whole body sense just lightly in the background – not 50/50, maybe 10 per cent or 5 per cent or something like that. So primarily, I'm really getting into this one spot, wherever it is, but I'm always maintaining this whole-body background awareness. Why? Partly because, when I have a bigger space that way, it's a bit like a table. If a table has one leg, and it's a narrow leg, it's hard for it to balance. If a table has two legs, it's still [hard]. If it's three or four, and they're spread out, it's much easier. So something spread out helps to balance the concentration. That's one of the reasons why sometimes the energy body works (but we'll revisit this in different ways): so it can stabilize really well.

(2) Second reason is (and I'll talk more about this probably starting tomorrow), as we go on with all this, the factor of effort and balanced effort and right effort becomes more and more crucial, actually. It becomes more and more of a real investigation. And it's not the sort of investigation that we sort of *nail it*: "Ah, day four, I've got the effort thing right, and then I can forget about it." It will stay with you for the rest of your practice life. It's just part of the art of practice. What's the effort level? What's the subtle effort level? What's involved in that? Where am I with that? Is it a bit too much? The whole thing just develops and gets more and more subtle, rather than something – "I've done that now." So if we talk about developing the art of *samādhi*, we must include this kind of opening up the exploration, and the subtlety of the exploration, the subtlety of the experimentation, with effort levels. It's not going to be something you're ever going to get beyond. It's part of the art of it. And we'll return to this a lot.

The thing about keeping the whole body in the background is that, thankfully, awareness of the whole body will enable us to be aware when we're over-efforting. And if I'm really over-efforting, I'm going to cramp up my muscles, and I'm going to get a headache right between the eyes, and that sort of thing. Even as the effort becomes a little more subtle, it will be reflected – maybe not in the

musculature, but maybe just in the tone and the contraction of the energy body. But basically, as an instrument, as an instrument of sensitivity to effort levels, this whole body space is really, really useful. It's going to tell me: "Oh, I can feel, there's just a bit of tension creeping into the energy body." It's telling me: "A bit too much pressure. Just relax a little bit." If I don't have that background awareness, it's much harder to be sensitive. So that's one thing.

(3) Then, I would say, let's talk about – again, we can think of developing concentration, *samādhi*, whatever word we're going to use, *jhāna*, as "Okay, what it *really is* is *staring really hard* and really unwaveringly at something, and if I can do that with enough intensity and enough unwaveringness, I will get into *jhāna*." It's just not true. [16:42] If I'm doing that, and there isn't openness of heart, it's not going to take me to *jhāna*. I might get very good at staying with an object, and that's helpful. It's not going to take me into *jhāna*. So rather than think about it that way – we've talked about openness of heart a little bit; we'll talk about it some more – but let me emphasize three things: rather than just 'hanging on' to something, three things you can think about. And in a way, you could sum this up as saying, "Let's **emphasize quality of attention in any moment over quantity**." In other words, *quantity* meaning, "How long have I stayed with the breath without losing, you know, going off in a thought or a sound, or whatever it is." So very often, what happens is we get into this quantity thing. And one part of our mind is just really checking: "Have I had a thought yet? How long has it been? Have I been distracted yet?" And counting breaths, etc. It's not that that's unimportant.

But can we kind of re-hierarchize our priorities? And I would say *quality* of attention is much more important. That means, in this moment, with this part of this breath, what's the quality of my attention? And what's meant in that? What's meant by *quality*? A lot of things. I'm only going to say, I'm going to point to three things today: **intensity, directionality** (I'm not sure if that's the right word, but let's say that), and **subtlety**. Let's do that in the reverse order.

(a) As I said yesterday, again, we tend to think of *jhānas* and *samādhi* in certain ways. And undeniably, I would say it's the case that deepening in *samādhi*, and certainly deepening through the eight *jhānas*, is a movement of increasing **subtlety**. I cannot get away from that. Each *jhāna* is more subtle than the last one. Each *jhāna* is more refined than the last one. The whole deepening of *samādhi*, even before you reach *jhāna*, needs to be a deepening into more and more subtlety. It's not the case, though you might sometimes hear it, that each *jhāna*, the mind is more unwavering than the last one, as if that was the primary thing that's happening. It's not the case. You could have fifth *jhāna* – you're not quite used to it yet, and you're wobbling out of it, and second *jhāna* that's much more stable for you, or whatever, or breath is much more stable, and you're just learning the second *jhāna*, and it wobbles.

Again, it's like, let's get our sense of the conceptual framework. What's actually happening here? What's important? Therefore, what do I need to emphasize, work with, and pay attention to, and actually bother about? [19:51] So subtlety is a key element. As you practise with the breath, whatever way of working with the breath, or place you're paying attention – as it goes on, and the mind settles down, and the body settles down, the breath becomes more subtle. It *should* become more subtle. I mentioned this yesterday, I think. Also, if you're practising *mettā* or compassion – now sometimes, compassion, when you start practising compassion there are all these tears, and it's up and down, and the world's suffering. And it's great, and we need to expand the heart that way and have it go through all that. But as it settles down and deepens, actually, the compassion gets more subtle, and the *mettā*

gets more subtle. It's less – I don't know what you would call it – like, certainly, fiery emotions or intense emotions; the whole thing gets more subtle. Likewise the breath or whatever object.

So there's this movement into subtlety. The object is actually perceived more and more subtly. As I said, we can get in the way of that, either by having a certain idea, or by doing something physically, like repeatedly doing that – what was it called? – ujjayi breathing, or whatever it is. There are many ways we can block that process, that natural process of subtilizing. When the object becomes naturally more subtle, for the *samādhi* to develop – I mean, already that means there's some *samādhi* developing; it cannot happen without that – but for the *samādhi*, then, to really keep developing, then the attention, the *quality* of the attention has to get correspondingly subtle. If my left hand here is going down, down, subtle, the object – whatever it is, breath, *mettā* – then my attention has to match it in subtlety. So in a way, the attention needs to get more delicate there. And that process of matching, of following the subtlety down, the attention-quality matches the object-quality – that process is, you could say, one of the most central things that's happening, one of the most central processes that's happening as *samādhi* develops. And as I said, the *jhānas* themselves are a spectrum. Or the eight *jhānas* are a spectrum of increasing subtlety and increasing refinement.

(b) Let me say these other two. What did I say? I said **directionality**. What do I mean by that? I'm not sure if it's the right word, but something like this: let's say you have the breath at the upper lip, nose. Very easily, as human beings – well, I'm not sure how universal this is, but it's very easy. One way to construe the attention – in other words, to have a sense of the attention 'here' somewhere, oftentimes in the head, and it's 'going towards' the object. So if the object's a visual object, certainly. Or it's 'going towards' the sensations. Here's the attention, and it goes towards the sensations. And that's great. It's probing them and, you know, not *attacking* them, but going towards them kind of in this more probing way. Let's put it that way.

But we can also (and I know many of you know this) construe – and by 'construe,' I don't mean just an idea. I mean a sense, an actual sense, a perception of 'receiving' the breath, which in a way, of course, the body *is*. The breath, as air, comes in, and it's 'received.' But the mind can also feel like the sensations are being received. So this is something we can play with: the directionality, if you like, of attention. And this is something you can actually play with. All this boils down to: what's helpful right now? It's not the case that one of these directions is always going to be, for you, better than another. The whole thing is a dance. The whole thing is like riding a bicycle. "Oh, it's always good to lean to the left on a bicycle." No, it's good in *certain* situations to lean to the left. In other situations, it's good to lean the other way, or right in the middle, or whatever it is. So all this – again, it's stuff for you to play with, moment to moment, to have this sense of: *you're* the artist, *you're* the improviser, *you're* the person with your hands on the clay, on the wheel.

(c) So subtlety, directionality – the other one is **intensity**. This is kind of a hard one, but I think it's really important. It's like, as you pay attention to X, can you get a sense of actually dialling up, or down, the intensity, the energy of your attention? Again, you might think of it like, that probing gets more. That's one way of thinking about it. But it might also be just like a lamp going up, or a sense of energy – it's dialling up, there's more energy, I'm *really* present, I'm *really* alive there. But this, again, you just think, "Oh, well, more is better." Not always. It's an interesting thing. So if we take all these factors together, and you think about, "Okay, well, subtlety – what allows a subtle attention?"

Sometimes it's a *delicacy* of attention that allows to go into subtlety, and not so much *intensity*. If you think about – I know there are some fantastic chefs in the room, in fact, but let's say someone's cooked this amazing meal. It's exquisite, and you're tasting it. And each mouthful – you know, sometimes when you put food into your mouth, the flavours reveal themselves, kind of, not all at the same time. Have you had that? And sometimes some of them are mixed at the same time. What kind of mode of attention do you go into, if it's really exquisite, and especially the chef's there, and they want to know what you think? There's a kind of delicate poise in relation to the taste-attention, the gustatory attention. So this is delicacy. I can't kind of go in there, you know, ramming in there. It's not the right kind of attention that will reveal those subtle, exquisite qualities, if it's one of those really subtle dishes.

Or listening: when you listen for something, a sound that's faint amid background noise, there's a quality there of – you know, you're not squeezing something. You're not squinting. You're not pressuring something. It's more like there's a kind of poise, and it's almost like you're attentive in a way that your antennae pick up something. [27:17] So if you just, in a way, pay attention to how you pay attention in these kinds of situations, you might learn something. We might learn something about what I'm talking about here.

Now, what's also interesting is that, for example, if the breath is the object, or the *mettā* is the object, the delicacy of the object, as the object becomes more delicate and subtle, actually, it *can* (not always the case, but it *can*) become more delightful. So the delightfulness of the object often goes with the delicacy. But I would certainly say that the delightfulness of the attention increases with the delicacy of the attention. In other words, I think, as human beings, we like paying attention in a delicate way. We actually like that. It feels good. As that begins to happen more and more, part of the job here is to enjoy that. Okay, it might very, very not a big deal. But that's part of [it]: can I get intimate also with this delight? Can I include it? Can I enjoy it? Which is, again, a very different thing than “Am I still thinking? How long have I gone since my last distraction?”

So, that's the first block of today's teachings – a smaller point, and when you're using a smaller point like that, there are a few things to bear in mind, there are a few things you can play with. I mean, there's more, but that's okay for now. And as I said, where we're going is for this whole body space to be very pleasant, in different ways. But we can still use something that doesn't look that much like that. We use a small point, and for some people, that's what works best. As you get into this one small point, it will tend to grow. That's also one of the signs that it's getting deeper. It's almost like, “Oh, this upper lip area kind of feels like it's about as big as my head now.” That's very normal. So it will grow anyway, and in a way, that's part of the whole thing moving towards the whole energy body thing. I'm just mentioning that.

Okay, I think that's all I wanted to say about that piece. Why don't we pause there and do another one, yeah?

Breathing with the Energy Body (Guided Meditation)

In the second one, now we'll go to an energy body, whole body one. We'll do it as a guided meditation, just to give you a few ideas of what you can play with.

[00:49, guided meditation begins]

Okay. Remember, take that time to play with your posture. Sometimes when you're still getting used to all this, and working with the energy body towards *samādhi*, even micro-adjustments in the posture make quite a big difference, much more than you would think. I could say something about that. Maybe I'll say it on another occasion. Take your time with the posture. Just touching base with the sensations of contact, the feet or the legs, back or the backside on the chair, cushion, bench – whatever it is.

Feeling, sensing your posture. Sensing the uprightness, the alertness expressed in the posture. Sensing the resolve expressed in the posture. And at the same time, sensing, feeling, throughout the whole body space, the openness, the receptivity, the softness expressed in the posture. This ideal poise of the *citta* manifesting, expressing in the posture. The *citta* will shape the posture. The posture, to a certain extent, at least, will shape the *citta* – mutual dependent arising.

And the whole-body awareness. Really, again, spreading that attention over the whole space of the body, and even a little bit larger. Now, this attention will shrink so many times you can't count in one session. Not a problem. You just notice that. You open it up again. You fill that space with bright presence, alive sensitivity.

And here, working directly with the energy body, what we're interested in within that space is the texture of it, the vibration, the tone of it, the feel, the energy of it. It shrinks; you keep coming back to that.

When you feel ready, just allowing, supporting, encouraging the breath to be the longest possible comfortable breath. So really not a strain; just as long as is still comfortable – which may be much longer than you think, or that you're used to. And really not a lot of air. It's really quite a gentle, subtle breath, relatively speaking. A long, slow, smooth breath, in and out. And alive to the whole body space, the whole energy body.

As we explored briefly yesterday, you can tune in, if you like, to the sense of the whole space, the whole energy body expanding and contracting, and what that feels like throughout the whole space. And/or you could also pay attention, tune into, feel into the sense of the whole space being energized, feeling energized with the in-breath, and a kind of relaxation or letting go with the out-breath. Throughout the whole space, these are the energies, qualities, feelings, tones, vibrations, if you like, that you're tuning into, opening to.

And really let that long breath open up the body, open up the whole space. And again and again, opening up the attention, the awareness, to the whole space. Make sure your legs are breathing, are being breathed, your feet. You may not have anatomical images of feet, or legs, or head, or whatever. That's fine. Just let that go, if they're not there, and you don't need to bring them back, or you may. But really the whole body is breathing. The whole body space is involved. Including the head, or where the head is, where the feet are, where the legs are – that region of the space, region of energy, region of vibration.

Okay. I'm going to do something a little bit different. We're going to take a little bit of a tour. So when you're ready, can you imagine the breath coming into the body, coming into the energy body space, at a point, let's say, a couple of inches to the side, or maybe a little bit below, as well, the navel,

the belly button? It's probably not that helpful to imagine the breath as a kind of vapour like you see on a cold day when you breathe out, and the sort of water vapour and air, and that sort of swirling gas thing. Just what we're really interested in is, if I conceive of the breath coming in there, and just imagine that, how does it affect the whole energy, the whole space, the whole tone of the whole body? If you are visual, and you want to experiment with a visual thing, you could imagine the breath as a kind of column of light or beam of light coming in there, into the energy body. And how does it affect, how does it ripple out from there? What do you notice when you imagine that? Whole-body awareness.

But now, we don't have to be wedded to the longest breath. So there are two things to play with here: what do you notice when you imagine the breath coming in there? And also, what kind of breath does the body want coming in there? Is it a really long breath? Is it a much shorter breath? Somewhere in between? Is it a kind of fuller breath, or a very gentle, soothing breath? Don't be afraid to use your imagination to play. What do you notice in the whole body space, and what kind of breath just feels best? All very light, very playful. What do you notice in the whole space – its energy, its tones, its feeling? And what kind of breath feels best there?

When you're ready, leaving that point there, and imagining the breath coming in at a similar point on the right-hand side. So about two inches from the navel – doesn't have to be exact at all; just somewhere around there that feels kind of, "It's okay." Maybe a little bit lower. Whole body, whole energy body awareness, sensitive, bright. Sensitive to what the body wants, what kind of breath it wants there.

So construing the breath and construing the body as just energy. Both are energy. Imagining, sensing body and breath as energy. And feeling that, noticing what it feels like and what feels good, or as good as possible for right now. Whole-body awareness. Really opening up that attention, again and again, to the whole space. And opening up the whole body to the breath, to the breath energy.

When you're ready, the same thing, at a point, perhaps, in between. So on the midline of the body, perhaps a couple of inches or so down from the belly button, from the navel, somewhere around there. Doesn't have to be exact; just what feels kind of right. Same playing, same experiment, same sensitivity and questions for the whole body, for the whole energy body. Opening, opening.

And again, when you're ready, moving that point, the point at which we're construing, imagining, sensing the breath energy coming into the body, moving it up that midline to somewhere in the solar plexus area. How does it feel? What do you notice in the whole space, with the in-breath, with the out-breath construed, imagined, sensed there?

So there's really not a right and a wrong here. It might be you sense that whole space expanding, contracting, or energizing and relaxing. It might be that you notice certain currents through different parts of the body. They may be different, as you breathe in and out, at different points. Whatever it is that you find helpful to tune into, to feel into, to open to.

When you're ready, just moving up a bit higher on that midline to the heart centre – somewhere on the midline around the level of the heart, or a little higher even.

If you're really into one of these points right now, you don't have to necessarily move on. We're just kind of doing a bit of a tour, if you want. You can stay with wherever you want to explore for a while, or what feels good. But if you want, you can move up now, and the breath, imagine it, construe it, sense it coming in the front of the throat. So not down from the mouth, but directly into the throat.

What ripples out, then, from that point, through the whole energy body space? Those ripples might even extend out of the body, out of that space. Or they may circulate in the space. No right or wrong.

Again, if you want to, you can play with the idea, the image, the sense of the breath coming in at the crown of the head, down into the body space from there. So maybe your anatomy is clear. Maybe it's really not clear, or partially clear. It's not that important at this point. What happens, and what kind of breath does the body want, when it comes in there, when it goes out there? How does it feel, the whole space? The breath goes out, but we're paying attention to the space, and how the breath going out feels or affects the whole space. Light, playful, open, sensitive.

And if you want, how about the breath energy coming in and out of the energy body, of the whole body space, either at the base of the neck, somewhere around there, or even up at the occiput, the base of the skull, or somewhere in between? Just find a region there, and just play. How does that breath coming in there affect the front of the body? How does it affect the legs, the whole space? What kind of breath feels good? What kind of breath supports a sense of well-being in that space, just as much as that is possible right now?

How about, if you're ready, somewhere around the back of the heart, the back of the body, the breath energy coming in, going out there? Don't be afraid or concerned, "Am I imagining something?" If you imagine it first and then feel it, great. No problem. Imagining certain currents or whatever it is – it doesn't matter as long as the kinaesthetic sense gets involved, one way or another. There's that sensitivity to the feeling, the tone, the energy, currents if there are, vibration, texture.

Then, again, if you want to, if you feel ready, how about the breath energy coming in either at the sacrum or the tailbone, or some place around there, again, along the midline? Perhaps there are currents flowing down your legs, as well as up the back, at the same time, radiating out from that point. What kind of breath supports a sense of well-being, a feeling of well-being, just as much as possible?

And then, when you're ready, just staying with the whole space, that energy body awareness that expands over that whole area, the whole body, and letting the breath go, and just being with that sense of that space, the whole energy body. Let the breath do whatever it wants to do. No need to pay any attention particularly to the breath. You might notice it, of course, anyway, but just being aware of the whole vibration, texture, feel, energy, tone of the whole energy body right now.

[37:41, guided meditation ends]

And when you're ready, coming out of the meditation, opening the eyes. So you get the idea? Anything's possible here. There's no right or wrong. There's no order you need to go in if you're moving around like this. You might find you want to stay at one point for a while sitting because that's the juicy point, or that's the point where it's easiest for you. It could be anywhere, you know? Anything is possible. Experiment, yeah? You might have the breath coming up from the earth, through your feet, into the whole body. It might be from the middle of the body, that it kind of expands out. It's not even coming in from the outside. Or it might come in from 360 degrees. There's no limit to what's possible here.

[inaudible question from yogi] Thank you, yeah. So the question is, if I'm recommending one base practice, what we've just done, is that one, or does one point within there become a base practice?

Actually, in a way, we've done a couple already of energy body breath meditations, and I would conceive of *that* as one base practice. That's why I said earlier today: why do I spend longer on the energy body practice? Because there are so many possibilities. So even within one sitting, you could do a tour like that, and then actually just go back to something like I'm just with the expansion/contraction, you know? But basically, you've got energy body, coupled with the breath – because we can also do it uncoupled from the breath, but right now it's coupled with the breath – and within that, it's a huge playground, and that's your base practice.

Now, you might find, over time, that there's one spot that, within your base practice, within your springboard practice, it's your base point. You're just there a lot because it seems to work for you. But again, you still want to be responsive, creative, etc., and all that, and it might be that you still want to explore other things, if that's what you're doing. In other words, this energy body breath practice is quite a big territory, with a lot of possibilities, and actually infinite and endless kind of possibilities. Basically, we could say you're construing of the breath as energy, and you're construing of the body as an energy body, and you're just playing with how those two kind of – I don't know what the word is – dance, move in and out of each other. And anything goes. And what you're paying attention to is what feels good, what's helpful in terms of – remember the Buddha's analogy of the soap ball, and the apprentice bathman, bathperson, just shaping it. That's kind of what you're doing. You're using the breath to shape that ball into what feels good. Does that make sense? Yeah? Okay. Derek, yeah?

[inaudible question from yogi] Yeah, okay. So Derek's saying sometimes you bring the *mettā* in, or it comes in? You bring the *mettā* in, and then you can't tell whether you're using one or the other? Do you mean that the *mettā* seems to follow the rhythm of the breath once you've started doing the *mettā* practice? Yeah. I'm not sure what to answer. In many respects, it's good to keep things separate, you know? But you may find that ... I think if you want to go deep in *mettā*, you probably want to eventually separate it from the breath, okay? Because you're going to get so deep that the breath actually stops. So you need to keep them separate. At the beginning, though, it might help – it's what I said earlier: it's like I'm just expecting to nail my attention to something, and it's going to take me into *samādhi*. Actually the exact ingredient that's missing might be just something that juicens up the heart a little bit. And now that might be the *mettā*. So you might be finding a particular key that works for you, but it's really got a larger context of, again, if you're a chef, you're just, "This needs a bit more" – whatever the *mettā* would be, pepper or whatever. It just needs a bit more, and you're just adding. It's kind of like that. So that's my initial answer, but it's probably a little bit complicated. Does that sound okay? Yeah?

[inaudible response from yogi] Yeah. I think it's good – I will say more about this later on – it's really good to be clear: "I'm doing *this*. This is primary." If I use something else, and perfectly legitimate – I drag in an insight practice – it's secondary, and I'm doing it for what reason? Because something's got stuck, because something's blocked, because I just need something to loosen. "This is primary, this is secondary." When that thing's loosened, I can let go of it, and I come back to my primary thing. Yeah? So let's maybe say it like that for now. Okay?

Okay. Is that good? I'd like to talk. This is the third part. [transcriber's note: see the following dharma talk for part three]

A Hidden Treasure: The Relationship with the Hindrances

Actually, what I want to do is talk about the hindrances, but a couple of things before that. As I said, it's difficult teaching this retreat. There's so much I want to communicate, and so much that feels important to communicate, because you're all in different places with different needs. I mentioned the walking practice yesterday, and Derek's just mentioned *mettā*.

Who is doing *mettā* as their basic practice? Anyone? Great, okay. When you walk, are you comfortable walking with the *mettā* practice? Like, you know how to do that? Yeah? Okay. What I want to say, I guess, is I will talk about *mettā* tomorrow, but again, what I want to introduce is doing *mettā* with the energy body awareness, which means that I might have phrases, I might have visualizations or whatever, but I've actually got this whole space, and I never lose that, and I'm sensitive to that (I'll talk more about this tomorrow), so that when I walk up and down, I'm walking up and down in that kind of awareness, with all the *mettā* and however I'm doing the *mettā*, yeah? Actually, that's all I want to say for now, and I'll talk about *mettā* tomorrow. Is that okay?

Second thing, very briefly, I was very rushed in the latter part of yesterday's talk, so I just want to make sure that something was clear. It might have been clear anyway, and I might not need to say this. But when I was talking about, you know, "Why are we doing *jhāna* practice?", and how we conceive of the reasons for doing *jhāna* practice, and therefore what we emphasize, I don't want to replace other emphases or what other teachers might emphasize – simplifying, or laser beam, or unwavering mind, or all that. I don't want to replace those reasons – more *add* to them, okay? So all those emphases are important, can get emphasized at different times, but I just want very much to add something that's not often talked about, that to me seems really, really important: these qualities of sensitivity, attunement, refinement, etc. It's more to add that to the possible reasons we're doing this, and the possible emphases, and actually, then, to allow those to be more prominent, or even the *most* prominent emphases and reasons. So I didn't mean to say, you know, we're getting rid of all that. It's more just a question of emphasis.

Okay, what I want to talk about, as I said, is the hindrances. Now, there are a few things here: one is that sometimes, in the suttas, it's almost – not quite a definition, but it's almost like, with the abandoning of the hindrances, there arises the first *jhāna*. So it's almost like part of the definition of the *jhāna* is the absence of the hindrances. It doesn't say, "With the unwavering concentration on this or that." It says, "With the abandoning of the hindrances."¹ That's quite interesting, and it's quite important. Again, it has implications. How am I thinking about what I'm doing here? But part of what I want to say about them is, it could sound like, "Okay, so working with the hindrances is something that applies pre-*jhāna*. And it certainly does, of course; it applies right from day one of anyone's meditation practice. But not *just* then. Once the *jhānas*, and even all eight *jhānas*, are maybe accessible and regular visitors or explorations, etc. – even once all that is kind of up and running and going and wonderful, the hindrances will still arise at times. Absolutely.

What I also want to add, and what's much less commonly talked about and acknowledged, is that they can arise very subtly, subtle versions of them can arise *in* a *jhāna* as well. Now I use that word *in*, in a loose way, kind of avoiding the silliness of this extra-sharp definition of what is and what isn't a *jhāna*. The point is, again, about subtlety, that even within a *jhāna*, there can be subtle hindrances

around. And there's a sutta in the *Majjhima Nikāya* where the Buddha's teaching, actually, super, super-advanced meditators. They're doing all this whizzy stuff with psychic powers and all that stuff, and he's still talking to them about what subtle hindrances arise in that depth of *samādhi*.² So we have to have this idea of the hindrances, as I said earlier – they're part of the deal. They're part of the deal when, certainly, *jhāna* feels like a million miles away. They're part of the deal once we've already had a lot of experience in the *jhānas*. They'll be coming and going. And they're actually part of the deal in a subtle way even *in a jhāna*, therefore part of the work, part of the play, part of the whole. Again, when I say '*jhāna* practice,' I *mean* including the hindrances and all that.

I want to say something about insight in relation to the hindrances, but first thing I want to do is rattle through pretty quickly, because a lot of this is probably familiar to you. I want to rattle through some antidotes to the hindrances. First thing to say before that is, an 'antidote' is something we – you know, you apply something with a certain goal in mind: I want to get rid of something. I want an antidote to an illness, or whatever: let's hope to get rid of this illness. So there's, let's say, ways of practising insight meditation at times, when a hindrance comes up, and the view is, "It's fine. It's just here. I just watch it. I do the same with a hindrance as I do with a non-hindrance or anything else. I'm just watching it. It's not better or worse. And I'm just – it's okay." When you're doing *jhāna* practice, that's not the attitude. We want antidotes, and we want to work against the hindrances. And this is primarily, even in the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta* – this is actually the instruction of the Buddha – he's talking about what feeds the hindrances and what starves the hindrances.³ And we're clearly really interested in what starves the hindrances.

There's a slight kind of tilting, over the years of modern mindfulness teaching – but anyway. It's still a valid way of working at times, but in *jhāna*, in *samādhi* practice, no. We've got a different relationship, a different attitude. Again, watch out for the inertia. Watch out for the habit. If you have a habit of just, "Oh, it's just a hindrance. I'll just sit it out. I'll just watch it. It's okay. It's fine," we want to shake up that inertia a little bit, galvanize it. They're going to come. There's no way they're not going to come. If you come into an interview and you report to me that you just didn't have any hindrances, I'd just say you're not paying attention. Because at *least* the subtle ones are going to come, no matter how much practice you've done, and usually, as I'll explain later, also the not-so-subtle ones.

So, rattling off through the antidotes, the two most common hindrances are probably – they're given usually in a certain order, but let's start with the two most common, which are sloth and torpor, and restlessness and worry. I'm just going to throw out a bunch, and if you think of one that I've forgotten that's actually really helpful, then just shout it out. We'll put them all in a pot for everyone to use.

(1) Sloth and torpor: getting sleepy is the extreme, the head nodding like that. But like all of these, it has a range, so just dullness, fogginess, sleepiness, etc., lack of energy.

(a) Expanding the awareness to the whole body. There's a reason why I say that over and over and over. It's so, so, so important. It will affect the mind. It's impossible – if you're really expanding the awareness and really filling it with attention, it's actually quite hard to be nodding. There's something about it that's the opposite movement. So expanding the awareness to the whole body and really filling it, again and again and again.

(b) As I've mentioned as part of a couple of the guided meditations, the in-breath is naturally energizing. The out-breath is naturally relaxing. So that if I want, if I need more energy, **a bit more attention to the in-breath**, and a bit more attention to the energization of the in-breath is going to energize things.

(c) **A long breath**, or longer breath, or very long breath will also energize. It will energize the body. You can think of it as oxygen or whatever, but if you think in energy terms, it's just there's more energy there. And that will energize the mind. So long breath, move to a long breath – if you're working with the breath, of course.

(d) **If you're working**, let's say, **with mettā**, then again, what's going to help? Could it be that **going back in the categories to the easiest person** might actually lighten things up, bring a bit of brightness, just because the *mettā* comes and it's easiest?

(e) Or might it be that **going to the difficult person**, because they're difficult, and the challenge of it keeps you awake?

(f) Or might it be that **expanding to all beings**, partly because of the spatial expansion – which I'll come back to in a second. The question is, do I need to **shift categories** if I'm doing *mettā*? And which way? And it's not like it's always going to be *this* one that's going to help. So I have to have that willingness to respond and experiment.

(g) **More pegs**, okay? We talked about pegs in the counting, right? Bringing back those pegs really gives the mind – keeps it busy, gives it something to focus on. It literally keeps it up from sagging, okay? **With the numbers and the counting, they're like pegs. With the mettā practice, if you're using phrases, the phrases are like pegs.** What can often be really helpful in the *mettā* practice – so let's say your first two phrases are “May you be happy” and “May you be peaceful.” So usually you go, “May you be happy. May you be peaceful.” Actually, if the mind needs a bit more pegs, if it needs more energy, or if it's getting lost: “May you be happy. May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be peaceful.” Say each one twice. First one, I'm not quite there. The second one, I'm a bit more there. So just small things like this, but they can make a lot of difference.

(h) You can also just **imagine**, actually, let's say, **your whole body filled with a bright, white light**, just like the sun – really, really useful. Again, when the mind gets tired, it gets dark, foggy.

(i) You can also **open up the awareness very, very wide** – much wider than the energy body size, which is just a little bit bigger than the physical body. You can open it up to the size of this room. It's a lovely, huge room. Or even wider to the sky outside, etc. When we get tired, the mind shrinks. It's actually what we do when we curl up and go to sleep: the mind pulls in on itself, in a way. And so, opening up that awareness, opening your eyes, open up the awareness. You have a sense of the whole room. You're kind of moving the mind, encouraging it in the opposite direction that it does when it contracts as it falls asleep or gets tired like that. Tired mind is a small mind. [12:47]

(j) You can also sometimes just **sweep through the body, paying attention to whatever sensations you feel there.** And again, *experiment*. Is it more helpful right now, with this hindrance right now, to **sweep really fast**? Sometimes it is, when we're tired. Just move the attention quite quickly. Maybe it's more helpful **going up. Or maybe down. Or maybe both. Or maybe it might be helpful really slowly, really getting into a sensation.** Again, you have to experiment.

So those are some antidotes for sloth and torpor. We really want to use these.

(2) With **restlessness** – it's actually **restlessness and worry**, which refers to worry about ethical misdeeds that I'm worried I've done, or someone's going to find out this or that. But we'll leave that part. We'll leave that aside for now. But a lot of them [the antidotes] are interestingly quite similar, so:

(a) **More pegs** can really help.

(b) If you're working with the breath, the **long breath** tends to really help with restlessness.

(c) Or it could be like we just did. It's like, you **find a way of breathing or a way of construing the breath that feels soothing**. I mean, there's a place on your back, and it's almost like the breath and the sense of it comes, metaphorically, like someone just soothingly stroking your back, and that addresses the restlessness. It soothes the restlessness. Again, we can shape the breath with our imagination, the breath energy, and that can have a real effect on our energy, of course.

(d) Again, **expanding the awareness to the whole body**. So it's useful for opposite hindrances, if you like.

(e) And again, the **sweeping of the attention** can be really helpful when there's restlessness.

(f) One particular thing: if there's a lot of restlessness that is not so much mental but physical – in other words, it's not a lot of thought-proliferation, but just the body feels restlessness, and the mind won't settle down with that, then what can be really helpful, again, is **a really large awareness, as large as you can open it out**. But within that, you have a job to do. And the job is, let go of your primary base object, and you **become aware of the sensations of restlessness**, the actual prickly feelings that arise and pass in the body – you know, that sort of thing – in this big awareness, and your job is **completely allowing them**, and they'll be, moment to moment, arising and passing, unpleasant – and **completely welcoming them**.

Actually, technically what we're doing then is we're switching to what I would call a particular insight way of looking. But if you stay with that for a while, actually, for reasons I'll talk about later, it can settle the whole thing down. The whole system settles down, because we're then in a very different relationship with the restlessness. When restlessness comes up, we have aversion to the restlessness. It's unpleasant, the very sense of restlessness. And that aversion to the restlessness feeds the whole thing.

When you go wide like that, and you come into a mode of completely allowing, completely welcoming, we're almost, by definition, quietening the aversion. We're practising a non-aversive relationship. And it's that and the space that will really, really help. You just stick with it, stick with it, again and again. Actually, if you just do [that] – I remember playing with this years ago in the Hermitage, sitting – restless, restless, sitting while doing that – actually then ending up sitting for three hours, because that very practice just allowed everything to calm really, really, down. So all these things – they're quite powerful, if we find the right way to work with them.

(3) Okay, **sense desire** as a hindrance, third one (it's usually listed first, but I'll put it third).

(a) Let's talk about one particular kind of sense desire: **sexual desire**. Okay, there's desire for someone, or whoever it is. You know, you can go and take a cold shower or whatever, but I'd just like to offer this as a real possibility, especially as one develops more, and you're all experienced meditators. So oftentimes, what happens is there's sexual desire, and it goes to an image of having

sexual contact in some kind of way – I have this person, or whatever it is. That’s the bit that’s not so helpful for *samādhī*. But the desire itself and the energy, there’s a way of working with it.

For instance: okay, here’s desire. It’s gone to the image already. Is it possible to kind of feel the energy of sexual arousal? So I’ve got desire, I’ve got image (in the probably *not* imaginal sense, but an image there), and I’ve got sexual energy or arousal. Of course, they’re related. We could say you’ve got three things. Of those three, if I can focus on and open to, actually, and feel the *energy* – so most people, the desire comes up, and then the image comes up, and then the feeling, and I’m lost in the image. I’m lost in chasing this sexual fantasy. I’m embroiled in it. If I just can kind of **focus more on the energy and actually open to it, allow that actual energy in the space of the energy body**, actually, it feels good. If it’s not too tight, I open to it, and I enjoy it, it’s actually quite close to *pīti*. It’s quite close to the kind of good feeling. And oftentimes when people first experience *pīti*, they say, “Oh, it’s like an orgasm.” It doesn’t have to be that intense, but there’s a similarity there.

So what you’re really doing is approaching this thing more energetically, feeling it, opening to it, and kind of riding it in a way that allows it to shape into something that’s a more pure energy, which is actually very conducive and helpful to where we’re going, or similar to where we’re going anyway. I wouldn’t necessarily, obviously, give that to complete beginners. But you guys have had a lot of experience, so if that’s kind of desire coming up, that’s good. It’s a way of working with it. It can be very similar to *pīti* if I can kind of filter things out and emphasize and open in the right way.

(b) What about **desire for food**? Anyone got any suggestions? Sitting here, and I can’t think of anything but lunch or tea. Does that come up for anyone? Okay, not a problem.

(4) Ill-will and aversion – I’ll split this into two, this hindrance:

(a) Ill-will means, actually, I’m getting really upset with someone here, so much so that I wish them harm. **(i) Mettā**, obviously. You switch – if it’s really strong, you know, if breath is your base practice, just switch to *mettā*. I need to deal with this ill-will. I absolutely [need to], because when that’s there, it’s not going to help. It’s really going to get in the way. **(ii)** But there’s another possibility within that, which is: when I have ill-will towards someone, or aversion towards someone, or I just don’t like them, and the mind is in that kind of nasty state (however gross or subtle), actually, what I can do then – so first thing, I think, “Oh, I give *mettā* to that person,” which is great. That might really help. But there’s a second possibility, which is actually, bring the attention back to myself without trying to change the ill-will or how terrible this person is, or those kinds of thoughts and feelings. **Bring the attention back to myself, and actually notice and feel the dukkha of that ill-will here.** It’s in *my* heart. There’s a taste in my mouth. It’s a flavour in my energy body and my consciousness. It’s *dukkha*. It’s painful. So I’m not trying to change the ill-will. I just come back, and I feel what’s happening. Don’t judge, just: “What does it feel like? Oh, it’s *dukkha*.” And feel the pain of it. I just have to let my consciousness touch the pain there.

If I’m doing that, if I’m just letting it touch it, then what can happen is, when I touch that pain, when I come into contact, it turns into compassion for myself, okay? Self-compassion. You think, “Yeah, but my problem is with the other person.” It doesn’t matter. Once there’s self-compassion, there’s compassion. It’s a new energy in the system, and it will soften everything. So my self-compassion starts changing my relationship with this other person. That’s really, really useful as well.

(b) What can also happen – and what you will, I’m sure, notice happening over the course of the retreat – is that **we get aversive at certain noises**: the heating, or the birds, the rooks, which are a lot quieter than they used to be, say, ten or fifteen years ago, for some reason. And it’s like, “Oh, those crows are so loud,” or whatever it is, and “I’m trying to meditate, and they’re *bothering* me.” Or this person is just, “Every time they get up, their bones creak,” like my bones creak or whatever, something, or their breathing. Aversion at noise, which could include aversion at a person or another sentient being, or whatever it is.

(i) This is going to be really common, okay? I have to **remember the big picture, the goal**. Where am I going in practice? I’m certainly not going towards more aversion. I’m going towards less aversion. That’s what I want. It’s not even *jhāna* is my primary goal. **It’s less aversion, less *kilesa*, freedom from the defilements**. Just remind myself, “What do I want? **I want to get to a place where there’s less aversion, I’m less bothered by noise, I’m more open, there’s more love**, etc.” [23:31] So again, what does that imply about how I should practise the *jhānas*, and what kind of way I’m holding, and my view of the whole thing? Is it possible, can I find a way of practising the *jhānas* that is not so bothered, that kind of *includes* sounds, and coming and going, and noises? Not bothered, but not throwing out the baby with the bathwater: “Oh, I don’t need to make an effort, then.” So some attitude, view, or stance here that’s really, really possible.

(ii) Sometimes what you can actually do is, again, **deliberately let the primary object go, and open up more to sound, and a sense of really including that**. And again, I’m doing the opposite thing of aversion. I’m opening to sound and including it. I’m not saying, “Oh, that’s *other* than what I’m trying to do.” I’m opening to sound, including it, and then that starts changing the way I feel about the sound. And then within that, keeping that openness, actually, then I can reintroduce the primary object, but I’ve got it in a much bigger space, and a much bigger attitude, a much bigger orientation.

(iii) You know, technically, we’ll get to this when we talk about the second *jhāna*, but actually, technically, if in any moment, you could just quite significantly **turn down any aversion in the mind**, you would come very close to the second *jhāna*. *Sukha* would arise. Happiness would arise. With a lot of practice – or actually, maybe, again, this is just one of those things. Just try. I say, well, just try. Sometimes I say, “Okay, just turn down the aversion.” You say, “What do you mean, ‘turn down’? I don’t know how to do it.” Just try. Just try to turn down the aversion, because turning down the aversion can then just directly give rise to happiness, give rise to *sukha*.

(5) Okay, last one: **doubt**. We can doubt the teacher, we can doubt the teachings, and we can doubt ourselves. There’s probably lots of other stuff, but those are the three sort of common ones. So what’s the difference between questioning and doubt? **Doubt often involves an absence of questioning**, in fact, or an absence of letting questions blossom and grow into an inquiry that’s actually helpful. Doubt tends to paralyse. We get stuck in a kind of confusion or this and that. We’re not actually questioning anything. The mind is just shuttling back and forth or going round in a circle. So sometimes, underneath all that, there’s actually a question or two or three that need to get clarified and formulated, and perhaps asked to oneself or to a teacher. But we haven’t let the question form yet. And we’re just stuck in this kind of unclear shuttling back and forth. So *is there a question there?*

Once we've got a question, it's no longer paralysing. Even formulating it clearly will help. We'll feel unparalysed. And **then formulating and asking and engaging will be really helpful**. But doubt paralyses. And so, just one thing to bear in mind is timing, here. **When am I going to wrestle with this either question or doubt? "Outside of the meditation" is the answer.** In other words, yeah, there's something I'm really not sure about. I'm confused. I have a question, and I can't proceed until I have an answer. Just, "This is my meditation time, so I'm just going to put that aside. But I promise you, mind, that I will get to this question, and I will think about it, I'll ponder it, I'll inquire, I'll ask something later." You make a deal with the mind. It's like, "We're going to get to this. I'm not ignoring it." But it happens outside of the formal practice.

How many people have heard of the practice of **exchanging the happiness of self and other**? A few of you. It's a huge practice, infinite possibilities. I think there's quite a large section about it in the book I wrote, *Seeing That Frees*.⁴ At some point, you can visit that. I want to say it's a really, really beautiful practice. It's one of the most gorgeous explorations you can do as a meditator, and full of creative possibilities and lovely, luscious possibilities of transformation. In a nutshell, here I am, pretty miserable from some hindrance attack or whatever, and I say to myself, "You know what? I'll take this. I'll take this because somewhere, someone else – maybe someone I know, maybe someone I don't know and will never know – someone, somewhere else correspondingly, by magic, I'm taking their *dukkha*, and they can have the happiness." So again, technically, you could say, well, what am I doing there? Instead of the automatic, natural aversion to the hindrances, I'm actually saying, "Come, come, I'll take this." But it has heart in it. It has this, "I'm willing to take this suffering right now. I'm opening myself to the suffering for the sake of the release from suffering of someone else, somewhere." So it's a kind of, you could say, 'magical thinking' – it doesn't matter – using your imagination, whatever. There are all kinds of variations on that with emptiness and stuff, but that's the nutshell of it. It's a very beautiful thing.

And often what happens, with the hindrances around, is there's no heart as well. Everything's got squeezed, miserable, and there's no heart. One possibility is bringing the heart in, in that very beautiful way. So you could do that with physical discomfort as well: "I can take this pain right now. I *will* take this pain right now. I'm willing to take this pain for the sake of someone else's ease, someone else's well-being."

Like I said, we have to get clear a few things about the hindrances: one is that there are subtle hindrances as well. So everyone's used to really gross hindrances, and it's generally what we get taught about when you first hear about the hindrances on insight retreats and stuff like that. But they also manifest very, very subtly. And as I said, there's a sutta in the *Majjhima Nikāya* where the Buddha's talking, and he's talking about subtle [hindrances], and he lists all these subtle hindrances.⁵ So things like elation and inertia, fear, slight over-efforting, slight under-efforting – very, very slight, he's talking about. Desire, if it's not handled well. Perception of multiplicity – you know, just in a way, too much awareness of different things. There's a whole list there. But the point is, there's a whole range of subtlety. And in a way, there's always something to play with and work with and experiment with, something that can be tweaked a little bit.

Of course, there are some times in *jhāna* practice where all that goes, and we're not actually aware of any hindrances. And that's fine. You don't have to go looking for them at that point. You just get into the enjoyment of it. As you get more into the territory of a *jhāna*, then you start to realize the kind of more subtle hindrances that might be there, or possibly be there at times, that at first you don't realize. It's not that we're always looking. We're not at all always looking for hindrances with *jhāna* practice. We're actually inclining more to what's pleasant and easeful, and enjoying. But they will come up subtly.

Let me point out something else that I want to come back to on the retreat, and actually emphasize quite a lot. And it's something that, I think, gets clearer through *jhāna* practice than through insight and mindfulness practice. And it's a kind of very common micro-negativity of the mind. So you might be sitting there with a very nice energy body. You might be sitting there with *pīti*, etc., whatever it is, and you might be quite used to it by that point. But it's still pretty nice. Most people would give their right arms for what you're experiencing in that moment. But you've experienced this kind of thing before, and "The other day it was *better* than it was today." [laughter] And "I know it *can* be a bit better." And in this kind of very subtle way, the mind is inclining towards what's wrong, what's not quite as good as it should be.

Part of that is okay. It's part of the shaping. It's like, again, the potter with the clay on the wheel. Of course! "So what's wrong? It's not ... it's a bit sort of ..." I'm kind of pressing it. But when it has a flavour of [low complaining noises], when it has that negativity – we're talking, this can get *incredibly* subtle. It's just a cup half-full, half-empty thing, but on a really, really subtle level. It's just this moment, there's something in the way I'm seeing this and relating to this actually really lovely thing, and I'm somehow spinning it with a negative – I'm seeing it through a negative lens. This is incredibly common, and it's what we might call, like, a really deep, deep, almost base-level *kilesa*, defilement, of aversion in the mind. This, you'll notice more and more as things go on, and it's something that's actually really important to address and work with.

The really good news is that we notice this much more in – you'd think you'd notice it more in mindfulness and insight practice; you actually notice it much more in *jhāna* practice. And you'll get much closer to it, and you'll see it working at a much, much subtler level, and you'll be able to do something about it. And what I want to say right now is – and I'll repeat this, and other things – we just notice it. Expect it, notice it, find the pleasure, get into enjoying it. Find what's nice, get into enjoying it. So we just make a micro-movement. We're talking about a micro-subtle defilement. We just make a micro-shift of relationship and attitude, yeah? But in a way, we could construe that as a subtle hindrance, absolutely.

Okay, and again, in terms of subtle hindrances, there are two forms called 'sinking' and 'drifting.' I don't know where these words come from. I don't know if they're originally in the Buddha; I've never come across them in the Buddha. I picked them up from – I think it was Kamalashila.⁶ I can't remember. But they're around now in Dharma culture. So, 'drifting' and 'sinking': what does that mean?

(1) Drifting is a sort of subtle version of restlessness, and really, what it means is, the mind is still alive, you're still mindful, you're nowhere near, like, jumping out of your skin or anything like that, or obsessed with worrying, or that kind of thing. The mind is present. Everything's good. It's kind of with

its object. But there's just a bit more tendency for it to drift off the object, or sometimes it manifests as just a bit more thoughts and images in the mind, and a little bit more tendency of the mind to get pulled off into them. So again, we're talking about something quite subtle. **(2)** And **sinking** is the subtle version of sloth and torpor. Again, nowhere near nodding or falling asleep or anything like that; it's just a little bit of dullness comes in. It's not quite so present, so alive, so bright, so sharp.

These are interesting hindrances, because oftentimes, what they're most related to is effort levels. Again, we're back to this question, this issue of effort levels, and the fact that I cannot avoid that issue. I cannot avoid that parameter of practice. As you get deeper and deeper in *samādhi*, a tiny bit too much effort, just a little bit too much effort, or a little bit less so, makes proportionately more of a difference, and more of an impact. In other words, again, the deeper we go, the more sensitive the whole system is. And a bit too much effort, a bit less effort actually kinds of gets in the way, or causes problems, has more of an effect at a deeper level. [36:52] So with these subtle hindrances, sinking and drifting, one of the things that's really worth paying attention to is just the effort levels, and seeing, like what we were saying earlier today, what is it just to back off the intensity? Or perhaps to move, in my directionality, from more of a probing to more of a receiving. In other words, what I wanted to say is, both sinking and drifting can arise from *either* too much effort, very slightly, *or* too little effort – paradoxically sounding. We don't know. What do you have to do? You have to just get in there and play, play with that subtle effort: bit more, bit less, bit more intense, bit less intense, bit more probing, bit more receiving, bit more delicate – you know, whatever it is.

And sometimes, one of the ways I like to think about this is, for example, with the drifting, why is there more thought? Why does the mind go? We're squeezing the mind too tight, and (in a completely incommensurate image) it's a bit like squeezing a banana skin, and the banana comes shooting out. [laughter] Maybe that's not the greatest analogy. But again, going back to what we said before, the whole body can reveal the effort. Even just the size of the attention can also affect this.

So there's lots of things to try, but one main point to take is the *spectrum*. We're really talking about a spectrum. When we talk about hindrances, we're really talking about a spectrum, despite what the Buddha said as, "With the abandonment of the hindrances, with seclusion from the hindrances, arises the first *jhāna*." Yes, that's true, *and* at another level, we're talking about a whole spectrum here that's not going to go away, in one form or another. Sometimes even in *jhāna* – again, 'in' inverted [commas], using that word in a slightly loose way – you can be, here's the happiness. Here's the brightness, the luminosity, and the happiness, and it's as if at the edges of that happiness and brightness, at the edges of consciousness, there's like a whole little pack of little terrier dogs sort of yapping away. And it's not that they're in the middle causing mayhem or really loud, but you're just aware of them there. Are you in the *jhāna* or are you out of the *jhāna*? It's an irrelevant question, 'in, out' – where's the intelligence here? The question is, what do I need to do at that point? What needs to happen?

One of the things: what do I need to pay attention to? Let's say, here's this luminous happiness right there. Here are these little terriers yapping. I'm just going to really get into that happiness, and I'm going to open my body to it, open my mind to it. We'll talk about all this. Now, it might be that in doing that, the terriers nicely quieten down and fall asleep or whatever. But it might be they stay there, and actually, that's as good as it's going to get right now. Okay. So I've got this really nice, lovely, yummy, juicy happiness, which the person who gave their right arm for the *pīti* would now give their

left arm as well for. And don't worry! The terriers are there. It's not a problem. Just get into and enjoy it. And don't worry about this 'in' and 'out' business. It's just how *not* to consume the mind with questions that are not relevant. But also, sometimes, it's the terriers yapping, *da-da-da*, I'm kind of 'in,' *da-da-da* – but let me go to the terriers, see what they need, and see if I can do something that encourages them to do something else. So it's not like there's always a formula, but one formula is: "It's okay. This is the deal right now. This is as good as it's going to get."

Sometimes there are hindrances in different forms. Sometimes a hindrance arises, just – is it a hindrance? No, it's just that the energy body – it's not that my mind is consumed with this or that. It's just that the energy body feels a little constricted or blocked. I'm not obsessed with this, I'm not thinking about that, I'm not lost in desire or doubt or any of that. It just feels a little bit blocked. We could call that a subtle hindrance, if you want. Or it's just that the energy body kind of won't settle down, or the *citta* won't really settle down. It's not even from gross distraction or thought; it's something just a little agitated in the energy of the *citta* or the body. So that's a bit like the yapping terriers.

Or sometimes – and again, this is something that may be for some of you, or *will* be for some of you later, may be relevant for some of you now – sometimes it's amazing: if you have quite a lot of experience in and out of *jhānas*, sometimes it's just like, it's almost like you can just dive underneath something. So here, this is blocked, or it doesn't feel right. Something's not settled. And like I said, it's a bit like the radio frequencies or the wardrobe: the *jhānas* are there anyway, and you can kind of just point the mind to a level that's actually really peaceful. Now, it might not be pristinely, wonderfully, radiantly, overwhelmingly peaceful, but there's something that you recognize, like, "Well, *that's* the kind of peace that belongs to the third *jhāna*," let's say. I recognize that peacefulness. And you point the mind, and you just dive underneath a little bit. It's there. And then I'm tuning to that. I'm not getting caught up. Yes, this part of the body doesn't feel quite connected, or feels a bit constricted, or the mind – so I'm just pointing to that, I dive into it, and then what's my work there? I've dived in. Now I'm in touch with that peacefulness. Now what? Now I need to work with that, get into it, enjoy it, open to it, focus on it, etc. We'll talk about more of that. So it's not *really* that the *jhāna* is quite there, but something of a doorway to that, something of a trail of that *jhāna* is there, and you can pick it up and just kind of point the mind there and dive into it – with practice, with time. [42:57] So there it is. And once you get that trail or opening, then you work on staying there and stabilizing and absorbing into that, etc.

As I said, with *jhāna* practice, we really want this attitude of working with – working *against*, if you like – the hindrances. We really want this idea of antidote. But we also really want this idea of patience. So I'm *patient* while I'm *working with*. Really important. I'm playing with and experimenting with all that, and I can use all my ingenuity and creativity in how I relate to hindrances or what might help. And at the same time, I have a firm resolve. I'm not just going to give up now. I'm not just going to get up and walk away, or just sit through it and say, "Oh, whatever. Who cares." There's this combination of working actively, of being creative and ingenious, and a firm resolve and patience, all together.

So it's not that we want to get kind of locked into a grim battle for hours on end with some hindrance or another. At a certain point, it's like, "All right. You win the battle. You're not going to win

the war, but you win this battle, and I'm going for walk," or "I'm going for a cup of tea." Part of that is also just taking the pressure off and opening the mind. If I go for a walk, it's like the beauty, the air, the light, the spaciousness – I hope, by the end of this retreat, that everyone knows the beauty of rain, because you get a lot of practice with that. There's no reason that bad (or so-called 'bad') weather should affect your sense of beauty.

In a way, what we're doing is, the emphasis is more on cultivating well-being than kind of fighting the hindrances. We're doing both, but it's like, it's a certain way of thinking about it. That's the balance. And again, to those of you, or when you have more and more experience, after you've got quite a lot of experience in and out of different *jhānas*, you sometimes just get a sense of what's possible in any moment. So maybe I'm working on the fourth *jhāna*; it's where my playground is. But there are hindrances around, whatever, and I'm kind of stuck in the first or second *jhāna*, and you just get a sense: no, I can stay with this and shape it, and it will go deeper. Other times you get a sense: "This is as good as it's going to get right now." You just have a feel for it after a while. That takes practice. So still, that's great. You know, that's *really* good. Just the fact that there's a subtle hindrance blocking you from getting as far as you've got before – no problem. You take what you can get, what's accessible, and you kind of develop a sense of (I don't know what an analogy would be) what's possible in any particular situation. [45:56]

All right. To finish, some things about **insight in relation to the hindrances**.

(1) One thing I've already said: **the hindrances are spectra**. They're not on/off. There's a spectrum for each hindrance in terms of really, really gross, more and more, more and more subtle. That's partly just like, I know that, I understand, that's the territory that I'm dealing with. Partly, that has a couple of implications. One is that they will be common visitors. They will be coming and going. If I have the view that "They shouldn't be," or "They won't be," or "After a certain amount of practice, or once I've reached X *jhāna*, it won't happen," that's the opposite of insight. That's delusion. So there's just a certain amount of insight in recognizing they're spectra, and that means, in one form or another, in one level on the spectrum of grossness or subtlety, they will be coming. I'm aware of that.

(2) Second thing is, **it's not linear**. Yes, they'll be coming and going, and they'll be coming and going even after you reach whatever *jhāna*, you know, in terms of what's part of your practice. You might, in other words – how to say this? You could have a much harder time with the hindrances later on in the retreat than you did earlier, or something. Or you feel like, "Now I've got to this *jhāna* now. It was going so well, and then suddenly, I'm just in a hell realm," or whatever. I've said this before in many other talks. If someone comes in to me and they're doing *samādhi* practice, and they just describe this kind of smooth ascent, day by day, into the Tūṣita heavens, kind of uninterrupted linear graph like that, either they're lying, or they're, again, really not paying attention. It's more like *this*: okay, there's a trend, yeah, but it's more like *this*. [non-linear hand gesture] Actually it's more like *this*. [different non-linear gesture] We'll explain. But it's not linear. So again, just because (I'll come back to this in a minute) we had a great time for the last five days, and all this stuff was opening up, it doesn't mean that I'm not going to fall down a hole into the hindrances tomorrow, or that they will not visit. Let's say that.

(3) Third piece about insight here is, we want to help ourselves to **get to a relationship with the hindrances where we're really not taking them personally**. They are aspects of being human, until,

apparently, one is an arahant, and that means fully enlightened. They're aspects of being human. *Taking personally* – what I mean by that is, “Oh, I’m a bad meditator,” or “This means that I’m” – even worse – “a bad person, because I keep getting this or that hindrance. I keep getting aversion,” or “I keep getting desire. I’m really greedy,” or “I’m this or that.” Hindrances – don’t take them personally. They’re a human thing. They’re like facts of being human, and the arising of a hindrance doesn’t mean anything about my capability as a meditator or my worthiness as a human being. That’s really, really important. So, can I encourage that attitude? And that’s part of where we want to move towards. That’s part of the gift of *jhāna* practice. We begin, after a while, to see: it’s not personal. But we want to really encourage that, not taking it personally.

(4) The second thing, again, we want to move towards – this is the fourth insight piece now – is that we, more and more, **believe the stories that the hindrances spin less and less**. So less and less, over time, do we believe the stories that the hindrances spin. What happens is a hindrance arises, and we get convinced that it’s actually about this person, that they are the problem. It’s not the problem of my hindrance. It’s about them. Or it spins a story about me, and oftentimes then it spins this whole *papañca* thing, that whole proliferation.

Actually what’s happening is a seed of a hindrance arose, which is what happens for human beings. These hindrance seeds just keep coming up – defilement seeds, *kilesa* seeds, greed, aversion, delusion – in one form or another, manifest as the hindrances. They’re little seeds. And then without wisdom and mindfulness, those seeds become huge, huge trees, forests, jungles – jungles, better. Partly what allows them to become a jungle, those seeds, is *believing* them: believing what they tell us, believing the perceptions, believing the stories that they spin. This is so crucial. As I said, if nothing else happened on the retreat, you didn’t have a millisecond of an ounce of a nice feeling, but *that’s* what happened on the retreat, that’s really, really good. That would make a huge difference in your life – huge difference.

(5) And the fifth insight piece is that, in relation to what I just said, we actually **view the hindrances**: yeah, they’re really unpleasant, but in a way, they’re **kind of like gold dust or gold ore**. **There’s something really precious here. I just need to find the right relationship with it.** I can turn it into treasure *if* I find the right relationship with it, in terms of view and wisdom. So they’re really like gold dust, like something unrefined and filled with all kinds of not-so-great stuff. But actually there’s a treasure there, because as I said, hindrances will come up in life. It’s not just something in meditation. We think about, what about that creative project? What about that service project? What about your work? What about coming up in long-term relationship? Same things arise. The same hindrances arise, and they will get in the way of, they will ‘hinder.’ *Nīvaraṇa* is the Pali. It’s literally what it means: something that’s an obstacle, gets in the way of a going forward. They will do that in all of those other realms of our life. It’s not just something about meditation. If I can get wise to them, if I can learn how to view them in a way that they lose their power – they might still arise as seeds, but they lose their power – that’s absolutely huge, and absolutely precious.

And part of that is, also, I begin to understand something about emotions as well. And this is really interesting. Something that seemed like “It’s this emotion that I’m feeling,” I actually see, “Oh, sometimes it’s actually just a seed of a hindrance. And the mind has spun that into a story, and a certain emotion has arisen. But actually, in its root, it was just this hindrance, or mostly this hindrance.”

Sometimes. So there's something about understanding the hindrances that is actually really important in understanding our emotional life. I'm going to come back to that in a sec. [54:10]

The fact that they're spectra – there's a range – is part of this development of subtlety, because I recognize, they're going to get more subtle. My attention has to get more subtle to even pick up on subtle hindrances, and then work with them. So when we talked yesterday about how, I would say, it's so important, this development of subtlety and refinement and discrimination – that also happens in regard to the hindrances. In terms of our overall trajectory, this recognition and working with the subtlety of the spectrum of the hindrance is also part of that whole development of subtlety. Yes, it's much nicer, attuning and discerning to subtle differences of *this* kind of exquisite peacefulness versus *that* kind of exquisite peacefulness, but in terms of developing the whole subtlety – which again, is so important for our emotional life and all the rest of it – that's important too. It's all subtlety. It's all discrimination. It's all attunement.

In terms of not taking hindrances personally and not believing them, can you hear that that's about letting go? It's about having insight into what they are. I see you, what you are, and I let go. I'm no longer dragged along by this story or this identification. There's a letting go. It's insight. Yeah?

Last thing: if you do enough of *jhāna* practice, what you'll begin to notice is what seems like a kind of backlash – it's as if it's going really well, and maybe even a new territory opens up. I've gotten to a new opening or a new state or a new wonderful thing happened. And I'm in that for a little while, however long that little while is – half a day, three days, or whatever it is, a few hours, even – and then all hell breaks loose. And sometimes it can seem like, it's almost like the very opening caused a kind of backlash, that there was a kind of reaction to it somehow. It's not like every time, kind of expect it, but there seems to be something like that. There seems to be.

And it raises a lot of questions. I mean, again, I need to expect it, etc., don't take it personally, and it's not linear, all that. But is there some kind of catharsis, some kind of purification going on here? I know people who have exactly that view: that what we're doing in *jhāna* practice is somehow allowing a kind of karmic purification of our *saṅkhāras* and our emotions. Some people have that view.

I would be a little more cautious. So I don't want to rule that out, but I would rather take both views: yes and no. Again, if I step back from that, what we want is a range. Remember this thing I said? I want you to have a range. Do you remember me saying that? I want you to have a range in regard to your emotions. We want this range in relationship to our emotions, and with regard to the ways of working and the ways of viewing emotion. I would like you to have a really big range. I can work with emotions in lots of different ways. I can view emotions in lots of different ways. And I have a whole range of emotions as well.

But if there's a lot of *jhāna* practice, and if we're allowing that *jhāna* practice – over a long time, I mean – to give rise to insight, we will begin more and more to recognize the fabricated nature of emotions. We tend to think, “An emotion is a real thing. It arises by itself. It's there. And it's just sort of, I have to deal with that because it's a truth.” Over time – we may or may not get more into this, and I know it's a sensitive [topic] – but it becomes almost undeniable that an emotion is a fabrication. Without me *doing* something, usually unconsciously, it cannot arise as that emotion. It cannot get fabricated. It cannot get constructed. So in the Buddha's words, we “see a hindrance as a hindrance,”⁷

and not necessarily as an emotion. We recognize what's there. It's a 'fabrication,' or in other language, it's actually 'empty.' An emotion is empty.

But if you remember back to the first night, I said, "I can see an emotion as empty, and I can see it as real." I'm not parking in either one. I have the possibility to shift between views. To me this is absolutely crucial. Most often, people park in either one, and that becomes their view. For me, it would be catastrophic and tragic to *only* ever have the view, *always* have the view that emotions are fabrications. I would *never* want to *only* have that view. But both views become available. And therefore the view of catharsis, the view of, "Yes, something is purifying here. I may not even know what, but I sit through it as a purification," and then I have a whole stance with that and relationship with it – or the view that "It's *not* that. They're fabrications, and I need to get interested in the fabrication." They're both there. But as we practise certainly *jhānas* more and more, we begin to "see a hindrance as a hindrance" more and more, as the Buddha might say.

And what happens, as we said, is it's not linear. It's very up and down. But there is a movement, over a long time with *jhāna* practice, that what might manifest more as *papañca* – like really extreme agitation, and lostness in story, and believing everything, and self-view and all that – actually begins to manifest less as *papañca*, and more as just pure hindrance. So over time, there's this kind of sifting away, filtering away of the more *papañcizing* element of the mind. And it becomes: "It's just the hindrance." It might still be quite strong; I'm really quite restless in the body, but there's no story attached to it. There's no lostness. What was usually *papañca* becomes more just, "I'm just dealing with a hindrance now." And then over time, even the hindrances themselves – more and more, they tend to be on the subtle side of things, but they're still there. So, over a long time of *jhāna* practice, there is this movement of shaving away the gross, getting down to the hindrances, and then even more subtle. But they stay. They're part of the deal. And we need to be okay with that, really up for that.

Okay? [laughs] Sorry. I was going to take some questions, but we already had a couple, and I think it's probably enough now. So let's just sit for a minute together.

[silence]

Thank you, everyone. Enjoy tea, enjoy your evening practice, and I think there are a few interviews this evening. So if you haven't checked already, just check that that's not you. And see you tomorrow.

¹ E.g. DN 2.

² MN 128.

³ DN 22, MN 10. Also see SN 46:51.

⁴ Rob Burbea, *Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising* (Devon: Hermes Amāra, 2014), 322–6.

⁵ MN 128.

⁶ Probably the modern Kamalashila rather than the eighth-century Kamalāśīla. For discussions of 'sinking' and 'drifting,' see Kamalashila, *Meditation: The Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight*, 2nd edn (Birmingham: Windhorse, 1996), 165–74.

⁷ Cf. the Buddha's statement at DN 22: "One dwells seeing phenomena as phenomena in terms of the five hindrances" (*dharmesu dhammānupassī viharati pañcasu nīvaraṇesu*).

Mettā Practice, and a few things about Pīti (Instructions)

Just my particular style of neurosis, preferred neurosis, but I really fret a lot about – I want you all to have exactly what you need, exactly when you need it. [laughs] Each of you, rather. And of course that's completely impossible, so we'll just do the best we can. Today I'd like to divide things into two. First part is two pieces of instructions, and the second part, a talk about view, and effort, and attitude, and achievement. Two parts of instructions to start.

One is to give a little, *slightly* fuller (very brief still) instructions about if you're using *mettā* practice for the purpose of your base practice, for the purpose of moving deeper into *samādhi* and *jhāna*. Or *karuṇā* (compassion practice), or *muditā*, or something like that. The first thing actually to say here is that when you're doing *mettā* practice for the intention of *jhāna*, that's a different intention than doing *mettā* practice for the intention of cultivating *mettā*. It sounds obvious and not so consequential, but it's actually quite a big deal. So of course, when you use *mettā* as your base practice, as your springboard practice towards *jhāna*, and that's the intention, you're going to be cultivating *mettā*. Of course you are. How can you not be? Even if you're *not* – if you're doing breath or some other practice towards *jhāna* – *jhānas* actually have *mettā* in them. They are naturally filled, imbued, pervaded by *mettā*. I won't say any more about that. But if *mettā* is your practice, for example, is your base practice, then at some point – there are two things – at some point, it will probably fork. Is it the love that I'm primarily cultivating now, or is it the sense of well-being and *pīti* and happiness? Now, there are grey areas in the middle, and you can mix those two, but actually there's kind of a fork. And right from the beginning, or at some point fairly early on, you probably want to see, "What actually is my intention here?" Makes sense? The difference?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Well, if you're on this retreat, like I said on the opening evening, your intention is *jhāna* practice. That's your primary intention, which means that even just bearing that in the back of your mind is having all kinds of effects and kind of navigating your practice, without you even being conscious of it. It's a powerful thing. Intentions are extremely powerful things. Intentions create our worlds. And that's not hyperbole. So you want to be conscious about it. You want to be firm and clear what you're doing. And at a certain point, there might come – for example, let's say you're practising *mettā*, there's love, there's this feeling, there are all kinds of shades of different feelings (which I'll talk about in a second). But really what you're looking for mostly is the *pīti*, is the well-being. I'll expand on that right now. That's mostly what I mean, partly what I mean.

And then, when that comes, and it comes up steadily and kind of often, then that becomes your primary thing. The *mettā*'s just a springboard. I would say, at least the way *I* would teach *mettā*, and the way I tend to teach *mettā*, is that the qualities, the intentions of sensitivity, attunement, responsiveness, receptiveness – these are all key. So why do I emphasize those in *jhāna*? I said: if we practise *jhānas* emphasizing those qualities and recognizing the importance of those qualities, look how important, how much overlap, and how much significance and relevance *jhāna* practice has for our emptiness practice, for our soulmaking practice, for our emotional practice. I *forgot* to say: for our *brahmavihāra* practice. Because the way I would teach *mettā*, actually, those are really key, central qualities. We're practising those.

There are different kinds of sensitivity, different kinds of responsiveness, but for example, with the *mettā* practice, if you're using phrases – “May you be happy, may you be peaceful,” whatever – we talked about before, when we talked about pegs. Do I need more pegs here? Do I need to repeat that one first phrase a second time, for instance, maybe even a third time, before I even move on? I'm sensitive, I'm attuned, I'm responsive to the situation, and I'm responding to it by *more* pegs. Now sometimes, I don't need to. It's not necessary. That's the relatively gross level. I'm responsive to what I notice of my mind state, of my heart state.

[6:24] How 'loud,' so to speak, I say the phrases inside – so you know, sometimes, again, the mind needs something really loud and clear: “May! You! Be! Happy!” And other times it's like a whisper. What does it need right now? Where's the volume? How sparse or dense the phrases are, meaning – “May you be happy.” And then I need to get another phrase in there right away, because if I don't put another phrase in, I'm going to space out. There's nothing to concentrate on. Once the mind is settled, and the heart is open, and there are all kinds of lovely heart frequencies there, “May you be happy,” and I might just have some silence there, where I'm actually then resonating. The heart is really resonating in that silence, with the reverberations, the emotional frequencies and reverberations of that very phrase. So it might be, I don't know when I'll say the next phrase. But I'm sensitive, so the whole thing becomes a bit like, I don't know, riding thermals. It's like, “Oh, there's one. I can ride that. I don't have to flap my wings again right now.” And then maybe that thermal – I've lost it. If I want to go over there, I have to flap a bit. But I have to feel that thermal, and feel how it feels to ride it. All this is part of what I'm talking about: sensitivity, receptivity, attunement, responsiveness.

I want to be sensitive to the effects and the feelings in the energy body. Like we said yesterday, the whole energy body is really involved in the *mettā* practice. So when I say a particular phrase – let's say, I'm on “May you be peaceful,” or going through “May you be happy,” and then just, okay, with the whole energy body. And then I hit “May you be peaceful” – let's say that's the next one. And I notice, when I say, “May you be peaceful,” I notice: “Ooh! That's got a certain flavour to it.” Or that's just got more of an effect. I've caught a thermal with that very phrase. The phrase produces a thermal, so to speak, in the whole *citta* and body system. If I'm not sensitive here in the energy body and the heart, I won't notice that. I'm really opportunistic. So much meditation is about this attunement, receptivity, and then a kind of opportunism. What door is open here? What thermal is available? What can I ride? What has juice right now? And feel it. Then, also, each phrase – not just “*That* one's more alive than *this* one right now, in this moment, so I'll stay with *that* one. I'll repeat it again. I'll ride that thermal. I'll do what I need to do to just keep riding that thermal,” or surfing, or whatever your analogy is. Not only that, but each phrase, each word, even – and that's another sensitivity: do I need to say this whole phrase, or can I just drop in the word 'happy'? This is all part of the responsiveness.

But the effect, as I attune more, and as I become more sensitive, and the energy body and the heart become more sensitive, “Oh, the word 'happy' has a different effect in the heart than the word 'peaceful'” – sometimes. And it's not just that the word 'happy' has the same effect every time. So I'm sensitive to what exactly are the emotional tones and subtleties and frequencies that are arising. The whole thing is like this kind of attunement to different frequencies or colours or vibrations in the energy body, in the heart. And as you're sensitive to that and riding it, and appreciating it, and enjoying all those, *all* of those qualities – though they might be different, the happiness and the peace – I might then

start radiating that out: “Here, *you* have some of this. You have some of this lovely happiness and peace.” And the *mettā* is deepening, because *mettā* is actually not one emotion. It’s a complex of emotions. I’m also, as I’m radiating out, bathing in it myself. I want to make sure I’m enjoying that. So I’m not losing it if I radiate it out to someone else.

If my intention, though, is for *samādhi*, then all that’s going on, but as I said earlier, what I’m actually more interested in is when the *pīti* arises. Sometimes it’s hard to distinguish. What’s this? It gets all mixed up. Actually, we’re interested in discrimination. I will qualify this, and this is one of those things where I’m going to contradict myself: some of us need to be really interested in discrimination. And some of us need to let go of discrimination for a while. But basically, we’re interested in discrimination. But if my priority is towards *jhāna*, then I’m actually more interested in the *pīti*, this real pleasure feeling, well-being (I’ll come back and talk about that in a sec), and that’s what I want to allow to dominate, more than the *mettā* feelings. And that’s what I’m riding. I mean, of course, it might be happiness, and you’re going for the second *jhāna*. But that’s it for *mettā*, for now. Is that enough to be going with?

The second thing I want to talk about – and I wasn’t going to talk about it today, but I just hear, and people I’ve spoken to, in notes and stuff – I think saying a little bit now feels necessary, because for a lot of you, you will need something like this. And in a way, what I’m going to say now will make what I’m going to say a little later today – make it make sense over a larger area. So what I want to talk about now is *pīti*, very, very briefly, and pick it up. I will say much more in the next few days.

What is *pīti*? The Pali word *pīti*: ecstasy, rapture, pleasant feeling, well-being – technically, I would define it as ‘pleasant physical sensations, or pleasant physical feelings, that arise from a non-sensual source.’ In other words, it’s not like a pleasant taste in the mouth or someone touching you in a nice way. So the pleasant sensation is arising from a non-sensual source. [13:29] I will talk more about it, as I said, but there are many manifestations. There’s a big range in terms of how that can manifest, how intensely, what kind of experiences are involved, what kind of flavours. It can be a kind of tingling all through the body, as I said, a kind of rapture or an ecstasy, an almost electric-like vibration that’s very pleasant. It could be just a sense of lightness. It can be a mixture of all these. There can be a kind of warmth with it. But the key thing is that it’s pleasant. And the range of that pleasantness, both in terms of *types* of manifestation and also *how* pleasant it is, is quite extraordinary. I’ll come back to all this. I’m just touching on this, just to put a few things in now that some of you will need.

So *pīti* was like Newton Abbot, remember? Or Newton Abbot was like *pīti*. It arises anyhow. It can arise anyhow, any which way. The important thing is for you to really learn how it arises *for you*. Is it going to be one way? Is it going to be many ways? Eventually it’s just an intention. So it may arise from really just sticking the attention at the tip of the nose or the upper lip, and really keeping it there, and working with these other elements that we talked about yesterday, about the effort and the delicacy and the intensity, etc. It may well arise. It may erupt into the body at some point from basically the focus and the concentration, the intensity of energy.

It may arise from playing with the energy body, as we’ve done with the breath. And as we will touch on, you can also do it without the breath. So it arises, as I said, just from coaxing the energy body to be as nice, as comfortable, have as much well-being as possible. And slowly, slowly, that just shapes and kind of warms up into more and more *pīti*.

It might arise from an insight way of looking. Someone was saying yesterday – it’s quite common for some people – it *may* arise for some people with the *nāda* sound (I’m not even going to explain that meditation; if you don’t know what it is, it doesn’t matter). It *may* arise just from open-heartedness. So again, how often do we think of all this business as arising from something called ‘concentration,’ which means an intense focus and keeping my mind on something? People say to me – so common: standing outside, looking at a tree, appreciating, opening myself to the beauty of something in nature, and *pīti* arose right there. Wasn’t really concentrating on the tree: “Let me look at the bark.” Then you think, “Oh, but isn’t that sense contact? The tree is sense contact.” Actually, the nose, nostrils, the sensations are sense contact. It’s not the pleasantness of that sense contact of the tree: “What a perfectly formed tree!” It’s not the pleasantness of the sensations that there might be here. What’s happening is there’s an openness of being. And that, I would say, is more primary than anything else for the arising of *pīti*: openness of being. The person’s just there in nature or something else. The heart is open, the being is open, and actually the energy body is open, and *pīti* arises naturally. In fact, with that openness of being, *pīti* is just something that’s *there*. It’s then something you can just tune into.

So it can arise any way like that. Once it arises, then we have, I could say, ‘work’ to do. I know some people don’t like the word ‘work,’ so I could say, then we have ‘play’ to do. Or you might not like that word; some people don’t like that. So either one – if you don’t like either, then we have ‘doing’ to do. [laughter] And I know some people don’t like ‘doing’ in meditation. [laughter] And then, if you’re one of them, I think you’re really on the wrong retreat, and there might be some conceptual issues that need some inquiry.

I’ll say just a tiny bit now about what this work/play is, or needs. I’m going to say more later on. I just want to give you just a little bit. Now again, you’re all in different places. The primary thing right now is: where’s my playground? Some of you, your playground might be – whatever it is, the fourth *jhāna*. Some of you are still working with the energy body. Some of you are still working with the concentration. It doesn’t matter. But I really want to emphasize: can you discern where your playground [is]? What did we call it? Your playground at your edge. This is the way we’re teaching *jhāna* on this retreat, and there’s a reason for it. And I’m not going to – I don’t have time to repeat everything we’ve said so far.

Where’s your playground? Can you identify that and spend most of your time there? And actually marinate. Really spend a lot of time in whatever – let’s say it’s second *jhāna*. Whatever. Really, it means *spend time* there – hours, hours, again and again and again, as much as you can. And can you develop this mastery, and what’s involved in mastery? The shorthand is, why? Because, I would say, that’s how we’re going to get the most fruit out of all this, more than any other way. (That’s just my opinion. I’ve been through all this.)

So what is this work and play? What does it involve? I just want to say, for now, just a snatch of it. Let’s just say, for now, three play/work thingies to do.

(1) One is to see if you can **spread that *pīti* or well-being**. As the Buddha said when I read through his descriptions, can the whole body be suffused, saturated, drenched, steeped with this – if it’s the second *jhāna*, it’s happiness; if it’s the third *jhāna*, it’s a kind of beautiful peacefulness; if it’s the first *jhāna*, it’s *pīti*. So if *pīti* comes up, and it sustains for more than a few minutes (if it doesn’t sustain that long, it’s not quite ready to work with yet, but *if* it does), then one of the things to see if it can happen –

can it just spread, so that the whole body space is contained in the *pīti*? It's in the *pīti*. It's touched by the *pīti*, pervaded, etc. I'm going to say, for now, it's okay if it doesn't. It's okay if that doesn't happen. Okay? I will add and revise all this as we go on. I just want to say a little bit, like I said, right now. So the first thing is, see if it can spread. See if you can get your whole body involved, touched, enjoying, *in* it.

(2) The second and third things are two modes, what I call 'modes of attention.' So here's the *pīti*. Let's say it comes up, and it has spread. And then I say, "Where is it strongest?" Maybe it's strongest, let's say, around my throat. I might not even have a clear sense or image of my throat at that point, but it's sort of in that region. I can kind of get that. I may have a sense of my throat, I might not, but somewhere around there.

(2.1) So mode number one is like an arrow goes into a bull's-eye. Right in the centre of where it's nicest, I want to probe it with my attention, with a narrow focus. I really want to penetrate it, get inside it, dive into it. Very spatially one-pointed. But as I'm doing that, my primary intention – yes, I'm concentrating on it; yes, I'm focusing on it, but I want to relish it. I want to maximize my enjoyment, moment after moment. Where's the enjoyment here? Am I letting myself enjoy it? Can I enjoy it? Like nuzzling into it: "*Ohh, yeah!*" Or putting your tongue in a little cup of honey, and just wanting to lick every little last bit of honey out of it. I'm not kidding, okay? [laughter] Don't underestimate how much we prevent ourselves from enjoying, at all kinds of levels, and through all kinds of indoctrination, psychologically, etc. Concentrate, yes, probe, and *really* enjoy. Enjoy again and again and again. Find the enjoyment there.

(2.2) The second mode of attention is a complementary one – complementary in the sense, rather than being narrow and probing, it's open and receptive. So it's more like, "*Ohhhh, yeahhhh,*" just like you're sunbathing, and your body is just soaking up the sun. And you're *opening* – you're opening yourself, you're abandoning yourself. Or like you're in a really perfect temperature shower, with a perfect water flow, and just "*Yeahhh ...*" So opening, receiving, surrendering, etc. *Abandoning* is even not too strong a word. *Abandon* yourself to it. Surrender. Open your body to it. Open your being to it, again, with the intention and the sort of – I don't know what the word is – 'nudge' or 'emphasis' to enjoy it to the max. How can I really drink the most enjoyment from this? So there are two modes of attention, and we can kind of alternate in a very relaxed, sort of improvised way between this more probing/narrow, and the open, surrendered, sunbathing thing.

There's no formula. Just move back and forth. The very moving back and forth is a bit like the bathman with the soap. Remember in the Buddha's analogy? You're working something. Part of how it works is through this going back and forth with the attention like that. So not really fast, not all nervous, and don't worry about, "Oh, is now the right moment?" It's hard to tell in advance. It's like, "If I move now, is that going to help?" Just be relaxed, and just play and move. In time, sometimes you do get a sense of these things, but the movement itself is shaping something. It's forming something. It's allowing something to coalesce and to build.

So spreading it or seeing if it will spread, and then these two modes of attention – that makes three. You could do the 'see if it will spread' first. I'm not going to talk much about that now, other than to say, it's fine if it doesn't. Just see if it will spread. Imagine it will spread. If it doesn't, no big deal. But I'll come back to that. Let's say, for now, it's okay if it doesn't. Because if it doesn't – let's say the *pīti*

is *just* around here, and it feels like, “Well, actually, my legs just feel normal.” Fine. You can still do the probing and the sunbathing with it in a smaller area – no problem. So you alternate. Or you could do the alternating, and *then* see if it spreads. It doesn’t really matter.

Did that make enough sense? I just wanted to throw it out because I think it will probably be relevant for some of you right now. Okay, so that’s the end of part one.

Attitude, Effort, Achievement, and View

I would like to talk now about effort and achievement, attitude and view. And a lot of what I’m going to say will keep its relevance, should be applicable, whatever level you’re at, whatever stage of development you are through the *jhānas*. And as I said, the effort thing never goes away. It just becomes more subtle. But the attitude thing and the whole view – all this is so important. And so it should apply – maybe not all of it, but a lot of it should apply to any level we’re talking about.

I meant to say this other night, but I’ll throw it in now: it’s interesting to look up the word *samādhi* in a Pali dictionary and in a Sanskrit dictionary, because it’s actually a Sanskrit word, and see some of its historical uses. So *samādhi* almost always gets translated as ‘concentration.’ And I hope you can sense right now, I feel it’s a great translation, and there are some problems that come with that translation: a kind of implicit, and then repeated, and then entrenched indoctrination that comes. We tend to think of it as *meaning* something, right? You’ve got that message, a little bit.

If you look up what the word means, it actually means ‘agreement,’ or like a reconciliation, like a group of people agree on something, or two people become reconciled. Or ‘harmony,’ like harmony in a village or something like that. That’s one of its principal meanings. What does that imply about that word? What does it imply about your view? What does it imply about your conception? What does it imply about what you emphasize? I’m not going to say anything about it, but again, this is the invitation, the reminder to listen on your toes.

So, effort – it’s a constant question. We can talk about it at a very gross level. We can talk about it at a kind of macro-level and a micro-level. We can talk about it at extremely subtle levels. Effort and attitude and view – I want to go into some of this. Sometimes what happens, often what happens, when a person loves the path and loves practice, and really has a good desire and eros for all this stuff, in the course of a retreat, in the course of practice, very easily we put too much pressure on: too much pressure on the practice, too much pressure on ourselves. Sometimes there are people who would do better with a bit *more* pressure. They’re just a bit like, “Eh, it’s cool. You know. Things come and go, and whatever. You know. It’s not ... whatever,” and actually could do with turning the heat up a little bit, working harder, more time on the cushion, etc.

But most – I don’t know [if it’s] *most* – maybe very common, especially in this kind of retreat, is somewhere along the line, it gets a bit too pressured. We put too much pressure on. And a lot of that is unconscious. So how can we take pressure off, if that’s the case, in different ways? One other thing I just want to reiterate: body needs to be relatively comfortable, certainly at this point in *jhāna* practice, in your journey in *jhāna* practice, for most of you. We don’t want to put too much pressure on the body by thinking, “It’s better to stay cross-legged. It’s better. And I need to be in that over and over for hours and hours, and sit through the pain,” etc.

As I mentioned, the first – I don’t know *how* many – years of my *vipassanā* practice were mostly spent looking, being with, tolerating, working with, as best as I could, physical pain. It was sitting after sitting, hour after hour, month and year after year of retreat, etc. I would say that developed a lot. I mean, I look back at that youngster, and I think, you know, that’s quite something, to just put up with all that and be willing to do all that. A lot got developed in terms of patience and will and resolve, and I’m not sure *how* much insight – *some* insight, but I wouldn’t say that was the primary thing. At one point, my teacher Narayan – I can’t remember the context – I was telling her this, or we were discussing a retreat I was going on or something. And she said, “You know, it’s great, and it’s great that you’re able to do that. But your practice might be getting a little narrow.” Because if you asked me, what about the exploration of emotions and all kinds of other stuff, or *samādhi*, or this – it was mostly just being with the pain. And as I mentioned, Christina [Feldman] suggested, “Why don’t you try alternating postures?” And *then*, it was at that point that something opened. The pressure was taken off the body, and the *samādhi* could really, really then develop. So, pressure off the body.

Another way is through the view of what we’re doing and the *idea* of what we’re doing. And this is so much of what I want to talk about. [5:38] Sometimes, of course, “I’m on a *jhāna* retreat. I want to develop the *jhānas*. I want to develop my concentration,” etc. Sometimes we have to reflect, or maybe oftentimes we have to reflect on the bigger picture of what we’re developing here. I mean what you are developing just by trying, for instance, to keep your attention at the tip of your nose. So “I’m failing because I got distracted in thought again” is a view, and then a whole emotion and *papañca* and *dukkha* that’s coming out of too narrow a view of what you’re trying to develop. So as I said, if I include the fact that the hindrances and their arising have all kinds of potential for insight there, it enlarges the scope of my view, my picture of what I’m trying to do. That makes a *huge* difference. Then, when they’re there, I’m not all upset. It’s not a failure. I don’t judge myself as a failure as a meditator or whatever. I’m developing sensitivity and all this. And maybe that’s more important than focus and concentration. I’m developing all these resources, as we’ve said.

And a lot of this is not black and white. Sometimes another problem with view we have is everything’s so black and white. Actually, where is the black and white, in terms of resources that one’s developing, of well-being or patience, or whatever it is? I *am* developing concentration, but even that’s not black and white. Patience, as I said, resolve, responsiveness, discipline – all this is in the big picture of what’s being developed, and when it’s not going well in terms how well I’m sticking to these sensations, I need to open that view. Or at the beginning of a sitting, I really need to have a sense of the bigger picture of what I’m doing, what’s being developed here. This makes a big difference. I’m, of course, developing mindfulness. Every time the mind wanders off, it’s mindfulness that notices that the mind has wandered off. So it’s a moment of mindfulness, and I have to see that. That’s also part of what I’m developing. Don’t let the view get too narrow, because like we said with the table analogy with only one [leg], too narrow is not enough base, and things will capsize very, very easily. [8:09] The wind blows a little bit, things get a little difficult, and we get very dejected. Something falls over.

Hopefully, I’m, over time, letting go of judgment. So every time the mind wanders, I judge less. And not only am I developing concentration, but maybe I’m developing, I’m taking care of working on that, too, just as a sort of integral, woven-in factor. All of these things are really, really important. And for some people, they’re going to be – the development of patience, the letting of self-judgment, the

development of discipline, the development of resolve – all this is actually going to be *more* important, more significant for your liberation and the healing of your heart and your life than attaining some *jhāna*. I really mean this. Some people, it's like, "Yeah, *jhāna*, great. But what about this?" What about that self-judgment? What about whatever it is?

I mentioned yesterday this kind of micro-habit – remember, this kind of like, "Oh, it's not quite as good as it was yesterday. Could be better." That's also in the bigger picture of what's being developed. The influence of that kind of subtle, micro-level aversion or negative viewing – the influence of that on our lives is huge. And so, if that's part of our bigger picture of what we're developing, that also expands the container of what we're doing, the view of what we're doing, and hence, the stability of our vessel. One more thing about that micro-habit: can I learn to let go of that micro-habit of "It's not good enough" and *still* work and play in the moment? So they're not contradictions. How can we have a direction that we're working or playing towards, and yet not have that negative "not quite good enough," or not let that run the show, cast its pallor and its flavour over the whole of the proceedings?

When is that a hindrance and a *kilesa*, this "It could be better"? When is that a hindrance, and when is it actually just a wise discernment that's actually part of this opportunism? When is letting go of this "Oh, it could be better" – when is that a skilful shift in attitude, and when is it just laziness and inertia? "Eh, it's okay." We're actually just putting up with something, but it's coming out of laziness and inertia. [11:18] This is a really subtle question, really subtle inquiry.

Doing a *jhāna* retreat or practising *jhāna* long-term, developing that, it's going to really develop our steadiness, our capacity to stay steady long-term with whatever we're committed to, whatever we care deeply about in life – the projects we want to see through, the service we want to give – because we have more capacity, more resource. We're also training this moment-to-moment steadiness, of course, but it *takes* a lot of steadiness to just keep showing up and keep intending to do *samādhi* practice. So the steadiness you need to show up and to keep putting your mind in a certain direction – you're actually cultivating the kind of steadiness it takes to be there for your long-term intentions, and stay steady with them, and your goals and projects, and what you really care about, and manifesting in your life in a way that works towards that. So steadiness, that capacity for steadiness, is certainly a result of *jhāna*, but it's also a cause. It's part of the causal, supporting conditions. All that's involved, and all that, I think, needs to be in the bigger picture. If the picture gets too small, we'll get miserable much more often, and self-judgmental and tight and everything.

Okay, so talking about taking the pressure off. Sometimes at the beginning, the beginnings of sittings are quite interesting moments. Sometimes, of course, you get right in, get right to work, get right to play, you know, just, "Okay, let's go." And sometimes it's just, you know, you can come in and just hang out for a while, just sit there, and there's a sort of light mindfulness, and really what you're doing is just relaxing, hanging out, just checking that you're not too tight about the whole thing. Sometimes, for some people, or for dedicated meditators, just adopting the posture automatically brings in a whole set of views and a whole bunch of tightness. It's just associated with coming into a meditation hall or sitting on a cushion in a certain posture, and we bring all this sometimes subtle, sometimes less-than-subtle psychological baggage with it. So at the beginning, *sometimes* it can be fruitful – just hang out. Relax. Look around. It's taking the pressure off. And sometimes, in that, the energy body is actually allowed to become more harmonious, just naturally, organically, to some extent,

because the pressure – oftentimes unconscious pressure that we bring – is actually squeezing the energy body in a certain way that’s not helpful. [14:17]

And again – I mentioned this on the opening – I think sometimes open the intention: “Why am I here?” It gets so much about ‘me’ and ‘my practice,’ and ‘my achievement,’ and then ‘me compared to someone else,’ and all the rest of it. Can I actually keep opening it up so I’m actually not doing this just for myself? Maybe I’m not doing it *primarily* for myself. This kind of thing can be very, very significant, very pivotal in terms of its effects. And again, if I come and say, “I’ve got a three-week or twenty-three-day *jhāna* retreat,” whatever it is, or “I’ve got a week retreat,” or “I’ve got a month,” or “I’ve got a year,” or whatever it is. And then we can sometimes – often consciously, and sometimes semi-consciously – kind of have a timetable of achievement: “I guess by the end of the second week I’ll be in *there*.” And if it’s a year, then you *really* go ... you know. [laughs] Or three months, or whatever it is. Timetables are really not helpful in this. Well, the help is suffering. [laughter] So if you want to suffer, give yourself a timetable of achievement, of what you hope to achieve when, or what you’re pretty sure you’re going to achieve when, or even what you’re intending to achieve when. It’s a form of hindrance, in a way, actually. Let it go, *and* work and play – work or play, whatever you prefer.

What is it to *work towards*? So often, what happens in some spiritual contexts is, there’s so much pain in the idea of a goal or achievement, or attaining this or that or whatever, that it’s so painful, especially for Westerners, etc., they just throw it out. And then we get a teaching of “nowhere to go, nothing to do, *da-da-da-da-da*.” And it’s either *this* or *that*. Our life is not like that. There *are* places to go in our life. There *is* stuff to do. There’s stuff that we care about. We need to have goals. We need to *do* stuff. We need to make stuff happen. It matters to our souls. How do I do that? How do I relate to working towards what I love, what I feel is important, playing in that way, and still not having a timetable, for example? Letting go of that. I don’t have to get tight around it. Or it’s an art to have a goal and work towards a goal, and be aware of where the tightness comes in. Maybe that’s a better way of saying it. It *will* come in, if you love this stuff. You *will* suffer. You’re going to suffer on this retreat with exactly that, if you care enough. If you don’t care, you probably won’t suffer. But if you care, you’re going to suffer.

And the Buddha talked about this: “the distress of the contemplative,” he calls it.¹ If you’re *not*, something is wrong. Something, I would say, is wrong in your larger view, in your attitude. So it will come, and part of the art is, “Ah, there it is,” and noticing, even at really subtle levels, what’s feeding it? What view is feeding it? What way of going about things is feeding it? This is part of the art.

And related to that, again, this achievement thing: “Is this it? Have I got it? Is this the first *jhāna*? Am I in it? Am I out? Have I achieved it? Have I got it?” And that’s, of course, related to this question that I’ve talked about several times: what qualifies as a *jhāna*? “Have I got it? Is this it?” depends on how I define “it,” right? So again, oftentimes, this question of “What actually qualifies as the first *jhāna*? What qualifies as the whichever *jhāna*? What qualifies as *jhāna*?”, it’s often – how to say it? – just to dial down my inner language here – it could often be posed in more intelligent ways, I think. It could often be posed in more fruitful ways. Oftentimes it’s not. [laughter] What is important? What’s important? Don’t lose sight. Let your questions, and let your emphases, and let your attitudes, and let your practices – everything comes from “What is important? What do I want? Where am I actually trying to get to?” And it’s interesting, if you think about it. There’s such a tension and tizzy and fuss

around what is and what isn't a *jhāna*, either internally for a person, or in terms of polemic and argument and all that stuff.

If you think about, I don't know, something like mindfulness or another factor on the eightfold path, do we have the same kind of fuss about that? Or the seven factors of awakening? Most people, with all this other stuff – “What is mindfulness? Is this mindfulness? Or is this not mindfulness? Is that a moment of it?” It's not so black and white. Or *mettā* is an even better example, because we were talking about it before. Yes, we have to acknowledge, it's helpful to define *mettā*. What are we talking about? We're not talking about, like, “If you don't love me back, I'm going to jump out the window.” That's not *mettā*. So it's good: “Okay, *mettā* is *this*. It's unconditional. It's non-attached. It's universal.” This is good, you know – wishing for well-being. It's good to define what *mettā* is. But the practice of *mettā*, you know, sometimes it's stronger, sometimes it's weaker, as we were just saying. It has all kinds of sub-emotions or flavours. It's a complex of lots of different – or sometimes there's no emotion there, and it's just an intention. All that is *mettā*, you know. Sometimes, at different times, it's more or less purified of its near enemy, attached love. Right? It's a spectrum, and all of that is included. And all of it counts as *mettā*, right? It should.

Why are we thinking about *jhāna* – first *jhāna*, third, whatever it is – as something in any way different? Why has that one – what's going on? Somehow, so tenaciously and unquestioningly, we're conceiving of *jhāna* as something different, like this one word has got so charged. And as I say, I just put this question: is it possible to think and relate to all this stuff with a little more intelligence? Let's just say that. So yes, sometimes it's better to just drop that question, if one's fretting about it. And the fretting can be completely non-verbal. I'll come back to this at the end. I'm fretting over, “Am I in or out?” And I'm not even *thinking*, “Am I in or out?” Just get into it. Just enjoy it. Just work or play or seek to maximize your enjoyment. [21:43]

With respect to view and attitude and emphasis and all that, did I say, yesterday, quality over quantity? I did say that, right? Yeah. Oftentimes, mostly, I would say it helps it to prioritize the *quality* of attention over the *quantity* of attention – meaning, “How long in time before I get distracted?” It's still important, that sustaining the attention or holding it on something. But I would say most people do much better putting that secondary in importance to the quality. And what do we mean by quality? Wholeheartedness is part of quality. How wholeheartedly, in this moment, can I open to, and give, and become intimate with, and become interested in, and give myself to whatever it is I'm paying attention to? And this is one of those things – okay, so it's really important at a micro-level here. It's also really important in life. You know, the capacity, the ability, the willingness to be wholehearted – sometimes that's what's missing in a person, not just in their concentration practice, but in their life as well. It's an important thing. How wholehearted can I be in this moment, with this thing, with this person, whatever it is, with this passion, with this issue, with this whatever?

So quality means wholeheartedness, but also some of the things we talked about yesterday: this modulation of intensity. Quality doesn't just mean intensity on '11' all the time. It means the responsive tuning of the intensity of the attention. And if you say, “I'm actually not sure I know what that means, intensity, or I can feel what that means,” it's something I would encourage you to experiment with. Play with it. Get a sense of shifting the gears or turning the dial up and down of the intensity of the attention. Because again, back to this issue of inertia: sometimes it's like, “I'm paying attention. I'm paying

attention. What's that? I'm just paying attention. Okay, there's nothing to talk about. I'm paying attention." "Are you with your breath?" "Yeah, I'm paying attention to my breath." But the inertia, there, is not taking the trouble to actually play with this, to get a sense of, "Oh, this is what it is, this is what it feels like for an intense attention. This is what it feels like to back off the attention." And sometimes we just haven't explored that because there's a certain amount of inertia. We just think of attention, mindfulness, whatever it is. So delicacy, lightness of attention – this is all related. We talked about it yesterday.

The relative spaciousness also is part of the quality. What kind of spaciousness of attention helps? So back to when we talked about *pīti* earlier today, you know, which mode? This is all part of the quality, being willing to play with the relative spaciousness of the attention.

Just to throw out a little bit, sometimes, at some points (talking still about quality of attention), there's really a place for a kind of poetic or even imaginal sensibility in relation to whatever it is I'm paying attention to – the breath, for example. Sometimes, for most beginners on most retreats, we tend to [say]: "Pay attention to the sensations, the bare sensations. Don't imagine. Don't think anything," etc. Then when we introduce the energy body, then we say, "It's okay to imagine. And it's not really about sensation. Well, it's a kind of sensation, but it's a different kind of sensation." But actually, what about if it's neither *just* sensation nor *just* energy? What would it be, sometimes – on this kind of retreat, it's like adding a spice to the meal – what is it to breathe the breath of the All-Merciful Allah? What is it to breathe God's breath? Now, I just have that view lightly in relation to the breath. What happens?

Now, of course, that might not work for you at all. There's no formula here. The point is about, there are ways of sensing whatever it is you're sensing, whatever it is you're concentrating on, and sensing it with more poetic or imaginal sensibility. The breath of the beloved, the breath of the divine, the breath of the Buddha-nature – these are just examples. Or the breath *tinged*, somehow: I'm breathing mercy. I'm breathing in and out compassion, whatever it is. It may be, in that (and for some of you that know the imaginal practice; I'm not going to explain it), may be that the whole sense of self at that point becomes imaginal. That may be okay. Again, we're back to intention. What's my primary intention here on this retreat? We don't really want to get into a whole imaginal thing, etc., but it's almost like *titrating* how much of that imaginal sense or poetic sensibility there is in the mix of what's going on. So as I said, just a little bit of this spice in – it can ignite something, instead of a humdrum "Nothing's really happening." A little bit of that can change the whole relationship. Why? Go back to what I said before: what's most primary in *pīti* arising? Open-heartedness, openness of being – that's actually kind of what makes the most difference.

[27:59] Years ago, Kirsten and I went to visit – we had a friend who's a scholar in Berlin, the guy I was learning Sanskrit from. And he gave me these texts from caves in Afghanistan, Buddhist caves in Afghanistan, in Sanskrit. And they were versions of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha's mindfulness of breathing. But they had all kinds of things like, "Imagine breathing a blue breath," or with colour and imagery in them. I lost them, unfortunately. [laughter] They weren't the originals! [laughter] But anyway, that sort of thing is in the tradition. So a little bit of this, a little bit of this, titrate a little bit, a drop of this essential oil or whatever – it can spark something. A dash of spice in the meal. But it's all very delicate, very subtle. Sometimes when people talk about, like, *tonglen*, breathing in and out

compassion – sometimes when people practise that way, it's all very heavy. It's all very clunky and kind of gross. I'm talking about something much, much more subtle here. It's really like a little drop of something into a mixture.

[29:17] Okay, back to this – I probably won't bash it much after this talk. But again, so easily we can come – from our past, from our indoctrination – to think of, “What are we doing here? We're developing our focus, developing our concentration, or somehow trying to be or get into a state where there isn't thought.” And then we measure the whole thing with, “How long have I been on this object? How much is thought arising, etc.?” Could that view be part of our inertia? Could we have inertia around that view? As I said, some of those things that get emphasized are actually, if you look at the whole totality of what the Buddha said about all this, they're just a phrase here and there. Somehow they've got extracted, repeated, emphasized, indoctrinated. What would it be to emphasize at times, or instead, or even primarily, this idea of actually seeking to cultivate and to maximize, even, pleasure and enjoyment? The exploration of subtlety, the exploration of the whole territories anyway, just exploration and love of exploration, and love of what opens? What would it be if those were the primary intentions and emphases, rather than focus, concentration, being thought-free, etc.?

Earlier, I think I said, depends on how much experience you have, but some people, at some points in their practice, might be really good to drop the whole *jhāna* framework, the whole framework of ideas of *jhānas* for a while, and actually maybe just think about insight practice and *samādhi* practice. And the intention with *samādhi* practice is not so much focus and concentration, but as I said, this well-being, cultivation of well-being, pleasure, enjoyment. Going back to “What does *samādhi* mean?”, harmonization, agreement, reconciliation. What does that suggest? What does it feel like? And in dropping the whole *jhāna* framework, we're also dropping this question of (or it's much less) “Is this it now? Have I got it?” Sometimes what that does, that question, is it creates a kind of subtle over-excitement in the moment, or a grasping or a snatching. And the Buddha actually says in the suttas when he describes the *jhānas*: “Don't snatch. Without snatching at the first *jhāna*, without snatching at the *pīti*.”² But the snatching comes out of a certain attitude, out of a certain view, out of a certain mind state. [32:33] It's something that happens in the moment that comes out of a view. Do you see how important view is? And in dropping all that system of the *jhānas*, [there's] actually less self-judgment, because the self doesn't have this whole scale, this ladder by which to grade itself, of measurement, and the whole achievement mentality. A lot of these views will actually just work against the *samādhi* deepening and against the *jhāna* kind of coming together or opening.

So sometimes, for some people, at certain stages of their practice, actually just drop the whole framework of eight *jhānas*, and just think of, split it in two: there's insight practice, and there's *samādhi* practice. *Samādhi* is about having a really good time. [laughter] Actually, insight is as well, the way I teach it. So it's just slightly different how you go about it. I'll explain the difference. In insight practice, it should be really nice. It should open up a really nice time, because in insight practice, what we're doing is, we're letting go of clinging in the moment. It's clinging that causes *dukkha*. An insight way of looking, in my definition, is something that releases clinging. It therefore should bring relief, release, and it feels nice. But what we're primarily interested in, then, when we're doing insight practice, is that whole process: where's the clinging? How do I let go of it? What ways of

looking work to let go of clinging? And what happens in my sense of self, world, *dukkha*, reality when I let go of the clinging? So all that – it’s definitely a good time, but it’s a certain kind of good time.

Samādhi practice is more about, well, here’s this lovely quality that’s arisen. And there can be many different ones. Let me *really*, as I said, nuzzle into it, or open myself to it. Let me really get into that. And I’m less concerned with these other questions, primarily, about clinging and reality and all that. So they’re both – it should be *nice*. [laughter] Okay, so if a person lets go of the *jhāna* framework for a while, and then they can kind of begin to notice, gradually, the different shades in their experience. Just thinking about *samādhi* and these lovely qualities, and enjoying them, slowly, slowly, I begin to discern between these different shades and qualities and frequencies. And then at some point, you can reintroduce the *jhāna* framework in relation to that, with Post-it notes.

Other people, as I said, really need to discern more. It’s really the time in their practice where they need to make more discriminations, more discernments between “This is *this* kind of pleasure. This is *this* kind of realm. And this is *this*. And how is it different? And what are the different territories? And what are the sub-territories there?”

And let’s go back to this thing: what’s my playground? What does it mean to develop mastery? If we *don’t* discern with all these territories, the fruit we get out of it will be much, much less. And I know meditators who can get well-being, and they can sit in the well-being for hours, actually. And they’ve been sitting in the same well-being for about twenty years – I mean, not without interruption, you know, but twenty years of their practice, because they didn’t want to discern, when they could have discerned when it first came up between, say, *pīti* and happiness, or the different shades of happiness. And so what happened was it just became kind of like, over time, all these qualities got mixed together. It was a nice soup, but it was just a soup. Here at Gaia House, a few years ago – I don’t know if it was in your time as a coordinator, but they used to have leftover soups. So basically, all the leftover lunches, at the end of the week, would get mixed into a pot, heated up, and that would be ... [laughter] And of course it didn’t taste of anything. It just tasted of nothing, really. People would still be very appreciative, but ... [laughter] It was nice, but it’s not that you could differentiate any flavours in there. If we don’t discriminate, the real danger is you’re just left with a soup of niceness that actually never really develops. It never really develops and brings the liberation and the opening of certain territories. So again, I contradict myself. Different people have different needs at different times. [37:25]

With regard to effort as well, in relation to everything we’re saying, sometimes less effort is more productive in the moment, actually backing off. So that’s kind of implicit in a lot of what I’ve said. Sometimes even a slight over-efforting can disturb things in different ways. Sometimes that disturbance can be extremely gross, in fact, when the effort is too much. We’ll maybe talk about that sometime soon. And sometimes the disturbance can just be really, really subtle. But over-effort has an impact. I go back to this analogy of a potter crafting a vase or a pot on a wheel. Sometimes, with the hands, you’re going to press with more pressure, and sometimes with less pressure. And that’s what’s appropriate to what I’m trying to shape right then. In a way, the hands are always pressing. So it’s just that – if the hands on the clay are the analogy of attention – the attention’s always there, but *how* it’s pressing affects what arises. How much pressure affects the shape that’s created. And that’s responsive, and it’s variable, and it’s improvised.

It might also be that (again, stretching the analogy a little bit) the size – so I could have my whole span of my hand shaping this big vase or this particular area where it curves, and I’ve got it like *that*. Or maybe there’s a certain area where I just want a little kind of place where it narrows. Then I just put my fingers there. And that’s going to do something. So again, the size, the pressure, all of this – it’s going to shape what arises. And all of it’s improvised, responsive, sensitive, variable. [39:37]

The Buddha gives several images. He talks a lot about right effort, balanced effort. You probably know these similes, but I’ll mention them again. He talks about trying to hold a quail, which is a very small bird, and holding that in your hands – too loose, it flies away; too tight, and you’re going to crush it.³ Or another analogy he gave to a musician, a lute player – he said it’s like tuning the strings: too tight, you snap the string; too loose, you can’t play anything. Well, you can, but it’s going to sound ... not very good. So there’s always this question, and – I’ve said this before – it’s always a kind of sensitive, responsive question: what’s the effort? But if we talk about effort, as I mentioned a while ago, we can talk about a kind of micro-level of effort, which means, in this moment, what does the intensity need? What does the delicacy need? All that.

But also the *view* in this moment. Sometimes we talk about view, [and we] think, “Oh, it’s *up here*.” What I really want to communicate is, whatever view you have *up here* about the big picture of practice and where you’re going, it inevitably filters down, or its implications filter down to your micro, moment-to-moment decisions in practice, and navigations, and what you do. We want to see this and understand this, and understand the power of views. So part of the micro-level effort thing is also the sensitivity and the playing with: what view am I having right now about what I’m doing, what I’m emphasizing, etc. – my attitudes?

And there’s a macro-level, the question of effort on a macro-level. That means, like, “Do I get up and just go for a walk now? Is it enough? Do I need a rest? How many hours a day am I engaging in formal practice? Is it too much? Am I squeezing too much?” Or actually, is it like, “I *could* do more?” You know, the hall’s open, really, *really*, 24/7, and the walking room as well. So you might have, like, everyone else is on breakfast wash-up, and you could do a number of things there. But you could come and either sit or walk. Sometimes we just get into, “I’m used to being on retreat, and I sit this much.” And actually, it might be more. So this whole macro-level of effort, you know: “Do I need to back off? Do I need to do more?” And again, the larger views are part of the macro-level as well.

In part of my description or definition of what mastery involved, I mentioned that at a certain point, it involves being able to walk around in a *jhāna*, or practising doing that. So this is an interesting one, because if you get to that point, or when you get to that point, you say, “Okay, I’m going to do that,” and you might walk around and go for – whatever it is – a twenty-minute walk or whatever it is. And you’re in the *jhāna*, or an hour walk, and it felt like, “Wow, that was great. I was really there, and I was really in this, whichever state of well-being it was, and right with the energy body, and that was where my primary focus was, and the feet were able to just find their way.” And then you come back with the subtle view, “This sitting is going to be *amazing* now.” And it might be! It might, really. I’m not speaking so much about, “Careful of that.” That’s what you usually hear on insight retreats: “Oh, careful of that.” I’m not speaking so much about that. I’m speaking just about, we don’t always know, because it’s an energy question. So it might be, it might indeed – the fact that you’ve been in *jhāna* might really put you in a different kind of springboard for the next sitting or walking, formal walking

period. But it also might be that having done that actually takes a lot of energy. And then you come and, actually, you realize, “Oh, I’m a bit tired now.” Or the mind doesn’t quite have the energy. So it’s still really worth experimenting with, when you get to that point, being able to do that and practise that.

But it’s an interesting thing. So effort, energy – *jhānas* bring energy, unquestionably, but they also take energy. It’s a lot of work. You’re putting in a lot of work, just again and again and again, working in these ways, playing in these ways. That’s part of the whole art of being on retreat, and part of the whole art of practice is getting a little bit wise and sensitive to energy levels. And it’s not always possible to predict it in advance, when there’s going to be a dip or when “Now I’m actually tired from the work I’ve done, and I need to rest.” Sometimes the mind will need to rest. It really needs to rest from these kind of efforts.

Another interesting thing – and again, this is perhaps something that you will run into after you have, or once you’ve had, quite a bit of experience with different *jhānas*. It’s possible you’re in a *jhāna*, and then you lose it a little bit, or you space out, just for a couple of moments or something, a few moments. And then you bring the mind back, and in bringing it back, after your couple of moments of spacing out, it comes back at a deeper level. That’s interesting. I would say, two conclusions or ponderings to take from that. **(1)** One is, maybe spacing out is not always necessarily a disaster. So if I’m too quick with the self-judgment, then say, “Hold on. Let’s see. Let’s see.” Don’t immediately assume that. **(2)** The second thing to wonder about is that, if that happens, might it be an indication that I was, without realizing it, just subtly over-efforting in the first place? And when I spaced out, actually what happened is I just loosened. The effort got loosened, and it was *that* that allowed the deepening. I don’t know, but to me that’s very worth thinking about. So it might be an indication, and that should tell me something: “Okay, well, let’s maybe try going back in, and having a little bit more looseness for a while, in terms of the effort, a little bit less on the effort pedal.”

And again, this probably applies more to once you have had different experiences of *jhāna*, but it might also apply to working with energy body experiences: sometimes what can creep in is we come to expect to be able to access this or that experience or *jhāna* or quality of energy. And in a way, that’s actually good. It’s fine and good that we can expect that. And that’s part of practice maturing, that one can go and have a reasonable expectation of this or that arising, and being able to get into that. But easily that expectation can then become a kind of subtle, subtle demand for this or that to arise, or to be as good as it usually is, or how it was yesterday. And there’s a subtle stance. It might not involve a lot [of thought] – it might not involve *any* thought. But it’s just a subtle kind of demand or stance there.

Again, just a slight, subtle shift of view: rather than that, again, why don’t we think about picking up on, noticing, becoming sensitive to, and then attuning to whatever frequencies are there in the mix, in the mix of the energy body, of the emotion, of the lovely stuff that’s there? And that’s different. So it might be a slightly different mix, but the question is, “What is there? And what can I attune to?”, rather than a demand. The very tuning to frequencies in the energy body mix, the very tuning to frequencies in the mix of the *citta*, will amplify the frequency. [48:38] So I have to notice it, which takes a certain sensitivity. I have to be willing to tune on it – that’s the responsiveness. And then I have to attune to it. And the attuning will amplify. And that’s a different thing – I’m not demanding; I’m seeing what’s here. What’s possible here? What actually is here? And then attuning. That’s different than demanding something. That demand can, as I said, be very, very subtle.

Going back to what I said about *pīti*, which actually also applies, certainly, for different factors of the primary factors in the first four *jhānas*, even – actually, no, all the *jhānas*, perhaps. In the meditation, part of the work and play that we talked about, part of this kind of direction of increasing, maximizing pleasure, that licking the honey out of the cup, or whatever it was, you could say, in soulmaking terms (I’m just throwing this out very briefly; it doesn’t matter if you’re not familiar with this), there’s actually an eros for that quality. But it’s eros in the small definition: it’s this wanting more contact, wanting more intimacy, wanting to penetrate, wanting to open. Those of you who know the soulmaking, you recognize that. It’s eros, but it’s eros in the small definition, because we’re not, at that point, letting it go into an image – *too* much of an image, or a whole big [image], where it expands the psyche, logos, and everything. But it’s eros in the small definition. Outside the meditation, you can have eros with the fantasy, with the image, etc., eros in the bigger definition, i.e. eros that is allowed to stimulate psyche and logos and the whole soulmaking dynamic.

If that doesn’t make any sense, forget about it. It doesn’t matter. What matters right now, in the moment-to-moment meditation, it’s the seeking of the pleasure, the enjoying it, the getting into it. Get into it. In the larger, outside of the meditation, and actually *in* the meditation, both, the view of the self on the path is absolutely crucial. What’s my view of my self as a practitioner, as someone walking the path? So I’ve known people with all kinds of actually deep experiences in meditation over the years, and something’s not right in the view of the self on the path, the view of self as practitioner. And there’s very little liberation that comes from it. The whole way their psychology is construing or holding the self as meditator: have this experience, that experience, *da-da-da-da-da-da*, understand the idea about emptiness, even had certain fading, etc. – something’s not working. Some connection is kind of jammed the wrong way.

Sometimes in relation to *jhāna* (I don’t know if I’ve said this in a talk before; I’ve certainly said it in certain interviews), we can get so tight around the achievement-oriented[ness], and then self-judging. And you know, one way [to] kind of take the pressure off – and then I’ll say something opposite – one way of taking the pressure off is: okay, what we’re doing here (with the *jhānas* business, and the *pīti*, and the pleasure, and all these different wavelengths of pleasure) is something akin to, okay, you’re tired, and your back hurts. And at home, or wherever you are, there’s a sofa, and it’s got lots of cushions on it. And you’re just kind of arranging these cushions so that they feel as best as they can feel. And I say, “Oh, now, if I shift this one, that’s better. Now, *oh*, that’s better.” That’s what you’re doing. Are you going to get into a big self-judgment thing about that? That’s essentially what we’re doing. That’s one way of thinking about it. Take the pressure off in the view. We’re just kind of like, “Okay, here’s this body experience, here’s this mind experience, here are these, you know, everything involved in that, and here’s this energy body. What will help to make it feel good?” And it’s just not a big deal. And you play with that until it feels good, or to maximize how good it feels.

At another level, and coming back to the eros thing, the view of the self on the path – we do want that, or it’s possible that that can be a real sense of blessedness, of gift, humility, desire, love, image of the tradition, image of the Buddha, image of the teachers, image of self on path – all this becomes imaginal in the fully soulmaking sense of the word. And as the Buddha said, it will still have pain at times. There will still be distress, frustration, disappointment, tightness. “The distress of the contemplative,” he calls it. But that can be there, and it’s part of the cut of eros. It’s part of the bigger

soulmaking fantasy. For those of you who know about soulmaking (I'm not going to explain all that now), we need to have a sense of the self on the path, an image, a construal of the self as practitioner on the path, in a way that's nourishing, in a way that really makes sense, that holds us well through all the ups and downs. So all this that we're touching on today – all this is relevant to, and even *causes* the different and various difficulties we encounter in practice. Again, we tend to have such a narrow view of what we need to do.

But all this business is oftentimes actually causal of the difficulties, and more causal than what we tend to think of as the problem: inability to access *jhāna*. Again, I can think of one meditator who was actually meditating for decades – decades, decades, decades, lots of retreats, etc., and she wants to develop her *samādhi*, which means, for her, 'concentration' and 'focus.' "Oh, my concentration is so bad," which almost everyone says. She says, "My mind wanders, and thoughts come," and again, she's measuring in terms of exactly what I said. Maybe not put those things as priority: "How much thought comes? Is my mind wandering?" But she is measuring that way. She says, "I need to really get into this before I can do any other kind of practice. I really need to develop my focus. I really need to develop my concentration."

And actually, knowing her fairly well as a student, she actually needs, I would say – much more important than she needs to develop her focus, and keep her mind steady on something, and all that, actually what needs to happen is an inquiry, an exploration, or a development in practice of being able to give herself fully to something. That's a very different thing. What is it to really show up? I give myself. Now, there's a kind of, "I give myself. I really care about this." There's a kind of macro-level. And there's this micro-level, like when I did the sunbathing thing: opening, surrendering. The issue, I would say, is more with *that*. It's not about keeping the mind steady and her ability to do that. The reason she can't do that is because there's something in her that is holding back – energetically, heartfully, in terms of her soul, in her life as well, in terms of opening and surrendering. And so for her, there's very rarely any kind of build-up of energy in the being. Something's just blocking it. Something won't open to it. Energy is not permitted to gather. And actually, those are the primary issues. Those are the primary causes of inability to deepen in *samādhi* and access that. But just seeing in a very different way. So it's a different view.

But you can also see, one can also see (and we've talked about it), you see some of these very same issues manifesting in her life. It's not like, "Oh, that's just a problem of focus and concentration." These kinds of issues – about allowing energy to gather, about being wholehearted, about really giving herself, getting behind something, about really opening – actually manifest in her life too, and cause all kinds of, let's say, limitations. So a shift in view, a shift in understanding, then a shift in the emphasis of, "What am I actually practising here? What would make a difference? What's important?"

Again, sometimes, oftentimes, human beings – the body isn't open. The energy body, as a sort of habit, is not so open. So most people wouldn't [notice] – it's not obvious. I mean, you get people with really hunched-over, contracted postures; I'm not talking about that. I'm talking something much more subtle that's just palpable, but not obvious to, let's say, most people. And sometimes this has to do with trust. And sometimes it has to do with, and it's related to, sometimes you see, "Oh, the person like that, also, for instance, it's very hard for them to feel something like devotion." All these things are related. You say, "It's about the concentration." It's maybe *not* about the concentration; it's about something

else, about the heart and the soul, and how the heart and the soul, over time, shape or limit a certain typical stance or typical way that the energy body is. Energy body always moves; it's always opening and closing. But there can be a sort of – typically, it's just a little bit closed, so certain things just are not possible. And again, maybe to learn to practise trusting in the opening, trusting in surrendering, just slowly, slowly learning how to do that with the energy, practising that.

Or as I alluded to before, sometimes what happens is, people get quite a tightness, or over-excitement (which might be very, very subtle) creeps in, right when, actually, there's a lot of focus, there's a lot of concentration, there's a lot of *pīti*. They're maybe right on the edge of the first *jhāna*, if we even talk about edges. But what I want to say is, they're thinking *too much* about edges. And that view, it's too black and white. "Over there – if I can just get over there," even if over there is like, metaphorically, two inches, "that will be the *jhāna*." Again, it could be a verbal thought. It could be not a verbal thought. And that very black-and-white view is allowing a tension to creep in, an impulse to snatch and grasp, which causes a problem, a tightness. What about instead just getting into it? Getting into what is there that is lovely, and enjoying that, and not worrying about where the boundary is? Relishing, really relishing what's here, versus the idea of attaining something, and then measuring whether I've attained it. [1:01:06] What I'm interested in is just relishing that honey.

Last thing. I mentioned that the Buddha talked or described the *jhānas* at times as 'perception attainments.'⁴ And what we are doing, I would say, the most fruitful, the truest, the most ontologically valid, and the most liberating way of conceiving what we're doing in all this, is that we're playing with perception. And in that playing with perception, certain 'perception attainments' will be opened. And that way of viewing, I would say, is much more significant than "We're practising an unwavering attention," "We're practising an intensity of a laser-beam attention that dissects or magnifies things, like looking at things through a magnifying glass," or that "We're simplifying," or even that "We're playing with energy."

I do talk a lot about energy when I teach. Sometimes, like I said, it seems to be helpful for a lot of people. Some people really don't like it because it doesn't resonate at all for them; they don't get a sense of it. But you know, then, we can relate all this to qigong and all that, and it makes sense to talk about energy. But very often, then, we can think, we can kind of get locked in a certain view: that "We're really doing something here with the energy, or with the energy body, or with the body, or with the chakras," or with the whatever it is. Or "We're getting the energy body to this or that state of energy," or whatever. And that becomes locked as a view. "I'm working on this contraction," whatever it is. "I'm opening the energy here." Sometimes that's really, really helpful as a view, and we can talk in energetic terms. And some of these examples of difficulty, it's actually easier to talk about them in energetic terms, and how they relate to life. And sometimes, a person is just – they've had enough of that kind of thinking, and it's not the final truth of what's going on. It's just a certain way of conceiving of it, a way of construing it, a way of perceiving it.

So this idea of perception attainments, and the idea of playing with perception – that's the most radical shift of conceptual framework, and the most important shift of conceptual framework that you could make, and really understand what that means, and use that in a way that's actually fruitful rather than just a "Yeah, yeah, yeah." It has everything to do with a radical and deep understanding of emptiness. The *jhānas*, what we're doing in the *jhānas* – I didn't explain. I rushed through it at that

point in the talk. We'll come back to it. But if I start to understand the *jhānas* as, "We're playing with perception, and then perception attainments are opened through our playing with perception," this integrates completely into our understanding of the deep emptiness of all things. That's the most important thing in the Dharma, I would say. The most important thing in the Dharma is perception: understanding perception and playing with perception. And you can construe of the whole Dharma as actually being primarily interested in that: playing with perception. Everything – even things that sound like they have nothing to do with that – you can understand the whole Dharma as basically an exploration of playing with perception, and then a taking of certain conclusions and certain liberations from that.

What do I mean by 'perception'? Perception – *saññā* is the Pali word. Often it gets translated as something like 'labelling.' That's not at all what I mean when I say 'perception.' By 'perception,' I do not mean labelling: 'green,' 'Sarah,' 'cushion.' Actually it's not a 'cushion'; it's a 'bench.' By 'perception,' I mean, it's an equivalent term for 'experience' or, better, 'appearance.' I use these three terms – and 'phenomenon' – interchangeably: perception, appearance, experience, phenomenon. So a 'perception attainment' is not a 'labelling attainment.' If I were to say, if I were to label Sari 'banana,' and Kirsten 'pomegranate,' and Julian 'kiwi' ... [laughs] I'm not playing with labels here! I'm playing with the fabrication of experience, the fabrication of appearance. 'Energy' is a fabricated perception, a fabricated appearance. It's not 'energy.' It's a fabrication. It's a certain fabrication of appearance, experience. This kind of energy is *this* kind of fabrication, this kind of conjuring, this kind of weaving and sculpting of appearance and experience. The first *jhāna* is *this* kind of weaving, conjuring, fabricating of experience, appearance, perception. The eighth *jhāna* is – actually, that's a bad example. We'll come back to that later. [laughter]

Papañca involves a certain fabricating of experience. Just the normal, everyday consciousness is a certain fabrication of perception, experience, appearance. *Life* is the fabrication of perception, experience, appearance. Meditation is the exploration of the fabrication of perception, experience, appearance. Skill and art in meditation is skill and art in the fabrication and the various fabrications and what they lead to. Do they lead where we want to go? If I want it to lead to unfabricating or skilful fabricating, or this kind of liberation, or this kind of state, or that kind of quality, or that kind of energy, or that kind of *jhāna* – perception attainments. And that has everything to do with emptiness, which basically is related to the fabrication of experience, the fabrication of the sense of existence at different times.

So the *jhānas* are completely woven into the whole sense of what's most important in the path. It's a way of conceiving of the whole of the Dharma. Seeing it that way, with that kind of view, is very different than other ways we can conceive of what we're trying to do here. And as I said, for some of you – okay, I do talk a lot about energy, and some of you are very happy with that language, but it can sometimes get *too* ... as if it's a real thing. If you're one of these people, what would happen to just rethink the whole thing, rethink your practice, rethink energy, rethink *jhāna*, rethink Dharma in terms of perception – which, as I said, doesn't mean labelling?

Okey-doke. It's 5:45. Would you like to end now, or are there some questions that it might feel helpful to ask? Does it feel like there might be? Just get a sense of who might feel like they might want

ask. Why don't we take just a few questions? This will be part three. And then, yeah, let's see how that goes. Yeah.

¹ Cf. "distresses connected with renunciation" (*nekkhammasitāni domanassāni*) at SN 36:22 and MN 137.

² Source unknown. Cf. the similes of the water snake and the raft at MN 22, as well as the simile of grasping at branches AN 4:178.

³ MN 128.

⁴ AN 9:36.

12-20 Q & A

Danny, yeah. Please.

Q1: expanding on what sensitivity, attunement, responsiveness, and refinement mean

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, so expand a bit on these different words: sensitivity, attunement, responsiveness, and refinement?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, attunement, sensitivity, responsiveness, refinement. Okay. Let's take the example – we were talking with Jason. Here's *mettā*, and I'm practising the *mettā*, and I'm noticing the different flavours emotionally and in the energy body at different times. Here's happiness. Here's peace. Here's something that I don't even have a word for, but it just has a certain kind of emotional quality. So sensitivity is noticing all that and feeling it.

Refinement is more just the idea that, first of all, these are probably quite subtle things. They're not big sort of in-your-face ... I mean, they *can* be, but as the whole thing deepens, things tend to get more refined, meaning more subtle. They're not big explosions, necessarily. And part of what I would want to include in pretty much all practice is that willingness to pay attention, an ability to pay attention and be sensitive to what is refined, and also knowing the possibility that things can get more and more refined, not necessarily more intense (although they *can* also get more intense).

Responsiveness really is just the, for instance, again, going back to Jason's – here I'm saying, "May you be happy." Then I say, "May you be peaceful." And I notice that when I say, "May you be peaceful," there's like, "Oh, 'May you be happy' was just okay. Nothing particularly happened. But when I said, 'May you be peaceful,' there was a little *ooh*. There was a little something there." Maybe it was a feeling of peace or something, and I actually felt that in the energy body and in the heart. So I'm sensitive to it. It may be quite refined. But I'm responding to it by noticing it, and then maybe my response is, "Let's just repeat that phrase a few times." Then I'm riding the thermals, like I said. So

that's my responsiveness, for example. But there's all kinds of responsiveness, even a whole macro-level responsiveness, like, I've been sitting, sitting, working with his hindrance, and it's just *phlagh*. Time for a cup of tea. That's responsive. I'm making a responsive decision. So in terms of how gross or refined the responsiveness, it goes over the whole range.

Attunement would be – going back to the example – here I've just said, “peaceful,” and there's that energy or emotion, feeling, to it. And I'm kind of listening to that and feeling it. Of everything that's going on, I'm kind of singling in on that. I'm not losing the whole background of my whole body sense, but I'm tuning my receiver to that particular wavelength, and I'm just kind of resonating with the vibe and feeling it. So that would be attunement. And as I do that, like I said today, the very activity of attuning amplifies that particular wavelength, or tends to. Does that make sense?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, if you like – organizing, partially organizing. It's the thing that you're tuning to. It's like when you tune a receiver. There's all this static, or other radio stations. You're just finding *that* one. You're dialling: “There's that one.” I'm tuning, literally like that. I'm tuning to it. And then it's like, okay, now I'm enjoying this radio station. I'm really feeling it, etc. So the feeling it and the enjoying it is part of the attuning, as well as the focusing on. It's all part of the attuning. Does that ...? Yeah? Okay. There are a couple here. Please.

Q2: attention becoming more subtle as the object becomes more subtle

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yes, absolutely. What happens when an object gets subtle – let's say the breath gets subtle. It's very common, on retreats, people to say, “After a while, the breath gets ... I can't feel it any more.” Or they're paying attention to the rise and fall: “I can't feel it any more.” It's become a subtle object. And, in a way, we could say yes, it's inviting the attention to become more subtle. But sometimes what happens is it becomes so subtle, and we *don't* let the attention become correspondingly subtle. We just say, “I can't feel it,” and then we space out, or lose it, or we get frustrated, or whatever, or say, “Oh, that doesn't work.” But if what we can do is, “Ah, the object is getting more subtle. Great. Okay. Interesting,” and then what's the art of just letting the attention get correspondingly [subtle], so it kind of matches the subtlety level of the object? And that process, again, I would say, that's more central to what's really going on as *samādhi* deepens, this subtilizing, if we make it a verb, than something like, “I've been there for 1,348 breaths,” or whatever it is.

That process of subtilizing is what allows things to open up, in a moment-to-moment level and in a sitting. But also if we look at the whole scale of what the *jhānas* are, they're movements into more and more subtlety. So something like the nothingness, the seventh *jhāna*, is an incredibly subtle state, and the neither perception nor non-perception, it's *unbelievably* refined, you know? But even, like, the peacefulness of the third *jhāna* is less subtle than the ... The eighth is more subtle, less subtle, less subtle, less subtle, *da-da-da-da*, all the way back. The whole spectrum is actually a movement into

more subtlety, and understanding that has actually a lot to do with what I was talking about, perception attainments, and the whole view of the thing. But in a moment-to-moment meditative level, yeah, if the object gets more subtle, it's like, "Okay, how can I just let the attention get more subtle? How can I let it shake down like that, or what do I need to do?" Yeah? Okay. Lovely.

Let's just take one more. I can't even see who that is. Is that Marco? Hi. Yeah.

Q3: working with pain; *pīti* increasing after sitting with pain

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Shift to walking? I think so, yeah. Unfortunately, there are a few different options here. I will talk more about this, but let's say something now, again, partly just dependent on what I know of your practice a little bit. So it might be, at this point, let's say you're sitting, *pīti* arises, and then at some point, pain arises somewhere in the body. And then, what you can do is get more into the *pīti*, and kind of keep it at bay. So I would really recommend that's the first thing you do. It's almost like your priority is the *pīti*, and enjoying it, and absorbing into it, and getting more into it.

Sometimes what helps you *do* that is actually, rather than concentrating on where there's *pīti* – that's one option, definitely, and I'll give other options, too, but let's say for now – actually seeing if you can spread the *pīti* into where there's pain. Does that make sense? Sometimes what *was* painful actually becomes pleasurable as you spread it more. Partly, maybe, what I think you're still working on is really learning the kind of absorption into the *pīti*. So we don't want to distract it too much by getting into the whole pain thing at this point. So that's the primary thing. But partly, there's also, again, perception – what was unpleasant can be perceived as pleasant. It's something quite amazing. So sometimes see if you can spread the *pīti* there. Just imagine it going there, or just imagine, even, just decide to see it as *pīti*, you know? There are several things you can play with, and I'll give more at some point.

That might work sort of once or twice, for some minutes, and then at some point, you can't do it any more, okay? On this retreat, at this point, that's the time to get up, okay? You're out of batteries, and it's time to get up, and either have a cup of tea, go for a walk, or do some walking meditation, or whatever. If you want, you could stand up and continue meditating, if that's pain-free, you know. So that's an option. But how does that sound for now, as a sort of partial answer?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. I think everyone can hear, but I'll just repeat it for the tape. So Marco's asking, he's playing with the *pīti* in the ways that I already said, but sometimes, remembering from the last retreat, he sat with real firm resolve, *adhiṭṭhāna*, to sit through the pain, be there. It was difficult, but then when he came back after taking a break, after the sitting, then that's when the most *pīti* built up. It broke through. Yeah? So it makes him think now, "Well, maybe I should do that, for the sake of that *pīti* breaking through later." Yes? This is partly what I was wanting to talk about, maybe even starting tomorrow. So *pīti* arises two ways, and one is this kind of just keep showing up with intensity, and

working, working, and then it kind of erupts through. And the other way is here's a little bit of *pīti*, and we're coaxing it, we're building it, we're adding to it more. So they're just different ways of working, really, but I'm partly wanting to ask you: what were you doing in those times when you were really just with your firm resolve? What actually were you doing with the mind at that point? Because you could sit with pain, and actually just end up a contracted, miserable, crumpled mess, if the relationship is wrong with it. So you were probably doing *something*. You must have been in some mode of way of looking or relationship with, that then that was part of the effect. The resolve will build energy, and energy is related to *pīti*, so it can erupt that way, but there need to be other factors there, as well, that have to do with the way of looking and relating. So do you remember what they were?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Very good. So when I asked him that, Marco said it's a combination of the allowing/letting be practice, insight way of looking, and the *anattā* (not-self) practice, both of which I would regard as insight ways of looking. And what they do is, when you're doing those, you're not just building *adhiṭṭhāna* and energy by staying still; you're actually opening the energy body, and opening and letting go of clinging, and *that's* having a big effect as well. When I say openness of heart, openness of being, I also mean just openness from release of clinging. So all this. *Pīti* also comes from release of clinging. But a lot of factors, a lot of things need to come together for the *moment* of *pīti* to arise. But can you see how that would be significant? Yeah? Because if you'd sat there just gritting your teeth, it wouldn't have given rise to *pīti* later. Does this make sense?

So as to what to do, in your case here, do both. I don't think it matters. But again, know what your playground is, in terms of what exactly are you trying to achieve at this point, what are you trying to learn, what are you trying to gain mastery of. And that might be – I'm not sure – but it might be really absorbing into the first *jhāna*. It's like, what do I need to do? How do I need to relate right now and practise right now? But I have a sense that's my playground. Does that make sense? Does that sound relevant? Okay. Super.

I think we probably need to stop now. Let's have some quiet together.

Insight Ways of Looking, Other Energy Body Possibilities, and Summarized Instructions

I want to start today with what's really the last chunk about base or springboard practices, so two pieces around base or springboard practices. And then, you're certainly welcome to ask more and bring it to interviews, but this will be the last bit about that from me at the front, so to speak. As I said, two parts to it:

(1) The first part has to do with **insight ways of looking**, and in a way, I mentioned it right at the beginning in the opening talk, and Marco also in his question yesterday mentioned that. So what do I mean? I'm going to be very brief here because this won't be really relevant for many of you.

Insight ways of looking: what does that mean? Usually, or perhaps a very common way of thinking about insight, or insight practice, insight meditation, is one is basically mindful, paying attention, and

paying attention as carefully as one can, and as continuously as one can. And in that careful and continuous mindfulness, attention, watching one's experience, etc., at some point one realizes something. One *has* an insight. One gets something. That's one way of understanding what insight meditation is, but also what *insight* is. That's great.

There's a second way – which is perhaps less common, but that I tend to emphasize quite a lot – which is more *taking* an insight and *using* it as a lens, looking in certain ways: a way of looking. For example, if one realizes that body sensations are not-self, one has maybe had that experience (or maybe one hasn't had that experience), one takes that understanding, and then one starts looking at experience, at body sensations, and seeing them deliberately, over and over again, as not-self: "They're just happening. They're not me. They're not mine." So it's more active. It's more deliberate. I'm not 'being mindful, waiting for an insight to come.' I'm looking at something in a certain way.

There are lots of these possibilities. What's key about them is that what I would call an 'insight way of looking' brings letting go. And it brings letting go *now*, in this moment. In other words, here's this pain in my back, my knee, whatever it is. When I look at it with an insight way of looking, it's not just, "Oh, that's interesting. It's not-self." It makes a difference to the experience. The suffering begins to lessen or dissolve. The actual experience itself (of the pain or whatever it is) begins to change.

What defines an insight way of looking, then, is that there is letting go. It brings letting go in the moment. Another way of saying 'letting go' is it 'releases clinging' in the moment. So this painful sensation – there's clinging in the sense of aversion: I want to get rid of it. There's also clinging in the sense of "It's me or mine." I'm assuming, unconsciously, without even thinking it. And the insight mode of looking, the insight way of looking, dissolves those, right in the moment. It lessens clinging. It attenuates clinging. So there's letting go and attenuation of clinging: two ways of saying the same thing.

Now, we could say that when we cling, as human beings, our energy body contracts. How do we know we're clinging to something? One of the ways is, you can feel it in the energy body. There's some kind of contraction somewhere or other in the space of the energy body. When we look with an insight way of looking which organically, by definition, has in it the capacity and the mode of letting go of clinging, then one of the things that happens, therefore, is that the energy body *undoes* – there's an *undoing* of a certain amount of contraction in the energy body. That's what happens. That's one of the things that happen when we look with an insight way of looking – sustainedly, deliberately.

What also happens with an insight way of looking – as I said, the phenomenon itself begins to change. As I get skilful in a certain insight way of looking, the phenomenon that I'm looking at *with* this insight way of looking begins to fade. Here's this pain; it's very intense. I keep looking at it. To just follow the example, I keep looking at it as 'not-self, not me, not mine, just happening.' And as I slowly do that, the pain, the unpleasantness starts to get less unpleasant, and even less unpleasant until it becomes neutral sensation. If I keep looking at it that way, in the insight way of looking, actually the sensation begins to fade. There's no sensation there any more. There's a space there, for example. Maybe it even goes via some pleasant sensation – in other words, what was unpleasant turns pleasant, then maybe turns neutral, or the other way around. But eventually, there will just be a space. There will be the fading of that perception, the fading of that phenomenon, the fading of that experience,

appearance, phenomenon, perception. We say it's 'less fabricated' because what's central to an insight way of looking is that it fabricates less: less *dukkha*, less self, less object.

Whether we look at it like we're undoing contractions in the energy body, or whether we say we're fabricating less solidity in the body, in the perception of the body – an insight way of looking does either of those; they're the same thing, whichever way we're looking at it – and *pīti* will arise. *Pīti* will arise as a less fabricated perception, or other *jhānas*. So an insight way of looking can open up the *jhānic* sense. Does this make sense? I realize that was a very brief explanation. Going back to what I said in the opening talk, what I mean by 'insight ways of looking' is insight practices, and (sorry for this, it sounds very – there's probably a word for it, but) I mean insight practices as I describe them, for instance, in my book *Seeing That Frees*.¹ So you might have done lots of insight retreats or whatever. You might have had insights into impermanence, whatever. I really mean something quite specific. If you're not familiar with all that, just leave all this. It's just an option that you can leave for another time.

If you *are* familiar with it, though, what you can do is take that – take one of those practices that you feel familiar with, one of these insight ways of looking, and start using it. Start using it, and use it sustainedly – just as sustainedly as you would use the concentration on the breath or whatever. And what you will notice is, as you engage this insight way of practice, the energy body starts to feel good, for the reasons that I've just said. Either you can conceive it as: "It's getting its knots unknotted. It's getting uncontracted," or more accurately and sophisticatedly conceived, it's: "The whole bodily perception is being fabricated less." As you keep practising the insight way of looking, the body starts to feel good. The energy body starts to feel good. It has some kind or some flavour of well-being there. And as the Buddha said, you don't *snatch* at that. So you're doing your insight way of looking, doing your insight way of looking, *in touch with* the energy body, noticing how it feels, and then at a certain point you say, "Yeah, it's nice now." Then you don't just *snatch* at that nice feeling, the *pīti*, or could be a different flavour of nice feeling. But you keep doing your insight way of looking, letting the nice feeling build, noticing it as well. Maybe then your attention is balanced between keeping doing the insight way of looking *and* the nice feeling. And at a certain point, just gently, you can manoeuvre your emphasis and attention so that the primary thing you're into, and the primary thing you're doing, is enjoying the well-being in the energy body, enjoying the *pīti*.

So you *may* keep with the way of looking for a bit, but then at some point, if you're switching to *samādhi* practice – again, *samādhi* is about the intention. That's what differentiates practice: it's the background intention. The *samādhi* intention has: "I really want to get into this enjoyment. I really just want to absorb and bathe and enjoy to the max." That's a *samādhi* intention. So at some point, what really swivels is your intention there. And to focus on it, and to maximize the enjoyment, getting really intimate with it, playing with those two modes of attention that we talked about yesterday, spreading it as well.

These kinds of practices are immensely powerful. So they may take you well beyond *pīti*, in fact, and well beyond the first *jhāna*. They may take you into different formless *jhānas*, the last four *jhānas*. Where they take you is partly dependent on which insight way of looking you're practising. It's partly dependent on your previous experience. If there are certain realms that you've visited a lot, you've kind

of got a groove in the mind, and it might tend there. But it's partly dependent on which insight way of looking.

Again, what is your playground? What is your learning edge playground? If your learning edge playground is the first [*jhāna*], and you play with an insight way of looking, and it takes you into the fifth or sixth *jhāna* – okay, that's maybe not what we want at this point, because you've decided that the first *jhāna* or the third *jhāna*, or whatever it is, is your playground, and that's shooting you way beyond it. But it might be that as you do the insight way of looking, as things fade, you can kind of pick up on the point where actually, it's just well-being now; it hasn't overshoot it into this huge empty space, or whatever it is.

Okay, so that's one other possibility for a springboard or base practice: insight ways of looking. It's probably quite rare as a way of doing *samādhi*, but so what? It might be your main thing. There's a second way I want to come back to, using it not so much as a main practice, and I'll come back to that a little later today.

(2) All right, second possibility or group of possibilities I want to talk about today is a little bit more with the energy body. Again, related to Sabra's question, the energy body – I would just view [it] as a whole collection of possibilities. I mean, I'm just throwing out a bunch of possibilities, but I count it as one sort of base practice. But what I emphasize today is – so far, mostly we've done the energy body with the breath, the breath as something that kind of stimulates, opens, energizes, massages, shapes the energy body. What I want to do today a little bit is practise **energy body without the breath**, because that's also a possibility. So we could make that a separate category. You could just lump it into one. In a way, it's neither here nor there.

I'll you what: let's play a game, a meditative game. Then I'll review at the end, and you can write notes. But let's just take a few minutes to just play a little bit.

[14:07, **game #1** begins]

Taking that time is so worth it, to just take a little time to settle into the posture. And that posture has openness in it. You need to be able to *feel* the openness in the posture. What do you need to do? It might be a micro-change in the posture. What do you need to do to actually feel it as open, and to feel it as receptive, and to feel it as soft?

And at the same time, the posture expresses, manifests the *citta* qualities, the heart qualities, the mind qualities of uprightness, wakefulness, alertness, resolve, energization. So there's this complement there. Find a posture that expresses – can't remember what the the Latin is – this amalgam of opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum*. Find that. Settle into the posture, which really means not just *settle down*, but *open out*. Open out the awareness. Settle out into the posture. Fill out the posture with that awareness. Fill it out.

And then, opening the awareness to the space of the whole body, the whole body space; opening to the sense of the energy body, the feel of the energy body right now. Doesn't matter what your breath is doing. Just opening, opening to that whole space. Keep opening it. You're just there, alive with the presence that's sensitive to the vibration, the texture, the feel, the energy, the tone, the tones of that

whole space. Keep opening. It's not that you open further and further; it's that you open again and again, just a little bit bigger than the physical body.

And that whole space, the whole energy body, filled with bright awareness, bright presence, bright sensitivity. See if you can turn up the brightness right now, the brightness of your attention. How does it feel? How does that whole space feel right now?

Sometimes, as we just open to that whole space, we begin to notice, actually, it's already a little bit pleasant. Maybe it's a lot pleasant, or maybe it's just a little bit pleasant. There's some well-being, somewhere, or lightly pervading the whole space. So if that's the case, notice it. Enjoy it. Open to it. Without snatching just at that, let it fill the space if it can. We're just opening up the awareness to that space of the energy body, again and again, and tuning to any sense of well-being or pleasantness that's there, and opening yourself to it. Opening your body to it. Feeling it.

[19:15, **game #1** ends]

Okay. That was **game #1**. No problem if there wasn't pleasantness there. Sometimes there might be. If there isn't, and you're working with the energy body, it's just a matter of staying with it, noticing what is there, maybe introducing some breathing or the *mettā* or whatever it is.

[19:39, **game #2** begins]

Okay, **game #2** has four little parts to it. Same thing: whole-body awareness, stretch it out again. Get so used to opening it up again and again. You're going to do that a gazillion times in your life, again and again, open. Let that bright presence fill the whole space.

And within that whole space, while you're still aware of the feeling, the tone of the whole space, let two points in particular become, if you like, more prominent, or you're more kind of focusing on them, *with* the whole space as well. So one point, let's say, somewhere in the middle of your head, or the area where your head used to be, and another point, let's say, somewhere either down in the middle of the body around the solar plexus, or even a little lower, just below the belly button, somewhere around there. And you've just got these two points. And simultaneously, you're kind of prioritizing a focus on *both* of them, *with* the whole body. What does that do, this bi-focus, this double focus with the background attention to the whole body?

What does it do if you imagine a line of energy or a line of light – say, white, golden light – between those two points? *With* the whole-body awareness included, but that becomes prominent, this line of energy connecting these two points. How does that feel?

Okay, let that go. Find again, stretching out the awareness again and again, fill that whole space with presence, with sensitivity. How about imagining three lines of energy? So these three lines meet somewhere in the lower belly, right in the middle, or that kind of area. Really doesn't matter if your anatomy is not at all clear to you right now. It's fine if it is, fine if it isn't. Three lines of golden, white light energy, or just a kinaesthetic imagination of energy: one of them goes from that point in the lower belly, around there, right up the centre of the body and out through the top of the head. Right out through the top of the head. And the other two go down. One goes down each leg and either out your

knees or out your feet. The important thing is the kinaesthetic imagination. It's fine if it helps to be visual as well. But really, what does it *feel* like to imagine lines of energy constituting, constellating the body, the body shaped around these lines of energy? How does that feel? What do you notice? Open the whole space. Open the awareness to the whole space. And within that, these three lines of energy.

Okay, you can let that go. And again, opening up the awareness, stretching it over the whole body space, inhabiting, really filling that whole body space with this bright presence, bright awareness, bright attention. And now, two lines – imagine two lines. Again, one down the vertical centre of the body, and another, perpendicular to it, at right angles, ninety degrees across it – across, say, perhaps the level a little lower than the shoulders, like where the nipples are, roughly. It really doesn't have to be exact. It's not about that. Nor is it about seeing clearly what these lines of energy look like. It's just a way of shaping the energy. Just a light imagination – two lines there.

Now you tell me – or rather, don't tell me, but just see, what feels better? If these lines of energy go out of the body? Out, let's say, through the bottom, through the perineum, and out through the top of the head, and out through the sides? Or if they stay within the body? Bright, white, golden lines of energy, but more important, the kinaesthetic sense, the kinaesthetic imagination. Whole-body awareness. What do you notice?

Okey-doke. Last one of this. Let that go. Again, whole body spreaded, and imagine your energy body – your whole body, in other words, that whole space – your energy body is a golden, white cloud. A cloud of golden, white light. So its edges are not particularly defined. It's more cloud-like. It's filled with this bright, bright luminous light, golden white. Again, stretch out the awareness. How does that feel? What do you notice?

Okay, you can let that go.

[27:27, **game #2** ends, **game #3** begins]

The **third little game** or exercise is, again, whole body, whole space. And if I say to you, imagine your body, imagine your whole body as *radiant* and *empty* – *empty* in the Dharma sense, whatever that means to you. In other words, whatever level of understanding you have of emptiness, or what that means to you, just plug that in. Imagine your body, your whole body as radiant and empty. Whole-body awareness, the whole space. Your body: radiant and empty, luminous but empty, whatever that word means to you, Dharmically.

Okay. You can let that one go. Last one, just for fun. Same thing: whole-body awareness, whole body space, whole energy body, filling out that space. This time we actually want to keep some sense of the shape of your body, of your anatomy. So in this game, you really want to stay sensitive to how that whole body space feels, like where you're sitting right now. But if I add this: can you (or I invite you [to]) just imagine an energy body coloured blue, a lovely blue, in the shape of your body, that flies out from your body. Flying. It can fly. You remain sensitive to everything you're feeling in that space, but imagine this lovely light, luminous blue energy body, flying out. Maybe it does these very free flying manoeuvres somewhere in front of your body. How does that feel in the energy body space? Maybe it does loop-the-loops. What does it want to do? How does it feel? You have to really stay connected with the feeling in your space, your energy body space.

Okay. When you're ready, connected to your energy body space, you can open your eyes.

[31:37, **game #3** ends]

So, what have we got here in this little group? We've got just a few little games, but really, essentially, what we're doing is going to the energy body experience, and sometimes, without doing anything with the breath or *mettā* or anything else, we notice there's already some pleasantness there. And it might already be enough pleasantness to work with, enough to kind of coax and gather into *pīti* and well-being and focus on it. Don't need anything. But it also might be, we just play a little bit with the imagination, and that starts to shape and fabricate the experience in certain ways. If it is already pleasant, etc., then like I said, maybe you can get into that.

Shall I run through what we did? Would that be useful? Yeah?

(1) So the first one is: **just open to the energy body**. Forget about your breath. Forget about the *mettā*. Just open to the energy body, the whole space. See how it feels without putting any pressure on it. There might be more there already than you commonly realize. That's the first one.

(2) The second one is: you're just really playing, again, with your imagination. It's primarily a kinaesthetic imagination. If the visuals help it, great, but primarily it's kinaesthetic. In other words, the inner tactile sense, inner energetic sense of either – well, let's backtrack now. Sorry. What I actually started with was giving two points, **two spatially separate points within the energy body**; it's almost like your mind is **paying attention to two things at once, predominantly and equally. Rather than just one point, paying attention to two points**. And sometimes, there's something that does: it just opens things up. And it can also allow things to become more stable, because again, there's more of a base, a wider base. So we did that as well.

(3) Then there's also the possibility of, as I said, **using the kinaesthetic imagination, which may be helped by the visual imagination, and imagining certain lines of energy**. And really, you can just play with whatever. So it might be a vertical line. It might be this vertical line, with lines going down the legs. It might be other lines intersecting in different ways. It might just be this kind of slightly amorphous, luminous cloud of energy. But the imagination shapes the energy. And then that becomes an experience, and it's no longer imagination. I'm actually experiencing these things. And for *samādhi*, that can become useful.

(4) And then the other two were really just, they're probably less common, but you know, you can **imagine your body as radiant and empty**, I said, even if you're not quite sure what 'empty' means, or you're kind of using it as fairly fundamental. And I don't know. When you tried that, did anyone ...? Was that ...? Interesting, isn't it? Is that a question, Andrew?

Yogi: No, it was...

Rob: It was what?

Yogi: Amazing.

Rob: Yeah, so partly this is the point. It's like, look. All this stuff is not necessarily so far away. You just do this little game for – what were you doing, thirty seconds or something? And stuff starts to happen. And how much the whole thing is conditioned, the whole thing is fabricated. The experience of the body is fabricated by the mind, and that's fabricated by what I put in the mind, what ideas, or what

views, or what ways of looking, or what imagination, etc. – and even when I don't quite know exactly what I'm talking about or thinking or what it means! There's a magic in all this. There *can* be.

(5) And how about **the flying one**? Was that ...? [laughs] Yeah? Some people like that. Okay, good. You know, it's not to say you're always – there is a whole other thing which we really don't want to get into on this retreat. It's whole other thing. But this is just – these are little just stimuli, trigger practices, yeah? That's how I'm using this. To just get a sense of *how sensitive a system* the energy body is. And by 'energy body,' I mean the experience of the energy. It's so sensitive, it's so conditioned and fabricated by the littlest thing, by the smallest thing, by the subtlest thing.

Okay, so basically what I'm saying is, you can either go to the energy body directly, and it might already be ready to work with, or you can play with the energy body in ways that don't really include *mettā* or breath. But *mettā* or breath, of course, will also shape the energy body, yeah?

Okay. I've never taught a group *jhāna* retreat before. All the *jhāna* retreat teaching I did was one-to-one. And in a one-to-one interview, you know, the person comes in, and they report an experience, and out of everything from my experience and my teaching that I know about *jhānas*, I just will select exactly what I feel they need right now, to frame what just happened to them, and give them the next thing to work on. And they take that away, and usually I see them either three days later or a week later, or whatever it is. And then again, they come in with something, and I'll give them a piece. And in that way they don't get overwhelmed at all in terms of information overload, etc. When it comes to teaching a group retreat, I have to think differently, and I do, actually. Almost every group – nah, a little different for some retreats, but in these kinds of retreats, I think very differently.

So I don't know. I remember being very young and being invited to birthday parties in the neighbourhood of the kids my age. This must have been a very alien sort of ritual to both of my parents, but for me it just became a thing. You know, there would be a birthday cake with the candles and all that, and you'd have a slice of birthday cake. And then when you went home – I don't know, do they have this in the States? – and you get a going home present, which is usually another piece of cake. [laughter] Is this familiar to anyone? Yeah? So I think of this as like, there's a big slab of birthday cake that's a going home present for you. And so I'm inviting you to think of it that way if you feel like, "Ehhhhh, this is way too much!" I'm sitting here. This is how I have to think of it, for me. I'm sitting here, and I'm teaching to you now. I'm giving you something that I hope will be useful for you now. And certainly in interviews, that's exactly what I'm doing. It's a one-to-one interview.

But I'm also speaking to another 'you' – the 'you' that's alive and still wants to practise in a year's time. And another 'you': the 'you' that's still alive and wants to practise *jhānas* in five years' time or ten years' time. So I'm actually speaking to multiple 'yous.' And between you, you can eat all that birthday cake. [laughter] Without getting indigestion.

I'm also – and for me, this is actually really important – I'm speaking to people who are not in this room. All this is – if Nathan is doing his job right, all this is being recorded. [laughter] And I've been very conscious of that for years. So I feel like I'm speaking to people I will probably never meet. I'll never know them. I'll never even know that they listened. They may be somewhere – for all kinds of reasons, they're not *able* to come. It's not even just a matter of timing. Maybe they can't afford to come on retreat. Maybe they have a health situation, that they can't do something like that. Maybe they have family obligations or work – whatever it is. So most of the group retreats I teach, I'm actually thinking

of other people that neither you nor I – or maybe you might meet some of them. I might meet a few of them. But there are people that we will never meet, and they matter to me a lot – not *more* than you, of course, but they matter to me a lot, especially the people who would not be able to come, and who are out there, really, nowadays, with the Dharma and the internet, really in the middle of nowhere, and they have very little Saṅgha, and they have very little direct teacher access. And they can listen to the stuff on the web, you know?

So I'm also, in a way, speaking to you, your future selves, and these people. Maybe when you have more time, when you can take more time with this material; when, actually, a little later on, however later on, actually, things will make more sense, *some* things will make more sense; when you will actually be able to realize (because of what's come in between, partly – “Oh, I've understood emptiness more,” or something else, or you've done other practices, or something in your conception has opened, or your practice has deepened), when, actually, you'll be able to realize more of the significance of some of the things that are being taught now. You'll also maybe realize how it fits together. Sometimes it might just be sort of, “That, and that, and this, and what the hell's that got to do with other Dharma I've heard, and emptiness and all the rest of it?” And also, maybe some times where you will literally hear things that you're not hearing now. You think, “Well, I was in the room when they said that, and I've just heard it now, on the sixth time I'm listening,” or whatever.

So it could be you in the future with your daily home practice, off retreat, and just giving yourself a period of time when you're really getting into *jhāna* practice. It could be you in some time, and you've decided to do a three-year *jhāna* retreat, just on *jhānas*. And why not, if you want to? That would be a beautiful thing to do. And my hope is that the material on this retreat will serve you all through those three years. You basically have what you need. So that's how I'm thinking of it. And I know that some of you, it's no problem. I know that some of you are struggling with all this *stuff*. So that's the way I get my head around it. Open the view, open the view – time-wise, people-wise, etc.

[42:36] Someone said to me (I don't know when it was, a year or two ago): “You know, I hate it. I hate when you talk about sensitivity, Rob.” [laughter] “And that word ‘subtle’ – it really winds me up.” [laughter] And with this person, I think, partly it was pushing on a self-view that they had: that they weren't sensitive, and they couldn't be subtle, and all that stuff. I'll come back to that in a second.

Let's get clear before I come back to that. Let's get clear: what's the simplest big-picture thing I need to be clear about? We talked about a base practice or a springboard practice, right? The most preferable criterion we're adopting for “What should my base or springboard practice be?” is whatever practice makes *pīti* easiest to arise, and most reliably. That's it. So I choose my base practice, whatever practice gives rise most reliably and most easily to *pīti*. Or let's not even say *pīti* – to *feeling good* in this space, to the body feeling good. Let's just actually say that, not even *pīti*. So that's one large principle, just in terms of, if you feel a bit lost, that's one large principle.

Second large principle in terms of the instructions, like a simple, global take on the instructions – there's a base practice; how do I choose that? Second is this idea of a learning edge playground. And what is that? I want to find what my learning edge playground is, and I want to marinate in it. I want to hang out there. That's the place where I'll spend 90 per cent of my time, if I can. And that marinating includes working, playing, tweaking. It doesn't just mean kind of hanging out there in some kind of stupor or non-responsive, non-attuned, non-active playing way. So what's my learning edge

playground? And I need to marinate in there, which includes working, playing, and tweaking. And I need to work, play, tweak until I have mastered all the – what is it that you call the thing in a playground, the slide and all those ...?

Yogi: Seesaw.

Rob: Yeah, but the collective word ... Equipment! [laughter] Until I've mastered all the equipment. [laughter] It's somehow not a very romantic word, but until I've mastered all the equipment in that particular playground – so I want to marinate there, and I want to master, both of which take working, playing, tweaking.

If, as you're listening to this, you can already do A, B, C of what I listed of the mastery, and what's involved in mastery, but you can't do D, whatever that is, then D is exactly what you need to be working and playing with and working on doing. That's where you want to fill out your sense of what mastery is there. If you can do all the elements of what's involved in mastery at a certain level – let's say with the first *jhāna*, whatever it is – already, then either it should be the case that naturally, organically, by that point, the second *jhāna* has already appeared, just naturally, inevitably. That's usually the case. It's already evolved to the next *jhāna* – for example, the second *jhāna* from the first. If it's *not* the case, if you've really got all the mastery down and it's still not the case, then it needs a little bit of wizardry, trickery, subtle little things you can try that just nudge it and encourage it, encourage that sapling with the sprout to come, the bud to unfold and show itself. [46:49] That's what you need to bring to interviews. Or if not, we'll obviously get to it in the teachings.

So when we talk about 'playground,' it could be any *jhāna*, okay? Your playground could also be, still, the base springboard practice. It doesn't matter. What matters is the big principle in orienting, and understanding those basic principles. That's the big picture of orienting to these instructions.

I started to say before: if very little of this energy business makes sense, or this talk about sensitivity and subtlety, or perhaps like this person I was talking about, just "I really don't *like* all this talk about energy, and attunement, and subtlety, and sensitivity" – if that's the case, and if you're not even sure which base practice, which springboard practice actually feels best, then just choose one. Actually, I don't think this is the case for anyone at this point in this room, but I'll say it anyway: just choose one. For example, just choose the breath at the nostrils or in the abdomen. And if you don't like all this talk about sensitivity and energy and *da-da-da-da*, then just concentrate on that point. Concentrate on the feelings, the sensations at that point. When the mind gets distracted, come back to it, and concentrate on it again. And when the mind gets distracted again, return and concentrate, without judging, without any to-do. Just come back again and again and again. Return a googolplex times. You know what a googolplex is? It's the biggest – 10 to the 10 to the 10 or something. Is that right?

Yogi: 100.

Rob: Anyway, it's a *lot*. [laughter] It's really – just over and over and over. It's a really basic instruction. Just do that, okay? To which I will add two more pieces of instruction: **(1) One is, when a hindrance arises, do not sit there putting up with it. Do something about it.** From that list that we gave, just *do* something about the hindrance. **(2) Second piece of instruction: can I learn to refine my concentration** a little bit? Which means playing with those three things I said: **(1) intensity, (2) delicacy, and (3) directionality.** In other words, play with those. Learn to move the sliders up and

down, turn the dials up and down. So if you don't like any of this other stuff, just do that. Do that, and trust in it, and it will deliver its fruit.

Okay, so maybe we'll cut there.

¹ Rob Burbea, *Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising* (Devon: Hermes Amāra, 2014).

Developing Pīti, Developing Focus, Developing Wellbeing

What I want to talk about now is *pīti*, and probably won't quite finish with it today, but I want to get quite a lot of material done. Broadly speaking, we could say there are two approaches or two avenues by which a practitioner works, plays, so that eventually *pīti* arises. But these two are not so black and white. The distinction between them is not so black and white. And neither are they mutually exclusive, like, "I'm only doing this or only doing that." But a person usually has predominantly one way or predominantly another.

(1) One is **working with the energy body**, and finding and encouraging any sense of well-being in the energy body space, and as I said, coaxing it, tending to it. The analogy I said – if it's an ember, and I'm trying to get a campfire going, what do I need to do to get this ember? What do I need to put around it? Do I need to blow on it? Do I need to shelter it from the wind? Whatever it is. What do I need to do to get this ember to turn into a fire, a campfire? So in a way, what we're starting with is the energy body experience, and any which way I can get that experience and massage it, support it, shape it, encourage it, ignite it to move towards more and more pleasantness, until there's *pīti*, basically.

(2) The second way is to choose something, **choose an object, and just concentrate repeatedly on that object**. And if the concentration gets more steady, and the energy accumulates there, etc., then at some point, *pīti* evolves in the experience, in the energy body. So broadly speaking, there are two ways.

What is *pīti*? I think we already said something about that. I'll repeat anyway. *Pīti* is – I define it as 'pleasant feeling that's felt physically, but whose origins are non-sensual.' That's just how I define it. And so, for a meditator, this can come up in all kinds of ways. There are all kinds of flavours and manifestations of *pīti*. So we talked about the whole body can feel like it's tingling, or parts of the body can feel like they're tingling. It can actually feel like an orgasm. Some people say, "Oh, it feels just like an orgasm." It can feel like an orgasm. It can feel like something much more subtle, like a kind of pleasant warmth, or a pleasant lightness, as if one's almost floating. It can feel like waves of sort of pleasant bliss or rapture or ecstasy going through the body. There are many, many manifestations it can have.

One of the interesting things about how *pīti* manifests is that it evolves over time, and evolves in a couple of ways. One way (I might have already mentioned this) is that as you get into, let's say, the third *jhāna*, then the repeated experience of the third *jhāna* affects the way *pīti* comes up for you from then on. The third *jhāna* is very peaceful, incredibly, beautifully serene and tranquil. And it's almost like that *does* something to the whole energy body, or it does something to the whole *citta* or something. And thereafter, usually, a person's *pīti* is much calmer than it might have been in the

beginning. So there's a kind of retroactive effect that deeper *jhānas* can have on the experience of the first *jhāna*, which is characterized by *pīti*. So that's one way.

And it's very individual. What can also happen is, one's meditating. For instance, let's say one's doing this – I'm going with the concentration thing, and I'm concentrating on the upper lip, tip of my nose. I'm concentrating, concentrating. And then, concentration seems to develop, and I notice at times these ... almost like a lightning bolt through the body, of extreme pleasure. But it's gone. It's gone in two seconds or a second or something. Or it might be like a wave of, like I said, bliss or ecstasy, or just a wave of pleasant feeling kind of washing over or through the body. But again, it's gone in a couple of seconds, two or three seconds. This is, in a way – it's good. It's *pīti*. It's definitely *pīti*. It's great. Things are happening. Wonderful. When that happens, open to it, enjoy it. If you're still really working with the object, you're not ready to leave the main object then. So you still stay with – again, if I follow my example, it's the breath. This is in my background awareness. I'm certainly opening to it and enjoying it, but I'm not kind of then going, "Ooh! Let's focus on that." It's not ready yet. It's not steady enough. It's just a passing thing. Yeah? What we want, and what might happen from the beginning, or might happen more with time, what we want is a more steady *pīti* – something that's around for, let's say, at least two or three minutes without disappearing. Once it's got steady, and if you're sure, "This is definitely pleasant," okay, then you're ready to work with it. And I'll begin to talk, in this talk, [about] how to work with it a bit more, adding on from yesterday. So we need to wait till it's relatively steady, and temporally steady. We want it to be steady.

But actually, just to be really clear, we want *pīti* and *sukha*. I remember – I don't know how many times, but certainly two or three or more, over the years, in interviews here, someone has come in and, in the course of whatever we were talking about over their retreat, reported that they were practising, usually in Asia somewhere or something, and had experienced *pīti*, and had experienced *sukha* (that's a word I'll introduce; it means 'happiness' from meditation; *pīti* and *sukha*, or *pīti* or *sukha*), and reported it in the interview, and were asked if it was pleasant and they enjoyed it, and they said yes, and then were actually shamed for having it. The teacher – what they told me – was actually quite severe; somehow they felt shamed. And they felt, years later, often, quite hurt and quite traumatized by that interaction. And something in their whole practice, and also their whole relationship with practice, had gotten quite twisted because of that. And there was often – it might be quite surprising – quite a lot of grief with that. Something that had touched the being quite deeply, that they were open about, a lovely thing, not just a difficult *dukkha* that one's sharing – one's sharing a lovely thing, and it was dismissed, and they ended up feeling ashamed about it. So just to be really clear, we want *pīti*. We want *sukha*. It's a good thing.

How does it arise? How can we think of its arising? One way we can think of it is, if we take, say, the mode of (as I said) two broad approaches, if we're thinking about concentration – I'm just keeping the mind steady on the upper lip, the lower nostrils, etc. – as the mind just keeps staying there, what's *not* happening at that point is, the mind is not squandering and dissipating energy through thought, through distraction. The mind is collecting its energy. In electronics, there's something called a 'capacitor.' I don't know if you know what that is. It's an electronic thingy that basically does exactly that: it gathers electric charge. So one way you can think about what *pīti* is, from the concentration

point of view, you're just not squandering energy. You're not dissipating it, as I said. And it begins to gather.

[9:13] But as I said, it's not just nailing your mind to an object. You're also going to need the refinement, the subtilizing of the object, if you're using the concentration approach. So *pīti* won't arise just from kind of looking at something. It also needs the quality of attention, and also the subtlety of the object and the attention, in order for *pīti* to arise, if you're going by the concentration route.

Pīti can also arise just from gathering the energy, say, in practices like qigong. You're actually gathering energy, and the qi and the *pīti* are very close. They're very close. Are they separate? Are they different things? Are they not different things? I'd say it's on a spectrum. And as we gather the qi and begin to feel it more positively, we can call it *pīti*. Or it becomes *pīti*.

We also just said, with insight ways of looking, there's a letting go, there's a release of clinging, and in that, that fabricates less. There's less fabrication of the bodily perception. *Samādhi* – I'll come back to this; it's such an important point. I'm going to come back to this as the retreat goes on. What *samādhi* really is – or perhaps, again, the most fruitful, the most helpful way of conceiving of what *samādhi* is – is as we deepen in *samādhi*, we're fabricating [less]. There is less fabrication of perception, less fabrication of self, certainly less fabrication of *dukkha*, definitely. There's less fabrication of self. There's less fabrication of bodily perception. And there's less fabrication of any perception at all. And the whole spectrum of the *jhānas*, you can understand it in one framework. And that's the most important way of understanding it. And that way of understanding it will unlock all kinds of other doors, in terms of the whole of the Dharma practice and liberation.

So how does *pīti* arise? It arises also – one other way is through insight ways of looking. Let go of clinging, therefore fabricate less, therefore less fabrication of body. And *pīti*, perceiving the body as *pīti*, is a less fabricated perception of the body. Or we could say, another way is the energy body, working with the energy body to shape it, to fabricate it so that there's pleasure and *pīti* there. Or as I said before, there's just an openness of being, an openness of heart. And that allows *pīti* to flow. It's like *pīti* wants to be there, it wants to come, and it's just the openness. Once it's there, then we have work and play to do, which is, I need to consolidate this, stabilize it, and absorb into it, so that it can become the first *jhāna*, if *pīti* is what we're talking about, as opposed to happiness or something else that's central to other *jhānas*.

It's interesting. Again, there are always going to be exceptions, but it tends to be the case that if I'm using the concentration method, when the *pīti* comes, it tends to erupt very suddenly and quite intensely: "Concentrating, concentrating. Okay, I can definitely feel like I'm in a deeper state of concentration." But when the *pīti* comes, it kind of *bursts* through into the body experience, into consciousness. Or one might even find oneself already in a *jhāna*. Everything's there, not just the *pīti*.

The other way, working (as I said) this ember that we try to get like a fire, working with the energy body, that *tends* to be – not always, but *tends* to be that the *pīti* builds more gradually. So there's a more gradual movement into the full *pīti* experience.

How many people have heard the phrase, the term 'access concentration'? Yeah, okay, quite a lot of you. I don't use that. I mean, the Buddha never used it. It's not a phrase the Buddha ever used. It comes, I think, from the Visuddhimagga, which is a text we may or may not come back to, a commentarial text about 500 years after the Buddha.¹ I don't tend to use it. The Buddha never used it.

What does it mean? Well, it's kind of like you can feel, sometimes, if you're concentrating, let's say, on the breath, at some point there's a kind of quantum shift where you just feel like, "Oh, now the mind is really settled and really getting to settle on its object." Usually the breath is subtler at that point, for example. Usually things feel more harmonized. So you're not in *jhāna* yet. There's probably no *pīti*, if you're in the concentration method. But it's just a kind of marking point of "Yeah, okay, we're settled a little bit." You can use it if you like; I don't tend to find it that helpful, really, but it's fine. Sometimes I think, well, actually I could really sense it's more the case that each *jhāna* has its own particular access concentration, once you do a lot of *jhāna* practice. But it really doesn't matter. If it's helpful for you in terms of getting a sense of where you're at, go for it. But I don't tend to use it. Doesn't matter; I'm happy about to talk about it with you.

With the breath at one point, if it's that method, yeah, there can be these kind of quantum shifts at different points. So for example (I think I mentioned it already; let's say it again, just follow my example), the breath at the nose or the upper lip – at some point, as it starts to go well, that area starts to feel larger. It starts to feel like, "Actually, it's about the size of my whole head, or about the size of my whole body." So this is a good development. This is a good thing. And that movement there – it's on its way. It's *part of* or *an element of* the whole movement towards whole-body *pīti*, or paralleling that, or something like that.

Another analogy you could use instead of the capacitor is like, you know, when you hold a magnifying glass, and you catch the sunrays, and you've got it on some dry leaves or something. It's going to make those leaves ignite. It's gathering the energy of the mind. So that's a way we can think of it. It's gathering the energy of the mind until it ignites in *pīti*. But as I said, it needs not just that. Part of the gathering, part of the energizing will be the quality of the attention, more important than the quantity. We've talked about this now three times: quality more important than quantity. Quantity is *still* important, but secondary. And quality, we've already said it includes lots of different factors.

Now, Andy asked a question yesterday. I want to see – I think I lost the piece of paper, but see if I answer it now in the flow of what I'm saying, and if not, we can ...

So I talked about subtilizing, like the sort of encouraging of making things subtle, or allowing things to get subtle. When we're talking about concentration at one point, then the object – in this case the breath sensations at that one point – need to get, or will get, as part of the deepening concentration, more and more subtle. And the attention needs to become correspondingly subtle. So if I can even encourage all that to become more and more subtle, that's great. I certainly need to encourage the attention to get more and more subtle. The object itself becomes more subtle, and the attention becomes more subtle, and I encourage that.

[16:35] If I'm going via the other way, the sort of coaxing of the whole energy body experience gradually, then my experience of the different frequencies in the energy body will maybe include both subtle and gross frequencies. We want to be open to all of that. We want to be sensitive to both subtle and gross experiences. But the experience of the energy body as a whole, on its way to the first *jhāna*, unlike the experience of the breath at one point, which gets more and more subtle, the experience of the energy body doesn't get more subtle on its way to the first *jhāna*. You're actually building more, so it's less subtle. There might be lots of frequencies at first, but I'm actually building more, so it's getting less subtle. So don't confuse these. They're slightly different.

However, as you go through all the *jhānas*, there is, as I said, a spectrum of subtlety over eight *jhānas*. The third *jhāna* is way more subtle than the first. The second *jhāna* is actually more subtle than the first. The third *jhāna* is more subtle than the second. The fourth is more subtle, etc. It's a spectrum of increasing subtlety. As I said, the eighth *jhāna* is almost *unspeakably* subtle, unspeakably refined. So this word 'subtle' applies in different ways. Does that answer your question, Andy? Yeah? Good.

[18:30] So let's stay with this idea of 'subtle,' just for a moment. I remember very early in my practice, in a very different tradition, hearing about the 'subtle breath.' And I was, "Ooh, what's that? That sounds interesting." And so partly what it means is just this subtilized breath, this breath that has become subtle through the calming, or that one encourages to become subtle. So the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the *Sutta on the Mindfulness of Breathing*, the first instruction is: the practitioner breathes long and knows they're breathing long.² Just as a turner, whatever a turner is – does anyone know what a turner is? It's probably some kind of woodwork or weaving, or something like that. Not weaving – it's woodwork. So they're turning something, for some reason. [laughter] Probably because someone is paying them to do that. And they're knowing. So oftentimes, it's read passively, like "I know I'm doing a long one," as opposed to, "No, now I *need* to do a long one. Therefore I will do a long one, *and* I know I'm doing a long one." To me it's more active. "I will deliberately breathe long." And then the second instruction is: "I will deliberately breathe short." And the shorter breath is a calming. It's already a subtilizing with the shorter breath, generally speaking. So there's this natural movement towards the subtilizing of the breath, the calming of the breath, and the encouragement of that.

However, there's another possible meaning of this phrase 'subtle breath.' And I don't know if you've ever noticed this: sometimes, the breath can feel quite gross, or it can feel stuck somewhere, and you're sort of yanking it or heaving it to kind of smooth through a constriction in the throat or something. So sometimes that's helpful. It's just, okay, find a way of breathing that's helpful and smooths it out, etc. Sometimes that's really helpful.

But sometimes, if I don't get too obsessed – and I'm using that word 'obsessed' in a very subtle way, because we can get very subtly obsessed in meditation – then here's this breath that's actually a bit stuck somewhere, a bit rough, a bit gross, a bit uneven. And actually, at the same time, somehow, it's almost like there's *another* breath, or another level of breath that's way more subtle and is already smooth – very, very subtle. I need to be not so obsessed, and a bit more spacious, a bit more receptive, my antennae a bit more receptive, to even notice it. So I can sometimes find that breath, and I forget about the one that feels rough. It's almost like they're going on at the same time in some kind of weird way. As I concentrate on the subtler one, as I find it and attune to it, as we said yesterday, what happens when I attune to it? It amplifies it! It gets amplified. The other one just kind of fades. I'm not worried about it any more. It amplifies the subtle breath in my consciousness. And that becomes what I'm concentrating on. Again, sensitivity, receptivity, and kind of opportunistic attunement: "Oh, there's something here that I hadn't realized." And then, opportunistic – the door opens. I kind of, "Let's just gently go with that. Find that. Go with that."

This is akin to, this is another level of something I've already mentioned, which is, in a way, even more subtle, that applies probably much more, usually, when you've already experienced quite a lot of *jhānas*. Again, sometimes the mind won't settle down. The energy body doesn't feel right. It's just not quite happening. But again, if I don't get too sucked into that problem, just spacious, kind of gentle

attunement, there's a *level* of the mind, let's call it. There's a level – a dimension of the being, better to say – that's actually already peaceful, already imbued with a certain *jhānic* quality. It's probably much more obvious once you know, once you're very familiar with that *jhānic* quality. And I say, "It just won't settle down in this sitting, or today, or whatever it is." But just a little spacious, opportunistic, my antennae are up, and then: "Oh, there's something akin to the beginnings of the peace, of the kind of peace that's characteristic of the third *jhāna*. And I'm just going to dive there." And in diving there, I attune to it, and in attuning to it, it amplifies it, and the other stuff just kind of dissolves. That *becomes*, that takes over my experience. So this business of finding the second kind of subtle breath is akin to that; it's just the same thing at a different scale, perhaps.

[23:25] And then, just on subtlety, we also mentioned that if you're going to use the imaginal or poetic sense of the object, that's really quite a subtle thing. It's really just a couple of drops of this magic essential oil or whatever it is that you're dropping in – really quite subtle.

Okay, so there are two emphases, like I said, broadly speaking, of concentration versus this kind of tending to, coaxing, sensitivity to the energy body, and developing that. At some point, whichever way you've gone into your *jhāna* or *pīti* or happiness or whatever it is, sometimes the emphasis is more needed: more concentration, more focus needed, more effort needed. And for some people, that's often the case: more effort, more concentration.

For other people, or at other times, or even once *pīti* has arisen (and I'll go into this today and tomorrow), it's like, what do I need to do now that *pīti* has arisen? It might be more focus, more concentration – maybe on the original object, but then on the *pīti* itself – and that's what I'm doing. Other times, it's actually as I said yesterday: don't underestimate the significance of this, or the importance, or how crucial it can be. Other times the emphasis and the intention needs to be more on more surrender, more opening, more abandoning. So you can move emphases, and you will. And I'll come back to this. It's not that you get locked into one emphasis. But what's needed right now? And then, generally, as I said, as a practitioner, as a human being over time, what do I need? And sometimes – I said it yesterday – a person, "Oh, I just need more focus, more focus," actually it's *not* what you need. It's not what you need. You need a bit more of the other, or maybe really to experience that, to gently develop in opening, surrendering, abandoning. And through that, there's the deepening, the progression, the consolidating, all that, through this balance, this play.

I don't know if you've noticed already on this retreat or other retreats, but if your intention is *focus*, *concentration*, if that's your emphasis, and if that's your conceptual framework of what you're doing, if that's your view of what we're doing here, focus and concentrating, then that very intention, emphasis of intention, focus and concentration – it has obviously a lot of good results, but it also has some negative results, so that when there's noise – something, birds, or whoever it is, someone in the meditation hall – with that intention and that emphasis, it's much more likely that there's aversion to the noise. Has anyone noticed this? *No one?* [yogi inaudible in background] Okay.

The intention, intentions, set up the flavour of perceptions. If that wasn't my intention, the noise would not – I would not have aversion at that point. The aversion scuppers the possibility of *jhāna*. It takes away the possibility of *jhāna*. It's not that one shouldn't practise that way; it's just something to note. If I'm practising this way – or rather, more broadly speaking, more broadly, Dharmically, if I have this intention, it will have these consequences on my perception. It will likely have these consequences,

whatever that intention is. We could speak lots on that. So it's not that one shouldn't, but one should realize, "Oh, that's going to be part of my territory if I'm going for the concentration thing."

I don't know. Is it a little less likely that there's aversion if one's going the other way, with the whole body and the coaxing of the well-being, if that's the conceptual framework, if that's the intention, if that's the emphasis? Because then, really, as we played earlier today, then actually, *any* approach is available. So here's aversion – we can just put into the energy body some *mettā*. Whereas if I go to *mettā*, once I'm focusing on the breath, I'm actually doing a whole different practice. Or I can relax the aversion with an insight way of looking, different insight ways of looking. And the whole thing becomes much more workable. And with the subsidence of aversion, there is the arising of happiness. So it's not to say, "Choose this one or that one." But it's to be wise to causes and conditions, and intentions are causes and conditions, and they have effects – all kinds of effects, effects that we don't often anticipate or realize.

Focus and concentration – really important. Another way of considering those terms, or what's happening with *samādhi*, is words like 'collectedness' or 'integrity.' Remember that translation (I think I said it yesterday) – the meaning of *samādhi* originally in Sanskrit (maybe it still had that meaning, I don't know, for hundreds of years later) was more like 'agreement' and 'harmony.' So *samādhi* as 'integrity,' meaning the elements of my being are in agreement, in harmony. There's an integrity to my being, and a collectedness of energy, mind, and desire – a collectedness, an integrity of energy, mind, and desire.

Now, when I put it like that, that to me has a lot more implications for my life, and my work, and my personality, and how I am in relationship. Yes, ADHD is supposedly an epidemic in our culture, and mobile phones, and screen time, and too many WhatsApps and Facebooks and all that – certainly. But I know countless people who are perfectly capable of concentrating very, very well on their work, in relationship with someone, in a creative project, etc., and they've never spent ten seconds on a meditation cushion. They don't know the first thing about it. But when we slightly conceive it differently – collectedness, integrity of energy, mind, and desire – and think of these more broadly as relevant to life, relevant to how I'm living my life, how I manifest my personhood.

So when there's that collectedness, integrity of mind, energy, desire, body, at that point there's *power*. I don't mean *power over*; I mean *power*. The being has power. The person has power. And you can sense it in a person. And you can see, over their life, is this person – has their soul-power, the power that you sense in them, the power that they then also feel (or don't even recognize; they don't feel or whatever) – is it growing? Is it lessening? So these things start to be much more relevant than "How can I keep my concentration on something?", which, for most, people is not really – beyond a certain point, the basics of human ability to focus on something – it's hardly relevant.

But collectedness, integrity, power, soul-power – these are important things. Then you start to relate that, "Yeah, that little bit of alcohol? It affects that." It's not that it's, "Yes, for the *time*, it might affect my ability to concentrate." More significantly, it's affecting something about my personhood and my capacity to really cohere and show up with soul-power, with the power and the integrity of my being, body, mind, energy, desire, as a habit – showing up, that it's cohered, that there's energy there that's collected, that has integrity. Or just, you know, people who listen to the radio – it's just on. Or the TV's

on, or a lot of TV, a lot of radio – it's *doing* something to your soul. That's a lot more significant than how concentrated you can be. Think of it in broader ways.

Or again, I've talked about this wholeheartedness, and how significant that is, again, for my life, for my personhood, for my relationships, for my work, for the service that I want to do. When there's not this capacity and this practice at being really wholehearted, really gathered like that, then it's almost like dissipating energy, dissipating mind, dissipating – I don't know, one's *being*, habitually, probably in very small ways. And over time, you can kind of get a sense: something in the being has gotten a bit flaccid. The very personality is different. Something's flabby and flaccid in the soul, in the being, and sometimes you can sense that in people. There's just not much sensitivity there. So from another perspective, focus, concentration – we think about them a little bit differently, actually. These are very, very significant, if we think about them as collectedness, integrity, this sort of thing is very, very significant for the being.

Okay. Let's come back to the energy body way of working, that second way of working. What's quite common – no, not quite common, *extremely* common; it will happen *every day* to some degree or other, many times a day – is that something in the energy body does not feel comfortable. There's some constriction or block here or there, it feels like, somewhere in the energy body. This is a really, really normal part of normal experience, part of the human experience. It will do that. The energy body is not a static thing. Blocks, unblocks, constriction – yes, we can have very habitual constrictions, but even if we don't, there's going to be a coming and going of constriction in the energy body in different places. So in meditation, what do we do with that? Because the constriction, the blockage, is not going to feel good. It's the opposite of *pīti*, if you like.

(1) One way, again, is don't forget: **open up the awareness**. Stretch it over that whole body space, a little bit bigger than the anatomical body. [34:58] What happens when there's constriction, or generally something we don't like, is the attention shrinks. Open it out again. And the very opening it out does something. There's a mutual dependence here: constriction somewhere actually then shrinks the awareness; opening up the awareness can sometimes open up the constriction – first thing.

(2) Second thing to play with in meditation if you're working with the energy body is, if you're working with the energy body and the breath, just **imagine the breath energy going right through, flowing smoothly right through that constriction**. Just imagine that. [35:38]

(3) Or **imagine a current of energy just flowing right through**. So it could be with the breath; it could be not with the breath. Use your imagination. It might want to flow *through* that. Let's say the constriction is in my throat. It might want to flow through the throat and up out the top of my head, or right down through the bottom of my body. Does it want to flow up? Does it want to flow down? Feel what feels like it's helpful. Again, you're just using the imagination to shape, to fabricate, to open the energy body experience.

Let's, again, say I have a constriction in my throat. I can imagine the breath coming in and out, not from the mouth and the nose, but coming in and out directly from the throat, or the back of the throat, the back of the neck. I just imagine that. Or maybe it wants to go out the sides, this way. And that imagination can unlock something.

(4) If you're practising *mettā*, let's say, and I've got this constriction in the throat or wherever, or anywhere where there's a constriction, what if you play with imagining the very place where there's the

constriction, imagine that as the centre of the radiation of the *mettā*? It's the last place you would think of, because it feels the worst and the tightest and the least like love, but just imagine it's coming from there, and see what that does.

(5) Another possibility – I guess it's the fifth, if we're listing them. Let's say, for example, I feel a constriction in my mid-belly somewhere – no, let's say, actually, I feel a constriction around my heart. But my lower belly feels actually quite nice, or some well-being there. Or the other way around; doesn't matter. There's a place where it feels good, relatively good, and there's a place where it doesn't feel good. One of the things you can do is just **imagine those places as connected. There's some kind of energy tube or something that just connects the places.** I'm not moving anything around; I'm not yanking. I'm just connecting them in my imagination – the place that feels good and the place that doesn't feel so good. And just see what happens. I'm just connecting two places in my imagination, very lightly.

(6) There's also the possibility of: here's this constriction, here's this blockage, here's this discomfort, and **bringing an insight way of looking that you're already familiar with, and looking at that very sense of constriction, that very sense of blockage with that insight way of looking.** In the context of *samādhi* practice, *jhāna* practice, unless the insight way of looking is your primary way of working, maybe that would be a kind of last resort, maybe (I don't know if it's *that* important). But basically, again, those are *extremely* powerful practices, extremely powerful. And so, to look at this blockage that way, through that lens of that way of looking, will basically dissolve it, as long as you're not – “Come on, dissolve, dissolve, dissolve!” – pushing it too much.

(7) Another thing to say, again, which is really, really important in the context of *jhāna* and *samādhi* practice is: okay, **here's this constriction. Here's this block. I don't always have to focus on it.** I can keep my attention – I will have to **work to keep my attention where it's pleasant**, where it feels pleasant, where there's *pīti*, perhaps, or where it even feels just okay. The tendency will be to either get dragged into where there's a difficult feeling, constriction, or blockage, or to get dragged completely outside and start daydreaming. But if I can keep my attention – let's say, in that example, my belly feels good and my heart area doesn't, I keep it in the belly. Don't get sucked into it. Or my knees are aching. Don't get sucked into it. [40:03] Just stay with where it's pleasant, and focus there, and enjoy that.

Now, when I say ‘where,’ ‘where’ might be a bodily location. It might be that the body has a bit dissolved then, and it's just a kind of spatial location. It's kind of somewhere around *there* in space. I don't know if ‘where’ is obviously the right word, but it also might be a *frequency*. So this is similar to what I said before: here's this discomfort, here's this constriction, this blockage. In energetic terms, it's a certain kind of frequency. Can I find another frequency that's not so much a spatial location as a kind of mental location? And then get into that? Find it, dive underneath, get into that? Again, with more experience of different frequencies, and certainly with more *jhāna* experience, that becomes just a more and more common possibility. It's much more accessible, that kind of thing.

[41:03] Most insight meditators, most *vipassanā* meditators, are kind of trained, either deliberately or just by default, that when there's something difficult in the body, when there's *dukkha*, when there's constriction, when something doesn't feel good, when there's a contraction, that the attention goes there. And we're encouraged to do that, mostly, in the way we teach insight meditation. And it can

become a kind of just, “Well, that’s what we do.” As soon as something’s difficult, that’s where the mind goes. It’s not even a choice I make. One realizes, “Oh, it’s just a habit. I pay attention to what’s difficult, where there’s constriction, where there’s contraction, where there’s *dukkha*.”

It might also be the case that insight meditation attracts certain psychological types and inclinations. It might be, but it’s also a kind of training that happens, both directly and indirectly. The willingness to do that, the willingness to go where it’s difficult, and to feel it, and to open to it, and to work with it – this is invaluable. It’s such a precious thing. Willingness is not enough. The *kind* of mindfulness I bring matters, because I can bring an attention there, I can bring a kind of mindfulness there, and it just makes it worse. And I’m being a ‘good meditator,’ and I’m having the willingness, which is great, and a good intention. But my mindfulness has just a bit of aversion in it, and it’s making it worse. Or I can be with it in a way that just doesn’t do anything to it. Or I can be with it – the attention and the mindfulness has skilful qualities in it. Mindfulness is never one thing. There’s no such thing as ‘pure mindfulness.’ Mindfulness always has views, conceptions, some kind of relationship with the object – a little bit of aversion, or a lot of aversion, a little bit of greed – always has *some*, if we’re talking really, really subtle. There’s no such thing as pure mindfulness. And what makes or breaks what happens, what determines what happens, is what’s *with* the mindfulness. It’s great that we’re willing to do that. As insight meditators, we’re all practised in that, hopefully. Great that we’re willing, but it also really matters – can I have the skill to bring what’s actually a *helpful* mindfulness there, a helpful attention?

So that’s all great, but now we also want, as I said to you, what we want is *range*, as I said on the opening talk, *range, range, range*. Choice, freedom of choice – sure, I can go where it’s difficult. I’m willing to do that. I’m not afraid to do that. If it’s a very little bit difficult, if it’s difficult in this way or that way, if it’s really, really difficult, I’m willing to go there. I’m *able* to work with it. As time goes on, and I get more practice, I’m able to work with it in all kinds of ways, lots of ways. But also, I’m willing and able *not* to go there. I’ll put the mind *here*, where it’s pleasant. I won’t go there. I’m training the mind to stay with the pleasant. When we open up to *jhāna* practice, this actually becomes quite an important skill, and quite something that one’s working against the grain, if one has done a lot of insight practice. So with training, we can have much more range and much more freedom of choice about what we do in regard to the difficulty.

I remember when I first taught this in here twelve, thirteen years ago, in a *samatha* retreat.³ And there were people there that said, “But that’s not proper meditation! Proper meditation, the best meditation, is to ‘be with what is.’ And so if it hurts, then I need to ‘be with what is.’ And even if it doesn’t hurt here, somehow the hurt is more ‘what is’ than the place that [does] not hurt.” But despite that, or as well as that, again, no. We have to ask about ontology, about reality here. Is it really ‘what is’? What am I believing about ‘what is’? Or is it a fabricated perception? ... The answer is ‘yes.’ [laughter] And I have to understand that. I have to actually get in there and work with things and play with things until I know in my heart, deep down, in my mind, in my life, I know: “This is a fabricated perception.” And I know how to fabricate it differently. At least at times, I have that capacity.

We want to train to open up that range. And we want to understand there’s something, there’s so *much* about the nature of reality that’s involved in all this. *Jhāna* work – what does that have to do with insight? It has *everything* to do with insight. Is it really as real as you think it is? What is real? What is

reality? These are fundamentally important questions. We get locked into certain views. Sometimes we get locked into certain views that come out of our very Dharma listening and training and thinking.

So, there can be, there *will* be, at times, discomfort and pain. As we said at the beginning of the retreat, you really want to not go there too much, and I'll talk more about this tomorrow, in fact. But it's also possible to perceive, *deliberately* perceive the unpleasant as pleasant. Here's this pain in my knee, sitting in meditation, and I can deliberately play with the perception. There's that key phrase: *play with perception*. I can play with perception and perceive the unpleasant as pleasant. So here's that pain in the knee. I decide to perceive it as *pīti*. With training, that's totally possible. I decide to perceive it as happiness. So the texture of my knee becomes happiness. My knee becomes happiness. I decide to see it, with training, as stillness, as a luminous stillness. The pain has gone, the knee has gone, and what is there is a luminous, beautiful stillness. Training. Training through playing with perception.

One way of doing that is you just spread the *pīti*, and the *pīti* spreads over the difficult area. That's one option. Another is this more direct way, where I'm actually looking at something, and because I have enough familiarity with *pīti*, and because I'm not locked into a view of, "The reality of this thing is it's painful knee" – so there's familiarity with *pīti*, and there's the absence of a locked-in view about reality, and then one just *sees* it as *pīti*, and one therefore experiences it as *pīti*, or happiness, or stillness, or whatever. What did the Buddha say? "Perception attainments."⁴ The *jhānas* are perception attainments. What's the best way of thinking about it? Playing with perception. We're playing with perception. This is, as I said already, way more significant than the whole question of "Is this a *jhāna*? Or is this not a *jhāna*? Did I achieve the third *jhāna*? So-and-so defines it as ..." – that seems, like, so relevant and so important. What I'm just talking about now, this ability, and not just the ability, the possibility, the recognition, and the experience of the possibility of doing *this* with, for example, a pain in the knee – that's way more significant than whether I have achieved correctly the first *jhāna* or the third *jhāna*. It's way more significant. 'Magic': we use that word, magic.

This whole business about the question of reality, about emptiness (which is to do with "What is the reality of things?"), about ways of looking, about fabrication, about perception (again, that's the key word), about playing with perception – this is absolutely fundamental to liberating insight. It's fundamental to the whole Dharma. It's fundamental to liberating insight. And it's way more important, as I said, than "Third *jhāna*, fourth *jhāna*" – you know, whatever it is – "Did I get it? Did I not?"

So *pīti* arises, and the Buddha says, "Don't snatch at it, and don't snatch at the first *jhāna*."⁵ What does that mean? I've already said it with the insight ways of looking. Here it's arising, however it's arising, and I'm just letting it arise. And if I've got another object, like the nose sensations I'm concentrating on, I'm just letting it arise kind of at the side of my – I'm aware that it's arising, because I've got that whole-body background, right? I'm aware that it's arising, and part of me is enjoying it and opening to it, but I'm still focused on my one thing. And then, when it's ready – really means, when it's strong enough that it's *definitely* pleasant; let's just say that – but when it's sustained enough, then very gently, as I described with the insight ways of looking, very gently I can make that my primary object: the *pīti*. And then we go back to what I said yesterday: there are these modes of attention where I really nuzzle into it, really go penetrate into it, or I really, really open myself to it, for example.

[51:16] And I also said yesterday, another job that we have to do, another work or play mission that we have to do, is spreading the *pīti*. The Buddha said, in the first *jhāna*, it's spread: "No spot of the body untouched, completely suffused, saturated," etc.⁶ So how do we get it to spread? I mean, sometimes it will be spread already, and that's great, and then you don't have to do anything. But let me run through a list of possibilities:

(1) One is, here's the *pīti*, and let's say it's only in my face, or that sort of region – my head region. Sometimes what happens, because it's quite sort of captivating, the awareness actually shrinks a little bit. So one thing you can do to help it spread is, **just open up the awareness again, open up to the whole energy body**. And just the opening up of the attention to the whole energy body – the *pīti* will naturally spread, like a gas will naturally spread to fill a space. You make the balloon bigger, the balloon of attention, the gas will fill the balloon. The air will fill the balloon. That's one possibility.

(2) Another possibility is, you can, so to speak, (a) **'mix' the breath with the *pīti*, and kind of imagine and begin to feel like you're breathing *pīti***. Or (b) **the breath energy is kind of massaging and moving the *pīti* through the body**. So you breathe in – and we talked about these currents of breath energy. Maybe you breathe in through the heart centre, and these currents of energy go down your body. And in doing that, the breath can kind of massage the *pīti* through the rest of the body, if it's just, let's say, around your chest or whatever. But again, this is all very playful, very experimental: mixing the breath with the *pīti*, or just getting the breath energy to help to move the *pīti* in different places in the body.

(3) Thirdly, you can just **imagine that it's spread**. Again, it can be quite amazing, the power of the imagination. Just imagine that it's spread. It's filling the whole body. And then, lo and behold, you might find that, "Well, that's my experience now." Okay, so feel it. Enjoy it.

(4) You can **imagine** (this is something I may come back to briefly) **the *pīti* mixed with white, golden light**, as if the *pīti* is white, golden light. You can feel it, and you can also see it. And then you imagine that white, golden light filling the whole space, the whole energy body space. And as you imagine the white, golden light doing that, it brings the *pīti* with it.

(5) Fifthly – actually, this is very similar to something we said before. Just **imagine these two places**: so here's the *pīti*, let's say, around my face, around my head and throat, which is a very common place for it to start. It's there, but I don't feel anything down in my belly. There's no *pīti* there. So just again, have an awareness at this point, and have an awareness of this place down in the belly – so **an awareness of where there's *pīti*, and an awareness of the place where there isn't *pīti*, and just connect them with a tube, an imaginary tube**. Just connect them. See what happens. You're not forcing anything. You're not imagining anything moving. You're just putting two places of the energy body space in connection with each other, or the body space in connection with each other.

(6) I think I mentioned this yesterday – this is number six – it might be that **moving lightly and playfully and relatively slowly between those two modes of attention: (a) the penetrating, kind of narrow focus and probing, and (b) the more receptive**. It might be that *that very movement* works the *pīti* and allows it to spread through the body, through the body space.

Eventually, what happens is that every time you experience *pīti*, it's just always spread. It's just always completely filling the whole body. There's so much in *jhāna* practice about just, it's almost like the *citta* and the bodily experience, the energy experience, just getting used to something, and it

becoming normal, it becoming completely normal, so that after a while, every time you have *pīti*, it's just automatic. It's never just in one place. It's just always spread. There are always exceptions, but that will eventually become pretty common.

(7) But last (this would be, now, number seven), okay, sometimes it won't spread. You've tried all this, and it won't spread. Don't worry about it! Just enjoy it where it is, and get into it where it is. Yeah, so okay, it's just around here, around my throat and head and whatever it is. I've tried all those other shenanigans. It doesn't spread. Just get into it and enjoy it. Don't bother about it. Enjoy it. And that's actually really, really important – *really* important.

Also don't worry about, you know, the Buddha says, "Not one spot of the body."⁷ It's not like you have to go through and say, "Well, how's my little toe on my left side?" You don't have to get so consumed with the kind of anatomical image or picture of the body. It's really more just this whole space. If you still do have a sense of separate toes and all that, that doesn't matter either, but you certainly don't *have* to. It's more like you just sense the whole space, sense the whole energy body space, and allow or gently encourage the *pīti* to fill that whole space in these different ways.

There is a movement in *jhāna*, anyway, for the kind of dissolving of the form of the body. Now, people are different. For some people, that happens – I'm not sure, percentage-wise, but for me, certainly, it happens in the first *jhāna*. That's part of the characteristic of the first *jhāna*: the sense of the body just becomes a bit like what we said in those little games we played. It just becomes a sort of amorphous, white light filled with *pīti*. There's not such a sense of – I *could* kind of my toes and all the rest of it in there. People are different, though. Anyway, there's a movement towards the dissolving of the bodily form, which means we don't have to worry too much about "Is the *pīti* in my foot?" or whatever, like that. It's more just the sense of "Yeah, it's really filling this whole space, this whole experience, the experience of the body."

Again, back to this perception thing. Really, one way of conceiving what happens in a *jhāna* is, in the first *jhāna*, the bodily experience, the bodily perception *becomes* *pīti*. My experience of my body is a body of *pīti*, is a space of *pīti*. In the second *jhāna*, the body (*rūpa*; the first four *jhānas* are called *rūpa-jhānas*, which means 'body') becomes happiness. And if you're still working with the breath, which is, in a way, an element of the body, the breath becomes happiness. I'm breathing happiness into a body of happiness. In the third *jhāna*, it becomes this kind of peacefulness; in the fourth, this kind of luminous stillness, etc. [59:01] So the energetic space, the energy body space becomes that. The body becomes that. So there's, yes, a gradual dissolving of the detailed sense of the form of the body. The body dissolves, we could say.

Okay. Sometimes what happens for people – and again, [it's] individual; there are a lot of different conditions and things over time – but sometimes what happens is, there's too much. It feels like there's too much *pīti*. Or the *pīti* feels – "This is too much to bear. It's *so* intense or *so* strong or *so* pleasant." There's one thing that's kind of more important than anything else there. It's that usually, when that's the case, what needs to happen is *more opening*. It's the opposite. If I feel, "This is too much to bear. It's too strong. I can't handle this," then actually, there's some contraction of the being, some aversion, some slight holding; I'm pushing away, like I'm trying to push back the waters a little bit. Could be very, very subtle. The primary thing we need to do when it feels, or when you think, "This is too strong," is *open*: open the space of the energy body. Open to the flow of the *pīti*. Oftentimes *pīti* has a

flow to it; oftentimes it's an upward flow, up the body. More opening – open even more. Put your opening dial on '11,' 150 per cent. More opening, more surrender, more abandoning. It's the opposite of what you feel like doing, when it feels like too much. You have to go to the counterintuitive energetic response.

Sometimes, talking to people in interviews, *pīti* can be a bit like – an analogy can be like water flowing down a mountainside, like making a river down a mountainside. And where it starts, in the initial stages, sometimes it can be, like, *really* fast. And then it encounters rocks as it goes down. And where it encounters rocks, you get all this white water, right? Rapids and froth and stuff. Two things here.

(1) If I then put more rocks in the way because I don't like it, because I just don't want it to be quite so intense, what am I going to get? Unless I actually put a dam there. But let's say you just can't. What am I going to get? I'm going to get more white water. I'm going to get more froth. I'm going to get more. I need to do the opposite: **open, surrender, abandon**, really, like, "Okay, how much can I really open my body?" It's almost like this: just **opening up the chest, opening up. Just completely let it flow through. And oftentimes it wants to flow right through, right up out the top of the head.** Just open, open, open. There's usually, at that point, a subtle – or sometimes not-so-subtle – there's some degree of aversion and contraction, and *that's* causing the problem. What it's also doing is slowing down the progress of this river, because this mountain river, as it goes down the mountain, as it winds its way, it's naturally going to find its way to calmer waters. As *pīti* evolves – I've already said this, in a way, indirectly – it naturally gets calmer.

So there are phases of practice when it just feels like, "This really is a bit much. It's too intense." It's on its way. It's just a phase. What we want is, "Okay, well, how can I just help that phase do its thing?" Aversion, contraction is not helping it do its thing. It's the opposite: I need to open, open, let it flow. You might have to put up with, yeah, it's super-intense. Again, someone else would give their right and left arms for this kind of level of pleasure. But we have to open, open, open, and then it will go through its thing, and it will calm down. Sometimes, even the very opening, in that moment, it actually feels better because the contraction is what's – then it starts to get, "I'm not even sure this is pleasant any more." It's partly the aversion colouring the experience. So open, surrender, abandon. Really, what does it mean to do that? Find ways to do that.

(2) And then, once you do, **find the pleasure in it, find the pleasure in it, find the pleasure in it.** So two things: (1) **open, abandon, surrender**, and (2) **find the pleasure**. And that will usually take care of it. [1:03:42] But it should help in that moment, absolutely, and then it should also help the process just unfold more freely and without kind of getting stuck in this certain place for a while. And sometimes, a person – either the *pīti* is so strong that it's like, "I'm not sure it's actually pleasant." Or it's not quite strong enough; they say, "I'm not sure it's pleasant." Again, playing with perception: you can actually decide to see it as pleasant. Just decide to see it as pleasant. Just play with that. Play with the perception. We're back to this idea of malleability again, of playing with perception. In *samādhi*, in *jhāna*, the whole system is so sensitive, so sensitive to these micro-shifts in ways of looking, in view, in effort levels, etc.

Now, sometimes, again, *pīti* is very strong, perhaps even over some days, or *sukha*, happiness, is strong, and there's a question here: "Should I move the body? There's so much energy. Should I move

it somehow? Should I dance? I just feel like dancing.” There’s joy, and there’s *pīti*, and a person wants to dance. And the question is, “Should I do that?” Or when there’s a lot of *sukha*, they can be just laughing and laughing and laughing out loud. “Or should I not dance and not laugh so much, and actually let something gather?” Generally speaking, I would probably lean towards, “No, let it gather,” because again, going back to what I said earlier several times, most of us, as human beings, actually haven’t really allowed energy to gather, haven’t really allowed happiness to gather. We don’t know what it is to have the energy body filled this way with happiness, and allow that to gather and intensify and do its kind of alchemical work.

However, sometimes it is really helpful for someone, and for a number of reasons, to dance or to move, whatever, because sometimes, that person, if you look at their life, and their person, and their character, sometimes there’s actually a habit there of holding the body. And the body’s a little bit rigid, or there’s a certain inhibition in terms of movement. Or with regard to laughing, there’s a person who actually doesn’t laugh – you know, you’re never going to find them giggling. They don’t laugh. They might – you know, something’s funny or whatever – a little bit, but they don’t give themselves to laughter a lot. Why is that? Maybe, sometimes, there’s just a slight emotional holding. It’s a personality thing. There’s a slight rigidity or non-fluidity. So sometimes, actually, for a person – it’s not the greatest weather, but it doesn’t mean you can’t go out there in the fields and dance in the rain. And if it needs to move, *do* that, or whatever it is. The danger, though, is that we squander the energy that’s building, we squander the *pīti*, and we squander the happiness that’s building, and then it can never really mature into *jhāna*. So it can be a tricky question, but you can experiment. Experiment with both, if you feel this is relevant. For a lot of people it won’t be relevant. In the analogy before, the capacitor doesn’t gather enough energy. It never really allows you to get into *jhāna*. But we want, as I said, to learn to allow and to tolerate these things to expand, to flow, to fill the being, and do their work inside.

Again, just with theme of sometimes really strong *pīti*, what can happen sometimes, for some people – a minority of people – is that the *pīti* is very strong, or the energy gets very strong, and the physical body starts shaking: kind of tremoring, or shaking, or jerking, or this kind of thing. This is quite an important thing here. Now, some people have the view, “Oh, that’s a catharsis. You’re releasing something,” etc. Speaking as someone who got trapped in all that for quite some years, I feel this is really important. It’s important to have the right view here and the right approach. [1:08:31] What can happen with those kinds of movements is that they very easily can become habitual. And the body just habitually starts to shake in meditation, or jerk, or whatever it is. In my case, it would even do it when I listened to music. It started to do it all the time. Some habitual loop had become set up.

Okay, so this is different now than the kind of body movement of, for example, some of you know, when the *pīti* comes, the head tilts back because of that upward flow. Some of you will know that. Actually, even doing the movement brings the *pīti*. But I’m talking about something different. I’m talking about sort of, as I said, shaking or jerking kind of thing. The head-tilt-back thing is not anywhere near a problem. If you can *not* do it – I have a bad habit; I do it, so do what I say, not what I do! But that’s less of a problem.

But this moving thing is actually – and shaking – is quite important. Again, maybe you can use your imagination a little bit. First thing is, see if you can keep the physical body still during meditation. For a lot of people, nothing like this is going to arise; it’s not an issue. But I’m saying it because it is for

some people. Can I keep the physical body still? And maybe you just set a gentle but firm intention that that's the case at the beginning of a meditation. But generally, I'm trying to keep the physical body still, and what I'm allowing, instead of the energy moving the physical body, is I'm allowing the energy to move inside the energy body space, and even move *out*. So again, maybe, it's *as if*, metaphorically – or an analogy would be like there's – again, it's a bad analogy, but let's say there's too much water and water pressure in the inner energy pipes, and they start bursting the pipes and rattling the whole structure. What we need to do is open the pipes, make bigger pipes. Let it flow more. So again, imagine your body opening, opening to this energy flow, opening the channels, the currents, so it can flow, allowing the (so to speak) inner movement of energy rather than the physical body moving. And usually, you'll find that that takes care of things.

Sometimes, again, it wants to go out, so it might want to fly out the top of your crown chakra and come out like that, and come down as a fountain, whatever it is. So use your imagination. It might want to just move inside. It might want to move out. How does it want to move? What feels good? What feels like there's some ease and release to this 'too much,' that means, then, the physical body does not need to move, because the energy is being allowed to move? When the energy is being allowed to move properly, without encountering blocks or constrictions, then the physical body does not need to move so much, or at all. So again, it might want to go in any [direction]: it might want to fly out this way, or this way, or up, or whatever. Just find – what does it want to do? And let it do; imagine it doing what it wants to do. And it *will* do what it wants to do, and then the physical body doesn't need to.

Often, this kind of thing happens when there's even just a slight over-efforting. It certainly is more likely to happen if there's over-effort. Or let's say, certain energy body types – it's really quite likely to happen if there's too much effort. Other people have different energy body types, and they can do a lot of effort, and it's not going to happen. They will never have anything like that. But with certain types, it can be, as I said, slight over-efforting can have massive impacts. Slight over-efforting can have subtle impacts in meditation, all kinds of subtle effects, but it can also have quite dramatic effects. So sometimes this whole thing with the moving is not catharsis or anything; it's just the effort is a little too much. Nothing's being purified; it's just the effort is too much, and it's putting too much energy-pressure on the whole system. It's having an effect.

What does that mean? What does that imply? Again, maybe I need to play with the intensity. What does it mean to just back off on the intensity pedal? What does it mean to just be a little less tight in the way I'm approaching, or my energy body is in the meditation, to have a slightly more spacious attention, to go into the more receptive mode and less of the probing mode? So all these things will affect, are part of the effort and the subtly backing off the effort, and they will have an effect on all that shaking business.

[1:13:43] Sometimes, someone who's done a lot of insight meditation may have experienced other states – of deep equanimity, or vastness of awareness, or these kinds of things – and then comes to *jhāna* practice and hears about *pīti* and first *jhāna*, and second *jhāna* with all its bubbly happiness, or whatever it is, and kind of thinks, "Well, why should I bother with *pīti* if equanimity is possible? Because I know equanimity. Why should I bother with *pīti*?" And they might think, "Well, equanimity is the *point* of practice, right? Why would I bother with *pīti*? We're trying to get to equanimity. So why

would I bother with *pīti* and with *sukha*, the first or second *jhāna*, or whatever? Because equanimity is where we're going."

Equanimity is *not* the goal. It is absolutely not the goal, and nor should equanimity be mistaken for awakening. It's really, really important. Equanimity is not '*the goal*.' It's an important part of the mix, of the range of what's available to a being, but it's not '*the goal*,' and certainly not equivalent to awakening. Awakening does not equate to equanimity. Awakening is, if we want to sum it up, realizing emptiness – realizing the emptiness of everything. And the implication from that, that then we can look at things in very different ways. Why? Because a thing is empty of existing independently of the way the mind looks at it. Therefore, one realizes that, and it liberates the possibility of a whole flexibility of ways of looking, which one can also train in, and develop that playing, can play all these different ways, play all these perceptions – that's what awakening is. Awakening is not equanimity. [1:15:30] So that therefore, again, practising the malleability of the mind, the malleability of mind states, the malleability of perception, playing with perception – when we're doing that, we're actually practising a path that resembles the goal, that resembles what awakening is, because an awakened person knows the emptiness of absolutely everything, and all they're left with, and they know, all there *is* is the possibility and the flexibility of different ways of looking. So by practising that, you're actually practising a way of conceiving of the path and practising the path that looks like what awakening looks like, as opposed to just trying to practise equanimity, and "I'm trying to be equanimous in relation to everything all the time." That's not what awakening is. And that's not even a healthy psychology, I would say.

Also sometimes, a person will say, "Why should I bother with *pīti*? Why should I bother with *sukha*?" Sometimes there are psychological tendencies, patterns, habits. *Pīti* and *sukha*, in a way, they're agitating. In a way, they're disturbing. They're not that peaceful. They open up things. They're exciting. They move around, and they do stuff. And sometimes it's not even a particular Dharma thought, or one uses a Dharma thought, but the intent, the reason one's using it is just because one's psychology doesn't want to be disturbed: "I just want everything to be calm, want the emotions to be controlled and within a certain limit. I want to either present or feel only a certain range." And that can become, or it can be, a habit or pattern. That's all that my being knows. It's all my being allows, is that range. And therefore all this kind of welling up of stuff – "Hmm, don't like it." What's actually going on there?

I'm coming back to something I've already said, but it's important. It's really, really important. We can conceive *pīti* as energy, so that when the energy body is unblocked – either through just the openness of heart, the openness of being, or when the energy body is unblocked because the insight way of looking is releasing clinging (clinging causes contraction, so with the release of clinging, there's a release of contraction, so the energy body is naturally unblocked) – when the energy body is unblocked, then naturally, a human energy body system will naturally experience a pleasant flow of energy. It will naturally experience *pīti*. So we can conceive of *pīti* as energy. Let's say we can also conceive of *pīti* as energy in the sense of, in a concentration mode, I'm not dissipating energy through distraction, the mind going here and there, thinking about this or that, getting caught up in this and that, this sound, that sound, whatever it is. And therefore the energy naturally gathers, like the electronic capacitor.

So we can conceive of the *pīti* as energy, but as I've said several times now, a better, more fruitful, truer, much more helpful way, and a way that's much more integrated with the rest of the Dharma, or a way of understanding the rest of the Dharma, is to conceive of *pīti* as *a way of perceiving the body*. It's not 'energy,' really. It's not to do with 'unblocking your chakras' or 'energy channels.' It's not to do with 'gathering energy.' *Pīti* is a way of perceiving the body. It's a perception of body. [1:21:41] It's a perceptual skill. It's a perception attainment, as the Buddha might say.⁸ It's a magician's art. *Pīti* is a way of perceiving the body. Again, you may or may not quite realize just how significant this is, but I want to at least plant the seeds.

Last thing, last couple of things: *pīti* is central to the first *jhāna*. It's the most important factor in the first *jhāna*. The first *jhāna* has five factors – we're going to talk about it tomorrow. *Pīti* is central. The first *jhāna* has five factors: **(1–2) *vitakka-vicāra***, which I'm going to talk about; when I read through the Buddha's list, I translated it as 'thinking.' We'll come back to that. It's slightly – what's the word – controversial, the translation of that. But anyway, it has five factors: *vitakka-vicāra*, or sometimes, you've probably heard 'initial and sustained application' – doesn't matter. We'll just say *vitakka-vicāra*. **(3) *Ekaggatā*** (I'll explain all this tomorrow), a kind of 'one-pointedness,' let's say – also a misleading translation; doesn't matter. And the two other factors, **(4) *pīti*** and **(5) *sukha***. *Pīti* we've talked about, and *sukha* means 'happiness.' Those are the five factors of the first *jhāna*.

Usually, these are conceived, either kind of consciously or unconsciously, with a causal direction through them. In other words, you work at your *vitakka* and *vicāra*, you work at your initial and sustained application to the meditation object. Over time, you kind of get one-pointed or absorbed or whatever, *ekaggatā*. And *pīti* and *sukha* arise as a result. So there's a movement *from* concentration, the concentration factors, to the arising of *pīti* and *sukha*. That's great.

But sometimes we can work *backwards*: here are these five factors. What's available right now? And sometimes people say, "Oh, I just – every time I think of this person, or every time I think of *this*, happiness arises." It's one of the factors of the first *jhāna*. It's not even the primary factor. *Pīti* is the primary factor. "But every time I think of this person, happiness arises." If you're skilful, that happiness – I just linger with the happiness, and lo and behold, *pīti* is right there with it, and then I don't snatch at that, and the *pīti* builds. There are five factors. What's available? I can go in starting on any one, really, in a way. I'm working backwards. This principle of working backwards, of "Where am I trying to get to?", rather than deciding in advance what needs to be emphasized and therefore what's relevant. So which factor, and therefore which do I emphasize right now as a way in, if we're talking about the first *jhāna*? And so, both: I conceive forwardly in terms of causal connections there, or I can conceive backwards. I've got five factors. Let's see which of those I can kind of access, ignite a little bit, stimulate, and from that, the rest of the five factors, the other four factors ignite.

If we go back to the two broad methods, concentration or working with the energy body – in a way, working with the whole body and the energy body from the beginning is an example of working backwards, a little bit, to a certain extent, because all four of the first four *jhānas* – what are called the *rūpa-jhānas*; *rūpa* means 'body' or 'form' – all four of them involve, as we said with the Buddha's examples, "leaving no spot of the body untouched with/by happiness or delight or pleasure," "suffusing, saturating, drenching, steeping the whole body."⁹ All four of the first four *jhānas* involve the whole body, energy body awareness. And they each just have a different flavour, a different

predominant flavour to that energy body awareness. So when we start with the energy body awareness, we're a little bit also taking this principle of "Let's start backwards." Rather than start at a point, let's start with the whole thing, because it's going to go to the whole thing anyway.

So back to these things (last point and then we're done), these two (I said it right at the beginning of the talk) – *broadly* speaking, two approaches. Either you **(1) choose a point, a thing, and you just concentrate it, concentrate it with the intensity, and delicacy, and the directionality**, and all the rest of it. So you're basically practising concentration on something, steady focus on something. Let me just interject something. That's one method, or **(2) there's this other method of starting with the whole energy body and gathering the niceness there.**

But at any time, even in – let's say you're new to the second *jhāna*. Happiness is actually quite a subtle object. So it can be very, very bubbly and intense, but as things calm down, it's actually quite a subtle, refined object. And even if your main mode of working has been energy body, and you haven't really thought about it as concentration, you're still, at some times, going to need to practise concentration. Sometimes you say, "Okay, I need to *learn* how to stay steady and focused on this subtle object of happiness." So at times, even, there are going to be times when your intention and your emphasis is on concentration. And there may be other times where your intention is more on spreading and enjoying and other things, or perception – playing, like we said. So at any time, in the practice of *jhānas*, your emphasis can shift, and that's completely appropriate. Sometimes it's not really going, and you say, "Okay, I'm just practising concentration now." But it's not *all* you're doing. You're seeing that as one possible emphasis in a whole *maṇḍala* of possible emphases.

So, going back to what I said at the beginning, these two broad approaches – concentration versus coaxing well-being through playing with perception and all that stuff – yeah, they're kind of separate, but they're not really. And we're going to move between them, and there are grey areas. But we should move between them and think about that at *any* point in *jhāna* practice, any point. It's going to be relevant. They're not mutually exclusive. [1:28:00]

Okay? I think we should probably stop there rather than do some questions today. Yeah, let's stop there. Let's have a bit of quiet together.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everyone. So, time for tea. Enjoy tea. And there are some interviews tonight, so if you happen to check the board today, please check, because there are some tonight. Is there anything else? No? Okay, so enjoy tea.

¹ E.g. in Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Olauska, WA: Pariyatti, 1999), 86.

² MN 118.

³ Rob Burbea, *Samatha Meditation* [retreat talks] (30 Mar. 2007–2 Apr. 2007), <https://dharmaeed.org/retreats/1308/>, accessed 14 Feb. 2020; also see Rob Burbea, *The Art Of Concentration (Samatha Meditation)* [retreat talks] (8 Aug. 2008–12 Aug. 2008), <https://dharmaeed.org/retreats/1183/>, accessed 14 Feb. 2020.

⁴ AN 9:36.

⁵ Source unknown. Cf. the similes of the water snake and the raft at MN 22, as well as the simile of grasping at branches AN 4:178.

⁶ E.g. AN 5:28.

⁷ E.g. AN 5:28.

⁸ AN 9:36.

⁹ E.g. AN 5:28.

The First Jhāna, and Playing and Working in (and out of) any Jhāna

Today I was planning to talk about the first *jhāna*, and then tomorrow I was going to talk about playing and working *in* any *jhāna*, but also *out of* any *jhāna*, or playing and working in and out of any *jhāna*. And then I decided, actually, I'll combine those two, really, because they kind of interrelate as two themes. So first *jhāna* as well as playing and working in and out of *jhāna* in general, as one talk. And then after that, the teachings will get a lot less dense, so there'll be a bit – well, should be a *lot* more breathing room in terms of how much material is coming at you. It's slightly complicated by the fact that I have a hospital appointment tomorrow, and I have no idea how long that's going to take. So I hope that it won't be complicated, that I can go there, come back, and finish, if I don't finish today, the second part of the talk. Maybe we'll finish today; maybe it will have to get bumped till the day after tomorrow; maybe I can come tomorrow. So let's see how we do, but just so you know that.

Okey-doke, so first *jhāna*, and playing and working in and out of any *jhāna*, really, mostly. First *jhāna* – I've read this already. Let's start with the simile:

Just as a skilled bathman or his assistant kneading the soap powder [so working the soap powder], which he has sprinkled with water, forms from it, in a metal dish, a soft lump, so that the ball of soap powder becomes one [there's an English word here; I don't even know what it means. I think it means one *oily mass*], bound with oil, so that nothing escapes. So this practitioner suffuses, drenches, fills and irradiates their body so that no spot remains untouched [and fills and irradiates, suffuses, etc. their body with what?] with this [have to retranslate] *pīti* and *sukha* born of detachment.¹

Detachment from what? Detachment from the hindrances. That's what 'detachment' means in this case. It's funny: if you look at older translations, there are all kinds of different translations of *pīti* and *sukha*. So I'm going to spend a little time on some Pali words today, but ...

With this *pīti* and *sukha* born of detachment [detachment from the hindrances, or sometimes the *seclusion* from the hindrances, *withdrawal* from the hindrances], she so suffuses, drenches, fills, and irradiates her body that there is no spot in her entire body that is untouched by this delight [oh, here we go], by this *pīti* and *sukha* born of detachment.

So the soap simile is really a simile for what we do with the *pīti* and *sukha*: suffuse, saturate, steep,

drench, irradiate, pervade, permeate – all these words. We do that with the *pīti* and *sukha*. And *sukha* translates best, I think, as, let's say, 'happiness,' I would say. In the first *jhāna*, the *pīti* is the primary quality (I'm going to come back to this). The *sukha* is there, and one is definitely not unhappy. One is conscious that one is happy, but actually, even the consciousness that one is happy – very, very happy – might be a little bit in the background. One's more kind of *taken* by, captivated by, and should be concentrating on the *pīti*. The *pīti* is what is foremost in consciousness.

So the Buddha has these similes. And other times, for each *jhāna*, he describes them in terms of their factors – what are called '*jhāna* factors': *jhāna-aṅga* in Pali.² And *pīti* and *sukha* (two Pali words) – they're two of the five factors of the first *jhāna*. There are five factors in the first *jhāna*. *Pīti* and *sukha* are two of them.

Another one is *ekaggatā*, and actually it's a factor of every *jhāna*, *ekaggatā* in Pali. This usually gets translated as 'one-pointedness.' I've already touched on this. It *cannot*, it absolutely *cannot*, there's *no way* that it can mean putting the mind in a small spatial point. Now, you might *do* that; in fact, you probably *will* do that at times in a *jhāna*, if you're playing with this probing, receiving – open, directed shifting of the modes of attention. But it cannot mean one-pointedness in a spatial sense, because it's a factor of, as I said, the fifth *jhāna*, which is infinite space. You realize there's a complete contradiction, right? If you take it as a spatial point, it doesn't make sense, right?

So what does it mean? *Eka*, 'one'; in the Sanskrit, *āgra*; and *-tā* is just a '-ness' on the end. I can understand why it's 'one-pointedness.' It's something like a mountain peak or a prominence. And of course, some mountains *are* quite pointy like that. But the best translation is something like, I think, 'one thing is prominent': *eka*-prominent-ness. One thing is prominent. What is that one thing that becomes prominent? People argue about this. Is it the original meditation object? Is it the breath? Is it the body that becomes prominent, the sense of the body? Or is it the *pīti*? I would say that in *jhāna*, what happens is they all get mixed together. As I said, I'm breathing *pīti*, if you're still with the breath, if the breath is still there. Or the body has become *pīti*. Or it's just the *pīti* is what's prominent. So I would say the *pīti* is what's prominent. In a way, it's the most significant factor of the first *jhāna*. Let's say that. So *pīti* is the thing that's most prominent to consciousness. It's not that other things, other aspects, other dimensions, or other aspects of the *jhāna* won't come into consciousness. They will. But the most prominent thing, and what *should* be the most prominent thing, is the *pīti*.

Okay, so *pīti* and *sukha*, two factors; *ekaggatā*, a third factor – I'm not saying these in the order they're usually presented. Then there are two more factors, which in Pali [are] *vitakka* and *vicāra*. Now most of you, if you've heard these terms before, any translation you will hear, you will have heard translations: 'initial and sustained application.' Who's heard that before? Really, really common. It's certainly what I was taught for many years. One of my original meditation teachers – I was originally taught by a group of teachers – one of them was a professor of Pali, *is* a professor of Pali. So not a professor of Buddhism, not even a professor of Theravādan Buddhism, but a professor of Pali. That's his thing. And he said that's *not* what it meant at the time of the Buddha. At that time, that's not how those words were used. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* just meant something like 'thinking.' In English, we have a kind of double verb – you always say *this* and *this*.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: [laughs] No, but I mean as a phrase. It doesn't matter. So it was a stock phrase in Pali, and it

just meant ‘thinking,’ originally. About 500 years after the Buddha in Sri Lanka, a guy, a monk called Buddhaghosa wrote a book called the *Visuddhimagga*, which translates as *The Path of Purification*.³ In some Theravādan countries, it’s regarded as a Bible. It’s really revered, this book, and in some other countries much, much less so. The story goes that he – actually, it was a compilation. What he did was interview lots of meditation masters, take what they had (I heard this, obviously, secondhand; I wasn’t there), take what they gave him, threw out what he didn’t like (although he himself was not much of a meditator), burnt what he threw out, and kept the rest. I don’t know if that’s true, but I’ve heard that. Anyway – I think, if the history’s right – he translates in Abhidhamma (which is a kind of technical psychological bureaucracy of Theravādan Buddhism), also translates it as ‘initial and sustained application.’

But at the time of the Buddha, that’s not how those words were used. They’re okay translations, actually, to a certain extent. At a certain point in your practice, if you keep those translations, it should occur to you, “This doesn’t really make sense,” once you get into the other *jhānas*. But it’s okay. At a certain point, they stop kind of making much sense, but to a certain extent, it’s really okay. So ‘initial application’ means bringing my mind to whatever it is, the breath. I bring the mind: initial application. ‘Sustained application’ means, in this sense, I stay there, and I probe it, and I become intimate with it. That’s usually the explanation that’s given on *vipassanā* retreats, and on, I guess, quite a lot of *jhāna* retreats.

One of my main teachers, Ajaan Geoff, translates them as ‘directed thought’ and ‘evaluative thought’ – very different translation. And what *he* means, really, is ‘attending to’ whatever the object is, and ‘thinking about’ it. So this is in the first *jhāna*: ‘thinking’ about the breath, ‘thinking’ about the energy body, ‘thinking’ about the well-being or the pleasure. “What would help right now? What would be helpful? How should I shift my emphasis? How should I view the breath? What way of looking should I play with?” And relates the word *vicāra* (the second of those terms) to *vicaya*. Some of you know the Pali – *dharmavicaya* is the second factor of the seven factors of awakening: ‘investigation.’ There’s a kind of *investigative thinking about* that’s going on in the first *jhāna* – at least, I would say, sometimes.

So for these two terms, we’ve got the possibility of the most popular translation and interpretation: ‘initial and sustained application.’ The second one is just ‘thinking.’ And a third one is ‘directed and evaluative thinking,’ which really means this kind of creative [thinking], like, “What’s helping right now? How should I play with this?” Which shall we choose? What are we going to do here?

Do you want to know what I think? [laughter]

I think, “Forget about it!” Forget about those terms anyway. Just throw them out. It doesn’t make any [difference]. Of course you’re going to be [using] initial and sustained application. Of course you are. Just don’t worry about it. If you’re thinking about the meditation, great. You know, we’ve talked about that. If you’re working with *pīti*, great. It’s fine. I think it’s actually not that helpful. There’s all this argument and tussle about it, and again, it’s like, what’s actually important here? We could say, at times, the first *jhāna* can include thinking about how the meditation is going, what’s helpful, etc. But ‘thinking’ – it’s not the kind of thinking: “I suck at this.” [laughter] “I bet everyone else in here is in the eighth *jhāna*. I just should go home.” Not that kind of thinking, okay? If there’s thinking, it’s about what’s happening. It’s a very subtle kind of responsive, intelligent, connected thinking about the

practice – *maybe* like, people ask me, “As a jazz musician, do you think when you play? You’re improvising. Do you think, or is it ...?” It’s like, “Well, yeah, but it’s a different kind of thought.” I’m not sort of pondering long sentences. Or a painter, really in the flow with their art – are they thinking or not thinking? Well, there may well be a certain thought, absolutely, in part of the flow. We’ll come to this later when we talk about deeper *jhānas*, because one question here is: what is a *thought*, anyway? We’ll come back to that.

So for what it’s worth, my two cents on this is: forget about it! Just get into it. Just get into it, and this whole “What does that mean?” will take care of itself. Just get into – in this case, get into the *pīti*. Enjoy it, get intimate with as much as you can, the fullness of connection with it, spreading it, really opening to it, enjoying it, seeing how much you can enjoy it – if you just do that, don’t worry about: “Is there thinking?” Just get into it more, and it becomes a non-question, what it really is.

[15:10] And then, even in the second *jhāna*, as you move to the second *jhāna*, one of the factors of the second *jhāna* is the dropping away of thinking. So it’s a kind of a factor of an absence, if you like. But if I’m *checking* – “Am I thinking? Have there been any thoughts yet?” – or if I’m measuring how long I’ve not been thinking, or whether there’s been thinking, or if I’m *trying* not to think, this, I would say, is not such intelligent practice, for a number of reasons, one of which [is] I’m putting my emphasis on the least significant factor, the least helpful factor of the second *jhāna*. I’m going to come back to this, obviously, when we talk about the second *jhāna*.

[16:00] So I think I’ve said already, I think, or it seems from my experience teaching, that if you can get to the first *jhāna*, I used to think, then actually, all the *jhānas* are available to you, with a lot of work. If you can get to the *jhāna*, you can master (in the sense that I mean it) all *jhānas*. It will take a long time, and a lot of work, and a lot of dedication, but it’s possible if that’s the sort of thing that you want. I actually would like to revise that (and I mentioned this), and actually say, if *pīti* can arise, you can do all that. If *pīti* can arise, there’s no reason you can’t attain the first *jhāna*, and then have all the *jhānas*. So actually, the arising of *pīti* should give you a lot of confidence. It’s saying, “The road is clear. It’s open. All you have to do is walk. Yeah, it might be hard at times. It’s a long way. You’re going to need a lot of ingenuity. You’re going to need a lot of dedication. It’s open. There’s nothing in the way for you. That road is open.”

Who’s heard another Pali word, *nimitta*? Quite a lot, okay. So do you understand by *nimitta* – in the context of *jhāna* practice – something like the appearance of a luminous visual form with some detail in it that you can then concentrate on that will take you into *jhāna*? Yes? Okay, again, the Buddha never used that word. He uses the word *nimitta*, but never, never ever in that way. Again, it comes from the *Visuddhimagga*, etc. [17:04] In English it’s often translated as ‘counterpart sign,’ or it is in the old translations. I’m not even sure how it’s translated now. In the Pali Canon, meaning in the words of the Buddha, he *does* use that word [*nimitta*], but more he uses it as ‘object of perception.’ Any object of perception in meditation is a *nimitta*. Sometimes I think he uses it as, in a way, it would translate as something like ‘theme,’ a theme of meditation, I think. In the Mahāyāna teachings (same word in Sanskrit, *nimitta*), it has the additional meaning of ‘ground’ or ‘base,’ and that’s connected with emptiness teachings and teachings about groundlessness, etc. So it had quite a different spin then in Mahāyāna teachings. We can use that word. I don’t mind using it, and it’s fine; I don’t mind if you want to use it, but I would like to use it in a slightly different way as ‘sign.’ That’s usually the translation.

Nimitta means ‘sign.’

And what is it? It’s a sign that the *samādhi* is deepening, *any* sign that the *samādhi* is deepening. So the arising of *pīti* is a sign that the *samādhi* is deepening. The arising of *sukha*, of happiness, is a sign that *samādhi* is deepening. The arising of a kind of almost otherworldly, pristine, pure, luminous stillness is also a sign. The arising of the perception of space, as a very clear perception, is a sign, at different levels, that the *samādhi* is deepening.

Some people get also, for instance, they’re meditating, and then at some point, a white, golden light is very common, like white, golden, suffused light, or a kind of cloud of light in the mind. Sometimes a person’s not sure; they’re meditating, and they’re like, “Did the sun just come out?”, because everything’s just got very bright. So this, too, that white kind of light, is also a sign that the *samādhi* is deepening.

But the primary *nimitta* – again, the most important thing to put the attention on, and the most important thing around which the whole practice converges – in the first *jhāna*, the primary *nimitta* is the *pīti*, if you want to use that word. In the second *jhāna*, the primary factor is the *sukha*, the happiness. We’ll come back to that.

So in the first *jhāna*, *pīti* has arisen, through one way or another, however it has arisen. In order, then, to consolidate it and move into an absorption in it, which is the first *jhāna*, what needs to be there, and what do we need to do? These are some of the things I want to address: what kind of work? What kind of play? How strong does the *pīti* have to be? I think I’ve touched on this already. There’s a huge range in terms of the intensity of the *pīti* that’s possible – massive range. But it does need to be *strong enough*. It does need to be strong enough that it’s *definitely pleasurable* before I can start working with it, and trying to take that *pīti* and kind of mould it, shape it, allow it to open, and take me into the first *jhāna*. It needs to be strong enough – which doesn’t necessarily mean, you know, blow your head off. It also needs to sustain long enough. (I think I said this yesterday; did I say that? Yes.) So it needs to be around for, let’s say, two or three minutes at least, without going away. Two or three minutes, strong enough, it’s definitely pleasant – *then* it’s ready. Then I can decide to take that as my primary object and really get into it, and work and play, and there’s the possibility that that moves into the first *jhāna*.

I think I also mentioned this – it’s good to review it though. In the first four *jhānas* (they’re called *rūpa-jhānas*, which translates sometimes as ‘form *jhānas*’; *rūpa* has a few different meanings, but let’s say ‘form’), what’s happening as we go through one, two, three, four is the perception of the body becomes more and more subtle, so that the happiness of the second *jhāna* – it might be a super-intense happiness. It might be a happiness that I’ve never experienced so much joy in my life. But it’s still, as an object, it’s more refined than the *pīti*. *Pīti* is, relatively speaking, gross. It’s a coarse object, like a coarse cloth, compared to a really fine cloth. So that’s not the same thing as intensity. Do you get the difference? In the third *jhāna*, the particular kind of peacefulness that arises in the third *jhāna* is really very, very subtle, and that’s part of its beauty. And it’s more subtle than the happiness of the second *jhāna*.

And as you’re pervading, saturating, suffusing, one way of saying what’s happening is, these primary factors, primary *nimittas* – the *pīti*, the *sukha*, the ... let’s call it ‘peacefulness,’ for now, of the third *jhāna*, the stillness of the fourth *jhāna* – the body *becomes* them. They become the body. What’s my body now? I don’t have a sense of organs and solidity. So the usual solidity that we have of the

body – hard bones and all that, and organs, etc. – is more gross than the solidity, the refinement of the *pīti*, which is more gross than the sense of solidity or refinement (if we can even call it ‘solidity’ at that point) of the happiness. Do you get the sense? There’s a spectrum here of increasing refinement or subtlety of the perception of the body. Because I’ve drenched, suffused, saturated, permeated, my body has become *pīti*. My body, breath, all that has become happiness. And there’s a spectrum there of more refinement. [23:34] When you get to the fifth *jhāna*, any sense of form, of body, has disappeared, and it’s just space. In a way, that’s ultra-refined, right? It’s like nothing.

Pīti is important, actually, in many ways. One of the things I want to emphasize is it’s important to keep it around, and keep our access to it, and keep it as something that we consider lovely and consider as a resource, even when I’m working and my playground has become the seventh or eighth *jhāna* or whatever. Sometimes what happens is we go into those formless *jhānas*, when that’s what you’re working on, and then you want to come back, and I want to skip back from the eighth to the third, or something like that, or the fourth. And the body vibration of stillness that’s characteristic of the fourth, or peacefulness that’s characteristic of the third – I can’t find it. The whole perception has become so ultra-refined from the deeper formless *jhānas* that I can’t find what I need to find to enter the fourth or third *jhāna*, because I need to find that particular vibration, that particular bandwidth of refinement that is characteristic and prominent of the fourth or third *jhāna*. What can really help is, actually, to just go all the way back to the *pīti*, the first one, and get that going a bit, and then the third or fourth will be more accessible.

So again, what I want to say today is not just about the first *jhāna*. It’s about working and playing in general. And a lot of what I say will be relevant to whatever stage one is at, will be relevant in a year’s time, etc. Sometimes it’s possible that the *pīti* in particular is an acquired taste. We’re not actually sure how keen we are on it at first. That’s definitely possible. It’s actually possible with any *jhāna*. It can be we just fall in love with it right away, and feel its loveliness, feel it as a resource, super-excited about it. Or it might be that it’s an acquired taste. So this could potentially be for any *jhāna*.

[25:54] What’s an interesting thing that happens, I’d say with the majority of people, is that when they start working on the third *jhāna* – which is this very peaceful, exquisite sort of serenity; that’s one of the main characteristics of it – then when you go back to the first *jhāna* and the *pīti* and all that, it feels so coarse, and one becomes a bit of a snob. So one [thinks], “I don’t want anything to do with *that*,” because relatively speaking, it’s actually quite gross, relative to the third *jhāna*. Still, I would say, in the context of the whole of *jhāna* practice, we want to keep it. Again, I might have to re-find my enjoyment of it. I might have to re-feel it as enjoyable and pleasurable. It’s an interesting thing.

Sometimes (and this is actually quite common), if a person, if a practitioner has done a lot of insight meditation practice, the order in which they experience the *jhānas* is not one, two, three, four, etc. Mostly, the way insight meditation practice is taught is, you know, be mindful, and things come up, watch them, let them go, watch them, let them go, watch them, let them go. In that being aware, being mindful, and letting go, what am I cultivating there? I’m cultivating a kind of equanimity. And so what happens with many, many insight meditation [practitioners] – years of practice, retreats, etc. – one has actually kind of developed a groove in the *citta* towards equanimity. And maybe not a *jhānic* state of equanimity, but maybe some kind of ... I need to explain something later on about different kinds of equanimity. We’ll get to that at another point. But basically, equanimity is a common hanging-out place

for the mind that's done a lot of insight meditation.

And then what happens? One goes on a *jhāna* retreat. One wants to learn the *jhānas*. But what might happen is it just goes straight to – if not the fourth *jhāna*, something akin to that, or sort of a quasi-formless state, maybe where the senses are open, because there are states that are *like* infinite space or infinite consciousness, but they're actually not those *jhānas*. The senses are still kind of – I'll explain the difference later. But there's something akin to the four, five, six, for example. And it's actually quite hard for that person to get *pīti*, because again, *pīti* is too agitated, and the mind has this groove to equanimity. So they find themselves in some state that's maybe not the fourth *jhāna* or whatever, but maybe near enough that, actually, maybe – and this is the sort of thing I usually work out in an interview with a person – maybe it's good if we start with the fourth *jhāna*. We take that stillness that you've got, and we really hone it, and get it very consolidated, very bright, very powerful. And then, master *that*, and then go backwards, so the order of mastery doesn't happen: one, two, three, four. I feel like I've said that very clumsily, but does that make sense? Yeah?

So a lot of you have done a lot of insight practice as well. It's interesting. It's just something to be aware of. There can be this real almost like habit towards equanimity, and sometimes that habit can be both entrenched enough, but also powerful enough, in other words, that you keep finding yourself in a territory that's closer to the fourth. Sometimes a person skips the second *jhāna*, which is characterized by a lot of happiness, and there may be all kinds of psychological reasons for that. Or the *pīti* – I'm just a bit resistant to that. We touched on this yesterday. In terms of the *arūpa-jhānas*, the formless *jhānas* – again, doesn't necessarily go five, six, seven, eight. For me, if I remember back, I think the sixth one was easier than the fifth, and I kind of was trying to learn them both at the same time. But certain minds, dependent on their inclinations and experience and trainings, will find different of the formless *jhānas* also easier than others. I don't think anyone will find the eighth *jhāna* easier than the others, but maybe it's okay to follow the order in which things open up for you.

But I retain my vision of, "Where are we going with this?" It's like, you know, imagine a sort of square, a check-off square for mastery of each of the eight *jhānas*: can I really hang out and sustain? Can I marinate? Can I get it at will? Can I jump around from it? And you go, "Okay, eventually, what I want is to look at that square for each of the eight *jhānas* and all of those mastery skills, and just have them all ticked." The order in which that ticking happens maybe doesn't matter so much. So it kind of depends. Now, I haven't, so far, heard that from anyone on the retreat, but I encounter it quite commonly as a teacher. The past tendency and experience in meditation, grooves in meditation, actually very much affect what opens up, when, and in what order.

But we *do* want this differentiation. We really, really – it's so, so important. This is this, and that's that. This is the second *jhāna*, and that's the third *jhāna*. This is the first *jhāna*, and that's the second. This is *pīti*, and that's *sukha* – whatever it is. It's part of the cultivation, the development of sensitivity. Without that differentiation, as I said, something will kind of grind to a soupy, squidgy halt at some point. It will be nice, but the possibility of really deepening insight will be limited.

So each *jhāna* to the next *jhāna* is kind of like a quantum leap. It's kind of like, "I'm in a different realm now." And mostly that's the experience. You know what 'quantum leap' means? It means there's nothing in between. Here's something, and *here's* something, and it's not that there's anything in between. I'm just here, and then suddenly I'm *here*. Yeah? Quantum leap. Mostly that's the experience.

They're discrete, quantumly differentiated states. But sometimes it will seem to you as much more of a spectrum. Like, "No, it actually *is* a continuum." Sometimes it will be experienced that way. And we can also *view* it that way. But I would say it's really important to have this discrete sense of quantum leaps between states.

Okay. One really large point (which I mentioned, I think, in one of the first two talks): rather than "Am I in or out of a *jhāna*?", can I just be thinking about *jhāna* practice?⁴ It's quite a different shift. So that means, for instance, the hindrances are part of *jhāna* practice. The place when I'm not sure whether I'm in or out – it doesn't really matter. The place where I said those terriers, where sort of I can just hear them yapping. Maybe they do feel distant; they're on the edge of the consciousness. It's still *jhāna* practice, okay? And if I have that view, it's going to be much, much more fruitful, much more intelligent.

So I have this view of a big picture of *jhāna* practice, which include a huge range of territory of experience – not just these sharply defined (so-called) eight *jhānas*, but the whole territory. The grey areas, the "I'm clearly in a hell realm now," the whatever – even the way I walk around outside (which I'll come to) in between formal sittings – it's *jhāna* practice, because I'm walking around outside in a different way than I would if I was doing a Mahāsi retreat, a Goenka retreat, if I was just hanging out, if I was on my way to work. So this is huge, actually, this view. What that means is there's work (as I said when I introduced the talk today) or play, dependent on your favourite word, *in* and *out* – on and off the cushion, but also in and out of a *jhāna*.

The first time you enter what's a new *jhāna* for you – let's say, the first time you hit the first *jhāna* or the second *jhāna* or whatever – what's quite common is that it *seems* completely effortless, the first maybe few times in that new realm. You've made that quantum jump, and it seems completely effortless. The idea of *working* there, or *doing* something, or *playing* with something, seems just a million miles away. It certainly won't even occur to you, if you haven't been told about it. If you're just skipping through *jhānas* really fast, you won't notice this. You'll miss 99 per cent of what's valuable about *jhānas*. You're just skipping right through, and it's like, like I said, skipping – "I've seen the Taj Mahal. I went there, and I pointed my phone at it while I was looking at something else." If you hang out, if you really marinate, if you really start working, and playing, and bringing all your sensitivity and intelligence and awareness and openness, and getting really intimate, and getting to know them, after a few times at a new level that you've broken to, you start to realize, "Oh, there *is* work to do here. Or there *is* play to do. There's lots to do." But it's very, very subtle. We're talking about very subtle work, play, mostly – yeah, definitely, mostly. So if you still feel it's a completely effortless state where you can't do anything, it's actually that you're in some kind of unconsciousness, and it's not going to be very helpful, and it's not going to deepen, it's not going to be very helpful in your life, etc.

So then the work begins. "Okay, I've had my little holiday at this new level," and then the work and the play begins. And I get used to this – what is it for the mind to really work in the most delicate ways, to really play in the most delicate ways, to learn about this *jhāna*, to consolidate it, to deepen it, etc., to learn about its different spaces, levels, textures, aspects?

It can also be the case, and it commonly is the case that when we reach, when consciousness reaches a new level, when the *citta* reaches a new level, it's a bit like a dam bursting. Again, the first experience of the first *jhāna* or the second *jhāna*, it's as if a dam has just broken apart, and the water is

just gushing through. It can be very, very intense. And then, again, as I get used to that *jhāna*, it seems to get less intense, the experience, or it often can.

So, what ‘work’? What ‘play’? What’s involved there? The principle of moving between these modes of attention – the probing, the receiving, the wider, the narrower, etc. – that’s part of the work. Again, it’s quite subtle, but it’s part of the work. There’s something active in a *jhāna*. There are other modes of attention that are possible: I could wrap the *jhānic* quality around the body and dissolve it in, or dissolve my body out – there are many things. Play. Find modes of attention that work. So you know, creative. Even if I say “*savour* whatever is the primary *nimitta*, the primary factor, like the *pīti* in the first *jhāna*,” to really relish it, to really savour it actually involves a kind of active work. If I really want to relish it to the max, I actually have to play with how I’m relating to it.

There’s an acronym that some of you who have met over the years with me individually have heard. What do I need? When I’m in a *jhāna*, I need to know: what do I need to do now? As I said, at first, it’s: “Oh, I don’t do anything. I’m just there.” It’s going along. I’m going along on this momentum of the water through the burst dam. I’m not doing anything. I’m just like, “Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow!” After a while, you see, “Oh, hold on. There *is* work to do,” etc. What’s the work that I have to do? What’s important, and what’s not important? Because what’s important tells me what work I have to do. What’s not important – it’s not part of the work that I have to do.

So there’s an acronym: SASSIE. I’m not just sitting there. I’m doing something. Don’t just sit there – do something! Isn’t that the name of a book? No, it’s the other way around. [laughs] Don’t just sit there. Do something! Sometimes. Sometimes you can go into non-doing, but again, that’s really, in the larger context, just a mode. It’s just a mode. So, SASSIE:

(1) First **S** stands for **Suffusion**. As the Buddha said, “suffusing, saturating the whole body.”⁵ So this is one of the things I’m working towards. Once the *pīti* is there, I’m working towards: make sure, or can I encourage, can I help the whole body space to be completely, homogeneously suffused and saturated by the *pīti*? At some point, it *will* be suffused and saturated. It’s just done. And then that job is done. There’s nothing more to do. It’s done. What else am I going to do? It’s suffused and saturated, right? So it’s done. And we’ve talked about ways of playing with that, and what to do when it doesn’t quite work.

(2) The **A** – SASSIE, the second one: **A** for **Absorption**. So sometimes (I don’t know if you’ve had this experience), it’s almost as if the *pīti* (or whatever it is, the happiness, whatever) can feel almost like ‘in front’ of you a little bit, as if your *citta* and body are *here* somehow, and it’s kind of ‘in front,’ or something like that. We’re aiming: can I get more absorbed in it? Can I put myself and put the *citta* kind of more ‘inside’ it, so I really feel like I’m ‘in’ something? Now, to me, I would say, that absorption – there’s no limit to it. There’s no limit to it.

I want to say something else about the **Suffusion**. Can I say that, then come back to the **Absorption**? Is that okay? Yeah? So when I’m trying to suffuse, I’m not, like, *looking, feeling* around my body: “Which spaces don’t have *pīti*?” That’s almost like turning your attention to the negative a little bit. It’s more like, just don’t take it away from the *pīti*, and look, “Oh,” obsessed with what’s wrong. Just let the *pīti* spread – spread it out like you’re spreading, you know, jam on toast or whatever, rather than attending to the negative. Remember that subtle inclination towards negativity, towards

what's wrong, towards "not quite good enough." So eventually, as I said, when we become more and more familiar with *pīti*, and more and more familiar with moving in and out of the first *jhāna*, the *pīti* will be spread every time. It's just normal. And eventually, when we're more and more familiar with it, with the *pīti*, as I mentioned yesterday, and I put a lot of emphasis on this, we can start, if we want, sometimes, to see pain, to play with perception so we see pain as *pīti*. That painful area in the body, I see it as *pīti*, and it's therefore pleasurable. You can do that all the way through the *jhānas*. So I could the same painful spot as 'happiness,' or 'stillness,' or 'nothingness,' or whatever. (Again, I don't think the eighth *jhāna*.)

Now, when I say that, what's the point of that? It's not like, "Oh, that's a pretty handy thing. That can come in useful, if you're uncomfortable on a long bus ride or whatever it is." Yes, it might, but that's not really the point. And it's certainly not the point to try and, "Oh, now I can do that. Then I can live a pain-free life." That's not the point either. The Buddha had plenty of pain. I have plenty of pain. That's not the point. The point is, it's telling me something about the malleability of perception. It's telling me something about the dependence of appearances and experiences on the way of looking. Dependent on the way of looking, there's this experience; dependent on another way of looking, there's a different appearance, a different experience. And when I understand the emptiness of all things – in other words, that all appearances, all experiences *do* depend on the way of looking – when I really understand that, it empowers, or rather, it tells me about, that *means* that perceptions are malleable, and it empowers my ability to be malleable with perception.

So I think it was yesterday, I said this is the most significant thing. This is the most significant thing in the Dharma. This is the most significant thing. I think I said it's *more* significant than "Is this a correct *jhāna*? Am I in or out of that *jhāna*?" Right? I said that, yeah? It's the most significant thing, but it's not our primary emphasis or intention on this retreat. So as a *practice modality*, it's secondary. In other words, just play with that a little bit, once you're familiar with *pīti* and another *jhāna* factor. It doesn't become, like, the main practice. So philosophically, and in terms of its implications for our life and our understanding and our liberation, it's the most significant thing. In the context of a *jhāna* retreat, it's a secondary practice. It's just something you can play with now and then.

So back to the absorption thing. Can it be the case that we can be so absorbed that we don't hear sounds? For instance, you don't hear the birds chirp or sing, or whatever it is. The sense doors close. Again, the Pali Canon, the Buddha doesn't describe the first four *jhānas* that way. The *Visuddhimagga* does, I think.⁶ Sometimes in the Pali Canon the Buddha says that happens in the formless *jhānas*, in *jhānas* five to eight.⁷ But in other passages, the Buddha doesn't say that. He describes them with the senses still open.⁸ Obviously, the *Visuddhimagga* is an improvement over what the Buddha said, right?

Hold on. Make sure you don't have a notion of heresy. Or *do* you have a notion of heresy? Because some people approach Dharma as, "Axiomatically, from the beginning, whatever the Buddha said is true and right and the authority." Actually, probably, I don't know what percentage of Buddhists approach Buddhism that way. So how are you doing with that one? Is it possible that someone who lived after the Buddha could improve on the Buddha's teaching? [pause, nervous laughter]

Yogi: Why not?

Rob: I would say exactly the same thing: "Why not?" But I really mean that as a question, an actual question. If you think it's not possible, *why*? Why is it not possible? How are you thinking about the

whole thing that something like that becomes not possible? In every other field of human endeavour, there's the possibility of improving on what went [before]. So Einstein improved on Newton, who improved on Copernicus. At the moment, they're saying, "Well, maybe something's wrong with Einstein's theory. We're going to need to improve on *that* pretty soon." So that's just an interesting – I'm not going to go into it. I've talked about it in other situations.

But if we say either you just have, "The Buddha's right," and then it's not a question; how do we decide about, "Do the senses close? Do I hear the birds, or do I not hear the birds?" If you decide the Buddha's right, you hear the birds, okay? If you decide it's *possible* that someone could improve on the Buddha, then it's a bit more open. If you ask me, did anyone in the history of Buddhism improve on the Buddha, or on certain aspects of the Buddha's teaching? I would say, yeah, I think Nāgārjuna did. I think he took what the Buddha kind of said a little bit but didn't expand on too fully – if you know the *Kaccāyana Sutta* and the Middle Way between existence and non-existence.⁹ To me, it's all there in the Pali Canon, and Nāgārjuna took it and really expanded it, and worked it, and took its implications. And to me, really, there's an improvement. I'm not thrusting this on anyone, but just, if you ask me.

How are we going to decide about this one? The *Visuddhimagga* saying your senses close, you can't hear the birds – is that an improvement or not an improvement? I mean, certainly we're talking about a 'better' absorption, right? More intense absorption, because you can't hear anything – must be better, right? It's more. More is better. [laughter] Sorry.

Again, I'd like us to use our intelligence. If we're going to say it's better, *why* is it better? Why is it better that more absorption is better? And that will connect, again, back to what I was talking about at the beginning: how am I thinking? How am I conceiving of the whole *jhānas*? How am I conceiving of awakening? And how am I conceiving of the *jhānas* and their place [in relation] to awakening? So why is that more absorption would be better? You have to kind of explain the whole, "What are we doing? Where are we going? What are we doing with *jhānas*?"

And you *can* – there are conceptions that, again, conceive of *jhānas* as like, "Yeah, must be like, if I really get this laser-beam attention, then that's better, because insight arises from a laser-beam attention that can dissect momentary reality into the super-fast momentary passing and arising of the aggregates. And that's ultimate reality, and I've seen that through my laser-beam attention," *if* I think that's the ultimate insight. I've been through all this. I'm not going to repeat it.

But *is more better*? What is the fruit of that 'more absorption'? And again, you can turn things around. Hang out with people who have that degree of absorption, or who say they have, or whatever. Hang out with them. Learn about how they are, how their life is, how their insight is. Talk to them about deep insight things. Does it bear fruit? Or what fruit does it bear?

So absorption – I would say it's infinite. However absorbed we are, again, the question here is: what work, what am I trying to do in practice, in this moment, in this *jhāna*, or with this *pīti*, what am I trying? I'm trying to get more absorbed. But I can never reach the end of that. Someone says, "Oh, I didn't hear the birds." Another person says, "Oh, well, someone was sawing off my neck with a chainsaw, and I didn't feel anything!" It's like, "Okay, that person's better than that ..." It doesn't *matter*! What's the fruit? But basically, in terms of work and play, it gives us a direction. And however absorbed I am, I can be more. But I don't need to worry so much about it. It's just a little bit more. It's not like, "Do I have it? Do I not have it? Is it a *jhāna* because I can still hear the birds?" It's not that

question. It's just, it gives you a direction that's open-ended. And that, in a way, takes the pressure off. And it avoids this whole question of "Do I have it? Do I not have it?"

So the work with that one, when you're suffused in the first S, it's just done. I've done it. Okay. I don't have to bother about it. With this one, it's just a constant part of the creative working and playing. Is it possible to get more inside it? Is it possible to get really, really into it? And it's open. It's a direction that invites subtle work and play, but it's not something I'm going to fret about. One day might be better than the other – *it doesn't matter*.

(3) Okay. S, A, two S's in the middle of SASSIE: Sustaining. **Sustaining the *pīti* in the case of the first *jhāna*, or whatever is the primary *nimitta* of whatever *jhāna* you're working in,** and **(4) sustaining the attention on that.** These two, as well, I would say they're infinite, and they're infinite in their possibilities. So however much we sustain, we can always increase the sustaining. And if you look closely enough, and I *don't* want you to do this at the moment, you can see that even when it's so sustained, the attention is so, so sustained, just have to look at it in a certain way, and see that there are micro-nanoseconds where it wasn't. But *don't* do that, and I'll explain why at the end. It's a direction I'm working towards: "Okay, this is right now what I need to work on: really sustaining, really keeping the mind on this subtle object, on this refined object." Or if it feels like there are gaps in the *pīti* or the happiness or whatever, if I look at it closely enough, I will see gaps. So it's something to bring a little more discernment, intelligence to. It's just, however sustained those things are, they can be more sustained. So I'm working. They're a direction of work, a direction of play, as opposed to an *achievement thing* and a *definition thing* – I define, "It was, it wasn't a *jhāna*, because it was all going great, and then I heard one bird chirp. So at that second there, I was out of the *jhāna*, and then the next second I was back in." It's not that helpful to think that way. Just work on more sustaining.

(5) S, A, S, S, **I.** The **I** is for **Intensity**. So in this case, if we're talking about the first *jhāna*, it's the intensity of *pīti*. And I would say that actually doesn't matter. So again, the very common tendency will be like, "Well, it must be better if it's more intense, right?" No! It actually doesn't matter. It has to be strong enough that it's pleasant, and that's it. The intensity will vary over time, you will notice. You will also notice, if you play with certain things, sometimes there are things you can do that build the intensity. Over time, with the first *jhāna* – like, I mean a lot of time in and out of first *jhāna*, a lot of marinating, a lot of experience and skill developing with it – the intensity will actually get less intense. It's like that mountain river that I was talking about. *That's* the direction of maturation, not more and more intensity. So there's a certain way that the intensity of the first *jhāna* (A) doesn't matter, and (B) will anyway, in its own time, get less intense.

(6) S, A, S, S, **I, E** is for ... [dramatic pause] **Enjoy!** Which sometimes I find myself having to say to people, it's almost like you want to meditate with a flashing neon sign that says: "ENJOY, ENJOY, ENJOY, ENJOY, ENJOY." Sometimes, it's almost like, I say, you know, it may be that if you just really seek to maximize enjoyment in the moment, over and over, with whatever ingenuity and creativity and play you want, that *that* will basically take you where you want to go, and whatever needs to happen will happen, just from the intention to maximize enjoyment. Very different from "Is this it? Is this not

it? Am I doing it right?”, etc.

But how many times have I heard, from retreatants practising *jhāna*, how difficult it is to allow oneself to really enjoy, to fully enjoy? And how, so often, we notice there’s something holding back, or something blocking or preventing. And sometimes it’s verbal; we actually say, “Oh, this can’t be right. This can’t be. I don’t know what they’re teaching here, but it’s not proper. It’s not proper Dharma,” or whatever it is. Sometimes, or more often, it’s actually more an energetic thing. We actually just feel ourselves holding back or preventing, and then doubt comes: “Is this really okay?”, etc. Sometimes it’s because of one’s past – maybe particular kinds of religious upbringings that kind of stress that “Anything spiritual or religious *can’t* have enjoyment, have anything to do with it.” Sometimes it might be our Dharma background, our Buddhist Dharma background that has, again, encouraged a sort of snobbishness around enjoyment. Again, all because of certain views around what we’re going, and then certain views that get kind of entrenched in terms of persona, and all the rest of it. This is so common. This is really, really common.

What needs to happen with this? Sometimes, a person needs to actually inquire with themselves or with a friend, or with a teacher, or whatever: actually, what are the views? What am I believing here? And what’s actually at the root of this psychology, this belief? Perhaps more often, though, it just gets fixed without a big psychological process. It just gets fixed, moment to moment: “Okay, I notice I’m a little bit holding back. The last of E of SASSIE – can I just enjoy it? This moment – can I just really savour it and relish it? Can I just really open to it?” So you’re just, moment to moment, encouraging the enjoyment, and that is changing the psychological habit patterns, the deeply entrenched psychological habit patterns around enjoyment, around spirituality, etc. More often, I’ve noticed, it can be healed, that pattern, that holding, that prevention can be healed just by moment to moment, again and again – I don’t have to have a big psychological process about it. But sometimes, some people do; it’s really helpful to inquire into that.

[59:30] The work, the play – it’s very labile; it’s very responsive; it’s very agile. What is the work, play, right now? What do I need to do right now? And sometimes it is: enjoy what you have. Enjoy what you have. Maximize the enjoyment. Again, how powerful that “It’s not quite good enough. It’s not as good as it was yesterday,” etc. And that micro-tendency of the psychology, of the view, to pooh-pooh what we have, or to find fault, to look [for faults]. Actually, what happens is, of everything we could pay attention to – something nice is going on, something that could be better – we pay attention to the thing that could be better. It’s an inclination of attention, even more than it is of actual thought. “No, this really isn’t that good” – that’s quite a gross level. Sometimes it’s just where the attention goes: I’m fussing over what’s not quite right. So just enjoy what you have. Enjoy the good thing. Sometimes that’s the emphasis that needs to be there. That’s such a great gift in terms of re-educating, re-programming the psyche. Over and over and over, these micro-moments bring psychological change.

And at other times, it’s pleasant, it’s nice, it’s good, it’s going well, the mind is definitely stable, good feeling, whatever it is, *pīti*, *sukha*, whatever, but there’s just a *slight*, very, very slight dullness. So what’s happening? I’m not falling asleep or anything. It could be one needs to actually bring more presence – you know, talking very subtle now – bring more aliveness, bring more alertness. One needs to actually exercise more experimentation and play, rather than just sit there and, “It’s okay. It’s good. It’s fine.” Probe more, or whatever it is, play with that intensity up and down, play with the modes of

intention, etc. So sometimes, something's pleasant. We think, "Oh, that's good." But actually, what we need to do, for example, is: "Now, can I really ramp up the intensity of the attention in this moment, and really penetrate that?"

So often, as I said, this business of intensity of attention – many people are not [familiar], because you don't get taught that in school. So we need to familiarize ourselves. What is it in this moment? What does it feel like? And how do I do it – turn the intensity up, for example? But that will take me, in some moments, to another level. At other times, it will be more just the receptivity. Other times, we don't fuss with trying to make it better. Just enjoy it. So what we need to do at any moment is a constantly shifting ground, kaleidoscope, etc.

What's quite common – I mentioned, for instance, this experience of light, a sort of white light or golden light. That's pretty common. I call that a 'secondary *nimitta*.' It's a secondary sign that the *samādhi* is deepening. The primary one – again, if we're talking about the first *jhāna*, the primary one is the *pīti*. What can happen is, the bright light starts to get very interesting, and the *pīti* is there as well. This is quite important: can I blend them? Because the light is good, and it's helpful, and it's a sign. But can I mix them? So they're almost like, they're just two aspects of the same thing, two facets of the same thing, so that if I'm kind of probing, if I'm probing the *pīti*, it's the same as probing the light. I have the experience that probing the *pīti* is probing the light. And if I'm probing the light, because I can probe the light as something that will take me deeper into the *pīti* – in other words, they're just aspects of the same phenomenon. If I can't blend them, then I have to be really sure: what's primary and what's secondary? And the light is secondary. Just leave it. It's fine. It's a good sign, but it's not the primary thing. The primary thing is the *pīti*, and that's what I'm trying to get into. But oftentimes it is possible – do you understand what I mean, "mix them together"? It's almost like visually entering the light is the same thing as entering the *pīti*, for example.

Yogi: [inaudible question, probably about the two S's in the middle of SASSIE]

Rob: They're both referring to **Steadiness**. One is **Steadiness of the attention**. And one is **Steadiness of the primary *nimitta***, so steadiness of the *pīti* – in other words, it doesn't go away for a second or whatever and come back. Or if it's second *jhāna*, it's the happiness, or whatever. So two kinds of sustaining.

We use this term 'mastery,' and all this is part of developing mastery. Mastery is not about measuring the self and kind of getting brownie points and ego stuff. It's about working with the *jhānas* in a way that they're going to really be most fruitful. So what happens? Here I am meditating, and now I've gotten into the first *jhāna*, and it's trundling along very nicely, and then something happens. I've just been thrown out of that realm. I'm not even sure what happened. I've just been ejected. Or it kind of was, "Oh, it feels like it's losing power a little bit," and then it's gone.

So after – well, you can try this from the beginning. Once you feel like, "Okay, this must be the territory of the first *jhāna*, sort of" – when that happens, when you lose it, see if you can just remember it. Just *remember back* the first *jhāna*, or whatever it is. Just see if you can do that. It was a recent experience; it was alive; just remember it back. Just summon it back. It's a very delicate, light movement. Of course, sometimes you won't be able to, and you'll have to go back to your base or springboard practice. Or if you're on another *jhāna*, you might find a *jhāna* lower down, or whatever.

So these are all things you can try. Towards the end of a sitting, if you're not completely out of

energy, you could practise (just a couple of minutes or whatever, two or three minutes, five minutes) deliberately going from – let’s say you were in the first *jhāna* or thereabouts. You deliberately go from there to a kind of more normal consciousness. You just drop – just come out of it deliberately. Spend some time there – a few moments, a few whatever. And then see if you can come back to the first *jhāna* – just jump straight back into the first *jhāna*. So you’re more deliberately jumping.

All this, what I’m going to give you, ideas to try, it’s all very light. It’s just fun and games. It’s just play. I mean, it is part of mastery, but you have to have a very light attitude to it. You’re just playing with perception, basically, playing with consciousness, playing with realms.

Now, we talked about walking meditation instructions, right? Should I just briefly go through that again? Yeah? Again, all this applies to: where is my learning edge playground? So let’s say I’m now getting used to the first *jhāna*. I’ve been in and out. And it’s super-exciting, and I’m into it. When I go to the walking period, I stand at one end of my walking path, and I just see: can I go to the energy body, remember back the first *jhāna*? And I just stand there. Maybe *pīti* comes. And I just stand, and get into the *pīti*, and work with it, suffuse it, etc. – the same deal. And I stand there as long as it takes, or as long as I want to. So I could spend the whole walking period just standing there, and it becomes a standing period. It’s fine.

Or after some minutes, when I feel like, “Okay, there’s the *pīti*, and I’m kind of really – yeah, it’s really yummy, I’m really into it, whole body, everything.” Then I can begin to walk. The question is: can I keep that focus? Can I keep the primacy of the *pīti* around as I’m walking? And how fast do I have to walk to do that? The interesting thing is, I might need to walk really fast. Or I might need to walk really slow. So I have to be really responsive to find, what is the pace? All of this is responsive – sensitive and responsive. [1:09:34] And I can stop anywhere on the path and get into the *pīti* again, go to the end, take my time, however long I want. Basically, I’m walking up and down in the *pīti*, and focusing on the *pīti*, in that bubble, and enjoying and opening and probing that bubble, yeah? Those are the basic walking instructions. We can come back to that.

Now, some of this, what I’m going to put out now, actually, you have to be a little careful with the pacing of when you try it. But after you’ve had enough experience or familiarity with the first *jhāna* and the *pīti*, then, let’s say you’re in the lunch queue. And it’s not your turn to dole the food on your plate. But you’re in the lunch queue. Can I be there in the lunch queue, and just remember back the *pīti*, and maybe even the whole *jhānic* state? And maybe you get it back, and then can I get into it for thirty seconds, a minute? If it’s a really slow lunch queue, you can – however long. Or you’re having a cup of tea in the lounge or the library: “Just let me see. Can I find the *pīti*? Is it there? Can I summon it? Can I remember it, and then get into it?” Or you’re walking down the corridor here: “Let’s just see. I walk down the corridor – let’s see if I can walk down the corridor in the *pīti*.” I’m just remembering or summoning it – very, very light. Or you’re sitting on the toilet, or you’re lying down in bed before – whatever.

So what you’re really doing is deliberately remembering the state, deliberately remembering the perception, actually, and the subtlest of intentions, the subtlest of intentions to recall it. So you have to have enough familiarity with the *pīti* and the *jhāna* for this, to begin to try this. You don’t want to try it too early, because it would just be a bit frustrating. Sometimes, a little whisper, a silent whisper in the mind – for instance, ‘rapture’ (one of the translations of *pīti*) or ‘bliss’ or whatever, or ‘*pīti*,’ if you want

Pali. Just like a grain of something into the *citta*, and it does its magic. The mind, as *samādhī* gets deeper and deeper, the mind becomes more and more suggestive. Very, very subtle suggestions actually work their magical power. But this needs enough familiarity. Like I said, you don't want to try it too early or put too much pressure on. This is the sort of thing that, in one-to-one interviews, I might wait until I suggest this to a person. You get the sense, and sometimes I find myself more aware that it's available. It's almost like you can feel it in them, but the person hasn't realized that it's just available yet, so: "Why don't you try this?"

Eventually, like I described in the walking period, actually, you can begin your sittings that way. You can begin with *pīti*, begin with the first *jhāna*, or if the third *jhāna* is your learning edge playground, you begin with the third *jhāna*. It's a very, very subtle intention, etc. Now of course, while you're still working on that, sometimes you're going to try it, and you know, "Okay, 'rapture!' ... Okay, 'rapture!'" [laughter] "Come on, now!" You know, five, ten minutes max. If it's not igniting, it's not igniting. Fine. Back to the base practice. But in time, this becomes, more than anything else, the way you get into *jhāna*. You just remember it. You just have this subtlest of intention. So this, as I said, is part of the elements of mastery.

We have to be careful with energy here, because one of the functions of the base practice or the springboard practice is actually that it gives energy. You build energy through it. So if you just start right away with the *pīti*, sometimes it will go for a little while, but the whole sitting, it will be sooner in the sitting when you kind of run out of it – sometimes. Other times not. The analogy I use sometimes is like a long jumper needs a run-up, but again, it's one of those analogies that really doesn't work when you think about it. [laughter] Because there are some long jumpers that don't need run-ups, sometimes! Okay, I'll rework that one. [laughter] In other words, sometimes we might find the *pīti* – great, but then fifteen minutes later, it's all just dissipated. We didn't have enough energy built up from the base practice. But it's still worth playing with. At that point, okay, go back to the base practice; doesn't matter! What's more important here is the malleability.

So when you get to that point – and again, don't hurry all this. Some people, it's like they're hearing all this, and they want to try it immediately, and it's too soon. Other people, they [think]: "Oh, I couldn't possibly do that. That sounds completely advanced and outlandish." And actually, they're ready for it. So talk with us about it. Try a little bit. It's all very light. But probably wait for these things. And at first – not every time – just occasionally try it. "Okay, I'm going to my sitting now, and let's see if I can get it just by subtle intention." But not every time. Eventually it is possible.

Okay, then I'm sitting, and it's all going really well. What do I do? What do I do then? I sit. And I sit more. And I sit more. I basically sit as long as it's good. And 'good' means, primarily, as long as *this jhāna* is good. Marinate. So yes, there's a place for moving quickly between *jhānas*, but that's got a very minor place. Much more, we want to marinate. Sit as long as this *jhāna* is sustainable and feels good. So this marination business is so important. We want to work towards, like, let's say, a minimum – *minimum*, I'm able to sit in really nice *pīti*, really pretty absorbed, for an hour. Let's just throw something like that out for a minimum, if I don't have to go to my work job or whatever it is.

If I'm zipping through one to eight – let's say, I just zip through one to eight, and then I come back down eight to one, and that's my practice, and I 'practise the *jhānas*' – my question is: is that making much difference to your life? Really, honestly ask yourself: is that making much difference? *What*

difference is it making? How much difference? And if it's not, why are you practising that way? Why would I keep doing that? Maybe someone's taught me that way. Maybe that's my understanding of the text, whatever. But why? The point of all this is to make a difference: a real, profound, liberating, beautiful difference, a whole depth of resource, and all the other stuff we talked about. So the marination is one of the primary things that will really make the difference.

So I'm sitting as long as I can within my playground – let's say that's the *pīti* of the first *jhāna* – and then at some point, I start to run out of batteries. The whole thing – my energy goes a little bit. So either the *pīti* begins to subside, mind starts to get a bit more distracted, or areas of the body start to get uncomfortable – pain or whatever. Is it possible to resurrect it? So I've run out of batteries, but sometimes it's almost like you get a little emergency supply somewhere that you can tap into. And I just resurrect the *pīti*, find a way, and it comes back for some minutes, perhaps. Maybe (this is all very variable) you get a couple of shots at an extra five or ten minutes, just by resurrecting it. So just the fact that it disappeared doesn't mean you can't somehow find a way to get it back. Maybe that involves going back to your base or springboard practice, etc.

But at a certain point, it's like, "Okay, there's no more juice in the tank. It's not going to come back." Then, time to do something different. Either you get up and you do walking meditation, standing meditation, or you just go and have a cup of tea. Go and relax, rest the *citta*, appreciate, look at the beauty outside. Put the mind in that just restful, open, light gratitude. Maybe it's time for your yoga practice or whatever it is. Maybe you go for a walk. But there will be times in this kind of practice where you need to rest. You just need to rest, if we're doing it this way. Don't sit-walk-sit-walk-sit-walk. You actually need to rest and recharge.

So again, you have to be a little careful about the pacing of when you begin to try this stuff, but eventually, as I mentioned, part of mastery is that you can go for a walk – not just walking meditation, but you can go for a walk *in* your bubble of *pīti*, and giving that the primary attention. Or you can go for a walk in your bubble of peacefulness of the third *jhāna*, or stillness of the fourth *jhāna*, or whatever. And your primary focus is on that quality, that primary quality – stillness, peacefulness, *pīti*, whatever it is – and you're really enjoying it, and you're not really having to worry about where the feet place themselves, etc. So again, when is it time to introduce this, introduce trying to play with this? You can talk to us and find out, or just try it. You don't want to put too much pressure, and you have to be a little careful with the pacing here. But at first, it's all just games. So, "Okay, let's see if I can walk from *here* to that tree over there in *pīti*." And maybe it's fifty yards, or whatever. It doesn't matter. And then gradually, you can extend that. This is part of the fun, part of the playing, and part of the mastery. No pressure, very light. It's really just playfulness.

Let's say you're sitting, and it's time to come out of the *jhāna* now. The lunch bell goes, and if you're into it, it's like, "Aww, who cares about lunch?" And that's a very healthy response. And then suddenly you remember, "Oh, I have the lunch wash-up to do, so I need my lunch." So then, "Okay, I need to end." Sometimes, at first, coming out of a *jhāna*, you need to do it quite slowly, because it's really quite an altered state. So if you just open your eyes and jump up, it might be a bit disorienting and jarring. So when you're new to certain states, I would suggest coming out quite gradually.

But secondly, as part of that, sometimes, why don't you see if it's possible to kind of keep the *jhānic* quality around? Keep a connection with that, and have that even be the primary focus. So okay,

I'm going now to lunch, or whatever it is, I'm sitting, open the eyes. As I open the eyes, I'm still really in touch with the *pīti*, if we're talking about the first *jhāna*, or whatever it is. As I get up, still; as I move out – maybe as I move out, I begin to lose it. So I just stop a little bit, see if I can get it back, and move again. Again, it's all playfulness.

I'll say this again, but when we get to the higher *jhānas*, you don't need to come out in sequence. So right now we're talking about the first *jhāna*, but let's say you're working on the third *jhāna*. When you come out, you don't need to go, "Okay, three, two, one." You don't need to do it, just as you don't need to go "one, two, three" to get into the third *jhāna*. So sometimes you can do that, but that's just because that's the game you've decided to play that day. You could do three, one, two, and then come out, or three to zero, or whatever. But you certainly don't need to do that.

Okay, a couple of things, in a way implicit in what I've said, but it's so important – couple of things about effort: patience and perseverance. The more you do this, the more you realize that the state of the *citta* and the perception, there can be quantum jumps in a split second, in this kind of practice – often unexpectedly. Nothing's really happening, nothing's really happening – suddenly, there's an opening. If I'm getting dejected and despondent when nothing is happening, and I'm getting impatient, and I'm kind of giving up the alertness and refinement of my antennae, that very attitude will prevent these quantum jumps happening, because I've turned something off. In other words, don't get sucked into impatience. Don't get sucked into a view of, "Oh, this is terrible," or whatever. Then your antennae are there, and it's really quite remarkable how quickly things can shift. There's just a quantum leap, and suddenly a door is there, and you can go through it. [1:23:17] So that's part [of it]: patience and perseverance, because that kind of thing is possible.

But patience and perseverance *with playfulness* – really, really important – meaning, "Do I need to be a bit more active here? Do I need to kind of bump up the sense of presence, the aliveness? Do I need to make sure my antennae are attentive to subtleties? Do I need to try different things? Do I need to play with the subtle effort levels a bit more, a bit less?" So patience and perseverance, but with playfulness.

And always this question: what needs emphasizing? What needs prioritizing right now? Right now in this moment, what needs emphasizing? What needs prioritizing? Is it, in this moment, or for this little stretch of time, that the concentration, the stability of attention on the object, on the breath or the primary *nimitta*, the *pīti*, whatever – is that what needs the emphasis right now, the priority? Or is it the subtlety of attention that needs the emphasis and the priority now? Or is it the surrendering? Or is it the spreading? Or is it the maximizing of the enjoyment, moment to moment? These are all different emphases: "Okay, now for this little stretch in this practice period, that's what I'm emphasizing, or that's what *needs* emphasizing." This is what I mean by a kind of playfulness, agility, responsiveness, willingness.

Some of you might have heard the instruction to review a *jhāna* after you're out. Has anyone heard that before? A couple of people, yeah. So this a little bit gets interpreted in different ways, but I'd say, one of the things is, one of the questions to ask is: was there anything new that I learnt there? Was there anything new for me, anything helpful that I learnt? In other words, there something happened that felt like it was an opening, an improvement, a deepening or whatever in some way. Was it anything different that I did, perhaps? Anything at all. And just to remember it at that point before you get up,

and try it again. And it might have been a coincidence. It might not have been that thing. But it might be, yes, it was that thing that you did, or did differently, or a different weighting or emphasis or whatever.

In the larger scale of things, you might want to check: “Am I neglecting the first and second *jhāna*?”, for instance. So it’s more of a macroscopic checking, reviewing. Sometimes, what you often hear is, part of the reviewing of a *jhāna*, after a *jhāna*, is to review the fact of its impermanence, lest you mistake a *jhāna* for a permanent thing. I find that a little puzzling, because it’s completely obvious, or it should be completely obvious that it’s impermanent. It should be completely obvious, or it becomes much more obvious with time that it’s also not an achievement of the self. A *jhāna* is dependent on certain causes and conditions coming together. And the more you practise, the more that should become glaringly obvious. There’s actually very little danger to get attached to expecting a *jhāna* to be permanent, and also very little danger to the self getting grandiose, I think.

It’s dependent on causes and conditions, so it’s definitely impermanent. It’s dependent on causes and conditions. It’s also empty. In terms of the deeper levels of its emptiness, don’t do that yet. Don’t contemplate its emptiness yet. Some of you won’t quite know what that means, but if you’re familiar with emptiness practice, leave that aside. It’s something we’ll come back to later as an option. And that’s not part of reviewing a *jhāna*. And also, its microscopic impermanence – don’t do that either. That will not be helpful at this point. We don’t want to deconstruct *jhānas* too soon. We want to let them construct. Deconstructing a *jhāna* too soon is really like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I’ve actually missed the point. We can always deconstruct later. What we want is actually to consolidate, to see it and experience it as something continuous and homogenous, not impermanent, with lots of holes in it, and not full of its opposite, etc.

Okay, last thing: outside of formal practice, and perhaps when you’re doing your work job, or you’re just having a shower, or whatever you’re doing, there are times when the *citta* needs to rest. You really need to not put too much pressure on it. But there’s a spectrum there, because still you can have quite a kind of light contact or light presence, light sense of the presence of the primary *jhāna* factor, the *pīti* or whatever. Either you can completely rest, just let the whole thing go, or you can be like, “I’m moving down the corridor, really in this *pīti*, or going for a walk in this *pīti*,” or you can just be moving around with just a light sense of the flavour of the primary *jhāna* factor, whether it’s *pīti* or *sukha* or whatever it is. Generally speaking, the whole sort of tone and tenor of the practice outside of sitting should be really quite light, really quite easy, open: just this light mindfulness, open, light, easy. That’s the vibe of things.

Again, remember, all this is *jhāna* practice, all of it. We also want to be vigilant to the coming and going of the hindrances, okay? And not take them personally, if that’s possible, and not believe them. But we’re aware, because they come, and they’re really like poison darts. A hindrance comes, and it spreads its poison into the *citta*, and then starts colouring the view of the self. It starts colouring the view of other people. It starts colouring the view of the perception, the view of the retreat. Hindrances are like poison darts. We need to be really quite aware when they’re around, not believe them, not take them personally.

Okay. So that’s good. We got through what I was intending. So what that means for tomorrow is, I may well be in, or depending on what happens, also I may not be in. But at least we’ve done that.

¹ E.g. AN 5:28.

² MN 43 and MN 111.

³ Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti, 1999).

⁴ Rob Burbea, “A Hidden Treasure: The Relationship with the Hindrances” (19 Dec. 2019), <https://dharmafeed.org/teacher/210/talk/60867/>, accessed 19 Feb. 2020.

⁵ E.g. AN 5:28.

⁶ Buddhaghosa, *Path of Purification*, 323–4.

⁷ MN 43, AN 9:37.

⁸ See Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, “Silence Isn’t Mandatory: Sensory Perception in the Jhānas” (2014), 17–20, <https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/CrossIndexed/Uncollected/MiscEssays/SilenceIsntMandatory4.pdf>, accessed 16 Feb. 2020.

⁹ SN 12:15.

12-22 Q & A

Q1: what is the source of the interpretation that *pīti* is primary in first *jhāna*, *sukha* in second; the translations of the words *pīti* and *sukha*

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. So Keren’s asking about the interpretation of *pīti* being primary in the first *jhāna*, and *sukha* being primary in the second *jhāna*, and also the translation of those words. No, as far as I know, that’s not in the Pali Canon, that the *pīti* is primary and the *sukha* is secondary, as far as I know. They’re both factors of both the first and second *jhāna*, as far as I know. I guess I’m just speaking from experience – also from how I was taught originally, or one of my teachers, in fact. So I’m just speaking from the way experience tends to mature. I think, even for people who are not told what to wait for, or don’t even know what they’re supposed to be looking for, it will just tend to mature that way.

As for the translations, yeah, it’s interesting reading. Sometimes you get ‘delight,’ or ‘pleasure,’ or ‘joy,’ or all kinds of different translations. I’m just speaking from experience about *pīti* as predominantly felt physically pleasure, although it’s a perception, and *sukha* as predominantly happiness, but that has a lot of wavelengths.

Boaz? Is that Boaz? Yeah.

Q2: the presence of *ekaggatā* in *jhāna* and other practices/states of consciousness

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, so Boaz is asking, in terms of this word *ekaggatā*, the way I translate it, what makes it special as a *jhānic* factor, versus a factor that might be present in any insight practice? So actually, in

the Abhidhamma, which, as I said, is – I don't know what you'd call it – very sort of black-and-white definitions about factors of consciousness in Theravādan Buddhism (actually, the Mahāyāna also have their own version), they say *ekaggatā*, as a factor, is present in *every state* of consciousness – so not even just in meditation or just in *jhāna*. The mind always has one thing prominent to some degree. It's a question of how *much* is one thing prominent.

Then you would tend to think, “Okay, well, the *ekaggatā* of the eighth *jhāna* must be better than the *ekaggatā* of the first *jhāna*,” but not necessarily. It can vary. I would say it can vary. But basically, it's just a factor, it's a fact of being conscious, of having a perception, that there's one thing that's kind of more prominent in the perception. So it's not particular to *samādhi* or *jhāna* practice. It gets *developed* more in *jhāna* practice. It becomes developed in a *jhānic* state or a *samādhi* state, but it's something that's there anyway with any moment of consciousness.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: It means it gets stronger and stronger, or you make it stronger and stronger. So, you know, a *jhānic* state is very absorbed. There's really just one thing. It's like you're *really* into that thing, more and more.

Q3: tuning to and emphasizing a specific quality for *jhāna* practice, or a different quality to move towards imaginal/soulmaking practice

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: So the question is, you've been told to sort of stay in the first *jhāna* as much as possible, but other states are coming up, and is it okay to go there? Should I go there and just trust them, or not? And I *want* to go there – they're much nicer. Yeah. Can you describe what they are, what's going on, what kind of ...?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Very settled? Yeah. Okay. So Wah is describing a place where it's like white velvet, and very settled, and like the breath of God is there, and very lovely. Yeah. So, you know, again, it's about context. If we're looking at things from a *jhāna* lens, of everything you just said, and we sort of map that onto a *jhāna* territory, which are the significant *nimittas* there, and which are the *less* significant *nimittas*? So if we're doing imaginal practice, soulmaking practice, then actually it's the breath of God that's the most significant thing there. And the fact that it's velvety is great, and the fact that it's serene is great, but actually it's the breath of God that is most significant.

If you're doing *jhāna* practice, then actually what's most significant is the serenity there. So it might be, from what you're saying – if we had a longer conversation – it might be that the serenity there is something akin to something in the third *jhāna*: it's much more kind of subtle and exquisite and lovely that way. It might be. We would have to have a slightly longer conversation. But if you want to

go into that and explore it, it's almost like *that* needs to become the primary *jhāna* factor, the serenity. And it might be that the sense of the breath of God and the white velvet support it for a while, but after a while they'll become kind of secondary, and you realize, "Oh, it's a territory that is characterized primarily by that kind of serenity," and you recognize its particular bandwidths, and those other factors are secondary. But it depends what you want. If you want *jhānas*, then it depends what we emphasize, what we pull out of that mix of what's most important.

It's funny – I only know you, really, from imaginal practice, so I don't know what else you've done in terms of insight practice and all that, but it could be, like I said today, it could be that for you there has been a training where the mind goes a lot towards a kind of serenity, and doesn't really like all this kind of bubbly stuff like that. So again, either you decide, "Actually, I'm not really into the *jhāna* practice. I want to make this an imaginal space." I guess my request would be: not on this retreat, but you can come back to that. You'll have plenty of access to all these kinds of things at other times. If you *do* want it to be *jhāna*, then the question becomes, "Okay, which first? Which should I develop first? Or should I even develop these things in parallel?" So demarcate, really get used to, as you're doing, "This state is definitely different than this one. I prefer *that* one, but I'm actually interested in mastering them both, and being able to hang out with them both, and finding them both lovely." And either you decide, "Okay, well, I'm going to do *this* first and *that* second, or *that* first and *that* second, or I'm going to do them kind of in parallel." Does that sound okay?

To me, there's nothing wrong with experiencing the breath of God there and all that; it's just that if that becomes primary, technically speaking, it takes you in a slightly different direction – which is gorgeous and beautiful and incredibly fruitful, but it's slightly different than what we're doing. So it can be there as a support for a while, and it might be, but at some point you have to kind of hone in on what's the primary factor in any state. Does that answer?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, so this is one of the things – it's hard, as I said, doing a retreat over time. What you need to do is come to an interview and describe in a bit more detail, and then we could map the *jhānas* on those, and that will tell you what to make more primary in each state if you want to develop the *jhānas*. And then exactly the order in which you develop your mastery of those, if that's what you want, that kind of is partly dependent on your history and things like that. But yeah, I guess this is one of the situations where you would need to have a bit of a map, because there's actually an infinite amount of lovely states that a human being can find themselves in – infinite. When you start including soulmaking stuff, it becomes completely infinite. So it really depends. Certain honings, or a magnetism to *this*, or priority of *this*, will direct you in certain ways. And, you know, if you ask me, "Is it better, worse, whatever?", it's not really *about* that. It's just: what do we want to do right now? Does that make sense? Yeah?

I can't see who that is at the back.

Q4: mapping the *jhānas* in one-to-one interviews vs trying to put the whole map out at once

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Is there a reason I haven't listed out the eight *jhānas*? I did in one of the first two talks, but very quickly. The way I'm thinking about it is, okay, we're thinking mostly about *pīti* and the first *jhāna*, and then I'll give more detail about each *jhāna*. That's just one way of going about it, I guess. Is there a reason? Probably because that's where most people will be at.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Well, I read them very quickly. Why would you want that? To give you a sense of whether you're slipping into something or other else right now?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, yeah. It's interesting. I guess we could have done it that way. I would usually do that in an interview with someone, like I described, but it might be that it would take quite a lot of description from me at the front of each one for you to get an accurate sense of "Is that it? Or where is it?" So I'm not sure. I probably won't get the chance, but that would be another way of doing it. I think it would take really quite a lot of description, because there are a lot of states – like when I talked about how some people who have done a lot of insight meditation get into a state of equanimity, and then I said, "Oh, actually I have to explain a few things about equanimity," because, for example, the Buddha talked about equanimity based on singleness, equanimity based on multiplicity,¹ and then there's equanimity in relation to the eight worldly conditions,² and then there's just equanimity as a kind of almost *jhānic* state based on multiplicity, almost a *jhānic* state based on singleness and stuff. So it might take quite a lot to kind of put all that out there, and then for you individually to sort of figure out where you are on that map. But I guess it's another way of doing it, yeah. I don't know. I'm not sure. What do you think?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. But it is, like I said, in individual teaching, that's quite a common thing for me, and I'm just listening, and I'm picking up the signals, and I would ask questions and stuff like that. I think teaching a group to do *jhānas* this way, with the whole idea of mastery and marinating, is ... quite a strange thing to do.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: That's what I mean, yeah. That's what I was trying to say before. It would take quite a lot of explanation of the different sort of shades: "No, it's something like this that you may have experienced, but actually it's a bit different ..." So I don't know. I feel if I do it now, I'd just be rattling them off

again. I'm not sure what the point of that is. But do you want me to? I don't know. Would it be helpful? Or bring it to individual interviews, yeah. Okay.

Monica, yeah?

Q5: how *jhāna* practice both brings and takes energy; ways of increasing energy when there's tiredness

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Doing this whole practice takes a lot of energy, *a lot* of energy. I mean, it *brings* a lot of energy, but it *takes* a lot of energy. I think I said that at one point. It really does, much more than you think. So even when you've got the *pīti* there, and this kind of subtle work, and sustaining it, somehow, at the same time, it *delivers* a tremendous amount of energy, but it *takes* a lot of energy. So absolutely. The question is, okay, here's this *pīti*, and do I need to go back to the base practice, or is there a way I can just minutely change the way I'm working with it, that actually it's more sustainable? There's not always such a black-and-white answer, but generally, if you feel like you're getting tired, yeah, it's either time to rest, or time to maybe do the base practice.

Eventually, when you do a lot of this practice, it's like, okay, here I am working on, playing in the second *jhāna*, or whatever, and it's getting a little tired. I just go to the seventh *jhāna* and come back, and I've got loads of energy. So it's not necessarily you always go – that's the thing about this: it's not always so formulaic. Or it might be I'm in the fourth *jhāna*, it's getting a little bit dull, and I go back to the first *jhāna*, and that gives me energy, or I go back to the breath. So I don't know that there are formulaic answers, really, and that's, to me, part of the whole improvised thing with it. Yeah. Or it could be I just stay with what I'm doing – whatever it is, the *pīti* or whatever – and there's a way of getting more energy there, finding more energy, or not, and then I have to do something different. Yeah? Okay.

Maybe last one. Did someone else ...? Is that Nicole?

Q6: using images to support *pīti*, etc.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. So Nicole's asking, sometimes with the different kinds of *pīti* she experiences, there are sort of corresponding, different images, like a snowflake or something, that kind of seem to go with that image. And the image can kind of help trigger or support that *pīti*. And the question is: is that okay? Can I kind of go with the image? Or do I need to drop it as soon as possible?

Yeah, this is very common, actually, and I would say, again, it's a matter of intention. So the images can be there, as I say, in the background, but as long as they're helpful, if they're supporting the *pīti* and helping you get into it more, it's great. It's not a problem. They're in the background. And you can play with how much you get into the *pīti*, or how much the image goes. And sometimes, if you want, the image is quite primary for a while, but yeah, really what the primary thing needs to be is the *pīti*, so

it would be a little bit secondary. But it might kick-start things, you know? Eventually, you don't need so much of those kick-starts. Like I said, it just comes. So you just remember the *pīti*.

What you're all going to learn is lots of little tricks for all the different stages here. So you'll learn lots of tricks to get you from the first to the second *jhāna*. I can give you some, and then you'll discover your own, like a snowflake image or whatever – lots of little things. And after a while, you just find, "I actually don't need them any more." Other images might, for a long time in your *jhāna* practice, they just go with that *jhāna*, and they somehow just support it, but they're very much in the background mostly, but sometimes they can come a little more into the foreground to sort of ramp things up a little bit. Does that make sense? Yeah? Great.

Okay. Very last one. Roxanne?

Q7: subtilizing the attention when *pīti* becomes more relaxing and soft

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: If you're trying to go to sleep, or ...? Okay. So you're not talking about lying in bed and being troubled by *pīti* that doesn't let you sleep; you're talking about when you're on the cushion and there are different kinds of *pīti*. Sometimes it's really strong, and at other times it's so relaxing that you're going to sleep? Yeah, yeah. Okay. So yeah, there *are* different kinds of *pīti*. It might also be, though – well, a couple of things. Why don't we just say this: when the *pīti* gets more relaxing and soft that way, then your attention on it needs to change. Maybe it's more subtle, so again, maybe the attention needs to get more subtle, you know? And maybe the enjoyment of that smoothness, etc. – there's quite a subtle attention there, and a subtle way of enjoying it. You have to come into a certain stance with it.

What happens as we go more and more into the *jhānas* is we learn to pay attention with more subtle objects. We learn to sort of sustain our attention on more subtle objects. So that would be an example there. That's part of the art. I mean, it might be that another state is beginning to show itself, and *pīti* is actually not the primary thing there; it's a different body energy. But still, it's like, what is it to stay with that? And if you're actually falling asleep, you know, it's like, how can I be really alert with this, if that's there? Does that answer? Are you sure? Okay.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, it's an art to really be awake with something that's subtler and calmer. At every level, your attention has to get trained at every new level. So that could be part of what's happening there.

Okay. Let's have just a little quiet time together.

[silence]

Okay. Actually, just one more thing with Roxanne's question (Q7). You know, all the things we've said about subtle work and play might apply. So it might be that more opening needs to happen at that point. Again, sleeping, when we talked about the hindrances, sleeping is a kind of closing down. So we're very comfortable, and something just closes down, and actually you might need to open yourself with the idea of "How can I enjoy this to the max?" So is it more sustaining? Is it more opening? Is it

more maximizing the enjoyment? Again, this question of what needs emphasizing now in the way that I'm working, of all the possibilities, and finding what actually helps. But it might be more a question of opening and finding the enjoyment in it – so it's enjoyable, but actually I'm not maximizing the enjoyment, and I'm not opening to it in the right way, and *that's* what's descending into a sleepiness, yeah? So it could be something like that.

¹ MN 137.

² AN 8:6.

12-23 Q & A

Okay. So I think today we'll just have some questions and responses, rather than give you more material. You've got enough to work with and work on for a while. I don't want to overwhelm you more. So maybe just a couple of things before we open it up. Well, just a general thing to say: remember what I said about the hindrances, right? They're going to come, in case you haven't noticed. [laughter] They're going to come and go. The whole thing is like this. What do we want in relation to the hindrances? We want to be working on them – antidotes, what can I try? The same creativity, the same responsiveness, the same awareness and sensitivity working on them when they come. But we also want, in terms of the wisdom, we want not to take them personally. It doesn't mean my practice has now forever fallen through the floor into the hell realms and I'll be stuck here forever. It doesn't mean I can't do this. It doesn't mean you're a failure. It doesn't mean any of that. Really, really important, because when the hindrances are around, they're like little poisons, and they poison the mind, and then the mind starts believing all kinds of things – particularly about the self, about one's practice, etc. So we really need to kind of keep the view screwed on right with them – really, really important – and recognize, "Oh, this is a hindrance. It's a hindrance." Self-doubt is a hindrance: "I can't do this." It's doubt. It's a hindrance, okay? When they come, they make us prone to believing all kinds of things about someone else, about Gaia House, about ourselves, about the retreat, about life. They really are like a poison dart. They fire, and then it spreads in the bloodstream, and everything gets caught up and toxified through that, and the whole way we look at things.

So not to take them personally, and not to believe the stories they spin. A hindrance, in itself, is not at a complex level of the mind. It's a very basic level of the mind. When we're not careful, the complex story-making, world-building levels of the mind get infected by the hindrances, and that's *papañca* – then we go bonkers. So over time, the *papañca* bit, we learn to wean that off, to refine it off the hindrances, and a hindrance just becomes more like, "Just a bit antsy," or whatever it is. It's the basic energy of it, without it proliferating (which is what *papañca* means, 'proliferation'). We're not proliferating to these other levels. But they *will* come and go. So on the scale of things, how you feel right now – and some of you will be flying, and some of you will be really not flying, and feeling this or that – it's just part of the up [and down]. If you're up, guess what? [laughter] And if you're down, guess what? And if you're in the middle, guess what? It takes a while to get used to this, but if you were to do a really long *jhāna* retreat, it's so obvious. It becomes so obvious that our whole relationship to it becomes – we have a different perspective, much more spacious perspective. Yeah, of course we

prefer the hindrances to not be there. Of course. But the whole added sense of, “Oh, this is terrible. I’m terrible,” all that stuff, it just goes, more and more. So that’s kind of what we’re aiming for with the hindrances a little bit.

Okay. So let’s open it up to some questions – questions that feel relevant to your practice, wherever that is right now. So whatever you’re working on, whatever your – I keep forgetting that phrase – learning edge playground, or something I’ve said about the bigger picture, maybe “How does that fit together?” or whatever. I actually had a question I could start with. But I’ll come back to that. It’s from Andy, wherever Andy is. Maybe we’ll come back to that, if that’s okay. Yeah? So anything, please. Anyone. I can’t see – is that Lauren? It is Lauren. Okay.

Q1: working with over-efforting, fear, and grabbing at *pīti*

Yogi: On the one hand, I want to ask about over-striving, over-efforting, but then also, with that, I’m sort of in the midst of a lot of world-building around my relationship to over-efforting [inaudible].

Rob: Let me just repeat the question, if I understand it. Lauren’s noticing a sort of cyclic pattern of over-efforting, and when that pattern is there, it’s very convincing to believe that you have a really major problem with that, with getting stuck in over-efforting, and that you need to back way off. What’s the question, then?

Yogi: I think maybe I just need some moral support. I know that’s not true, on one level, but it’s also – I’m really believing it. [inaudible]

Rob: Okay. So needing some moral support and some skilful ways of working with it. Okay. Moral support: I don’t know if it helps you, but it’s certainly a pattern I can relate to. It’s certainly a pattern I can look back over the – I have to remember how old I am – over the last thirty-six years and say, yeah, I’ve really been in that, in different ways, in different modalities of practice, at all kinds of levels, and felt like I was stuck there, or felt like it was a real personality problem and all that. So I don’t know if that makes you feel better or worse, but ... [laughter] I look back at all that, and I feel like, for myself, that yeah, there was a lot of cost to it in different ways. There has been a lot of cost to it in different ways. But there’s been more blessing than cost. I’m *glad* that I had ... You know, over-efforting may come from a really deep love, and a really deep desire, and a really deep yearning for something, and these are all really, really beautiful qualities.

If you have something like that, then you have – sometimes I say to someone, and I’m actually saying it to someone else who’s here – it’s like you’ve been given a really powerful horse to ride, and you have to learn how to handle that horse. You could have been given one of those – I don’t know if you’ve been to Dartmoor and seen those little ponies. [laughter] They’re very different kinds of animals, and handling one and handling the other, it’s like ... So there’s a tremendous gift here, but it also takes longer to learn how to handle it, yeah? Does that make sense? So that’s one thing. You know, it really *can* be learnt, in terms of how to harness the power of that, and how to let that willingness to really give yourself in effort, and apply yourself, and bring your intensity, and bring this – what I was

talking about – this cohesion of mind and energy and desire, and let that really gather power. We were talking about soul-power and all that. It's a really great gift, and it takes time to learn how to let those things come together in a way that they're actually balanced and it works. So it's not a small deal. It's a big deal.

And as I've said in here, anyway, the whole question of effort is going to be around for *everyone*, in everyone's practice, for the rest of their lives. For any serious practitioner, you bump into it. And I would say any *really* serious practitioner is also going to find it really painful at times. It's not just the effort; it's also the wanting. So there's an energetic side to over-effort. Did I share in here? I can't remember. If I think back to the late eighties – well, what I said about that shaking movement stuff, you know? I had a really long period of being stuck in that, and it got incredibly wacky. I mean, it was just bonkers. I was 21 or 22, whatever it was. And of course, I was just trying really hard. The teachers at that time had no idea what it was. It got really, really intense, and very weird in terms of its manifestations. It went on for a long time. Looking back now, I see that the principal causal factor there was slight over-efforting.

So there's an energetic side of this, and we really need to learn how to handle that. It *can* have very gross effects, or you can just feel like something just locks or something, or it can have this kind of weird – it looked like I was just completely a raving lunatic. But it has quite marked effects. Or it can have very subtle effects, like I said. It's just a little bit too much effort, and it actually creates, it stimulates the mind to think more and to get slightly distracted more. It gets, relatively speaking, quite a subtle effect.

But anyway, everyone's going to have to deal with the question of effort, you know? I'll share something else. I remember being on long retreats here, and just in terms of wanting something so badly, and not being able to find the answers, and finding that so difficult, you know, in tears. I felt like I didn't have anyone to ask, or anyone who would give me answers that would satisfy. So it can be intense. When we really give ourselves to something, it can be really intense. To me, it's still a good sign. It's just saying, "Okay, you've got a powerful horse you've been given. Let's learn to ride this," you know?

So I would have to hear a bit more, Lauren, about what ways you're feeling stuck, and what you mean by backing way off. When we talk about working with effort, we've got a huge range, and one is backing way off, which means just stop meditating, stop whatever – sometimes it's a fretting about a question. Just take half a day off and go for a walk. That's pretty rare, but that would be backing way off, for example. Or backing way off can look like I'm just sitting here, but I'm going into a very different mode in terms of my relation with whatever the principal object I'm working with, whether it's *pīti*, whether it's breath, or whatever it is. Or it might mean going to an insight practice for a while. But I'm still doing *samādhi*; that's my intention. I'm just taking this kind of detour into a practice I know brings a lot more ease, and it's within a much larger context, you know? Or it could be finding an imaginal image that you've worked with in the past that has been helpful in this relationship.

Really, in terms of *samādhi* practice, again, Newton Abbot can then become, you know, not just *pīti* – it can become whatever it becomes. There are lots of ways there. And if it looks like, "Well, right now, I'm headed in the wrong direction to Newton Abbot," it *might* look like that, but in the bigger picture, it's really not. If you go into some imaginal thing that kind of changes your whole relationship

with being on retreat and what you're doing, that might be really exactly what's needed. It looks like a detour. It looks like you've given up *samādhi*, but you haven't. Some part of your consciousness has firmly got the intention and the navigation and where you're going in mind, and it's just very skilful to go off into something else for a while. Does that make sense? Do you want to say a bit more about the specifics, or is it better something to work with one-to-one in the interview, do you think?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Okay. So if I understand, there's fear, in the larger picture, that you've been asked or told to back way off, and maybe that same thing will happen on this retreat, and we'll say "Don't meditate," and maybe even "Maybe it's better if you go back home" or whatever, at that scale. To address that first, I've very rarely done that as a teacher. I would be extremely surprised. That wouldn't be my usual way of teaching. So I don't think that's going to happen on this retreat.

The fear is not a neutral factor. It's not like, "This thing is happening, and the fear is there, but it's not affecting anything." When fear is present, and when it's strong fear, it's *doing* something, you know? So when we talk about these, what look like detours, it might actually be working with the fear in different ways. We can also maybe talk about that in an interview. But it sounds like the fear at this point is strong enough, and kind of prominent enough, and probably having quite some effects, that *that* itself needs working with. It needs understanding. Something in you needs reassuring. You need to be able to kind of defuse the power of the fear, its energy, and its kind of contraction, and the belief in the thinking. So there are different parts to fear, as I said. There's energy; there's the cognitive component, what we're believing, that we're afraid of; and the contraction. So one thing is to work with fear. Again, we can meet in an interview, or with one of us, and really go into that – actually work in real time with the fear, yeah? As I said, that's not just, "Oh, it happens to be there." It's not a neutral factor. It's *doing* something, and almost certainly what it's doing is not helpful in the mix.

In terms of when there's *pīti*, grabbing at the *pīti* – this is really quite common to some degree. I think I mentioned it briefly in one of the talks. The Buddha took the trouble to say exactly that. Why would he say that? Just partly because he must have encountered it a lot as a teacher, is my guess. So it's normal. Two things, just for now. I think it would be good to meet one-to-one, but let me just say two things for now. One is: is there access, at times, to lovely states? Not necessarily *jhānic*, but lovely states, sort of other than the *pīti*, that are much softer, or warmer, or a bit more expansive, or something like that?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Okay, so at times you're able to ask the question, "What's pleasant?", and find a kind of mild pleasantness, yeah? And does that mild pleasantness have a kind of quality of softness to it? Because *pīti* can sometimes also be a bit intense, and that's also sometimes part of the issue. It does? So that's good. The softness itself is not a neutral factor. It's softening something. That's the thing about *jhāna*. There's this whole thing about marinating and resource. Whatever the *jhānic* quality is, it then affects the *citta* and the body. So if there's something soft, and warm, and maybe even soothing that's lovely,

then actually hang out in that, you know? And take your time with this. Hang out in that. Feel that touching the heart, touching the body, touching the consciousness, etc.

Sometimes you may want to then put the fear *in* that. Take the fear, the idea that you've had, and put it in the middle of that – whatever your language would be, of this soft, warm space, and just see what that does. Put the two, the difficult and the lovely, into contact with each other. Other times – and you don't need to rush this – you could see if you could hang out in that soft place, and really – the second thing I want to say with all this is: snatching is *this* kind of movement, okay? Although it *looks* like a movement that I'm doing, it feels to you right now that you're not in control of it. The mind is just grabbing beyond your will. Is it possible that the more sunbathing posture is ...? You can spend a lot more time there. So both with the softness, and then I think that's quite key, to go into that and practise that posture, that stance, that poise with what's lovely. Over time, maybe that resets the habit. So the habit is not so much immediately to grab forward, but it's also to soak it up, which is much less doing. You're training the habit so that they become more equalized, and eventually you *will* have autonomy, because they're equally available possibilities, they've both been practised equally, and therefore you can begin to choose.

With that, then, you can really soak up that soft whatever-it-is. Let's not even worry whether it's *jhānic* or not *jhānic*. It doesn't matter. It's a skilful state. You want to be tuning into the very softness, the warmth, the healing. There's something that reassures the whole system, the whole nervous system, and the mind, eventually. But you're really just lapping it up, like really soft, gentle water, just lapping over the being. And then, when you've got used to that, at times, maybe, then you can see if the *pīti* can come up, and you have the same stance/poise in relation to the *pīti*. And when it goes out of that, the mind might quickly want to sort of panic a little bit: "Oh, here it is again, my over-efforting," and all that stuff very quickly gets ignited. But can I keep bringing it back to this more open, receptive, sunbathing, showering poise, relationship, mode of attention?

So you also have to think about you're retraining the kind of – again, it's a very sort of basic level of the mind in terms of the *saṅkhāras* doing that. That grabbing movement is a very base-level mind movement. So retraining often happens just by over and over and over, over and over and over, doing something different. When we notice it, defusing that by doing the opposite, defusing that by doing the opposite. Partly just *knowing* that's what you're doing – it *will* come up; this habit *will* come up, you know? You're going to encounter it so many times you can't count. It's like, "Okay, can I not freak out? And is it possible to just switch the mode in that moment?" Let's see how that goes. You'll have a meeting with one of us soon anyway, but bring that to the interviews, because it gets very individual. There's lots of detail here. So much depends on micro-moments and micro-choices at a kind of subtle level, yeah? But how does that sound for now? Yeah? Okay. That's really good.

Mikael, yes?

Q2: *nimitta* fading with increased absorption – why and what to do

Yogi: I'd like to ask about SASSIE. It was interesting to hear differentiated all those different elements. Personally, I became aware that absorption is something that I had not been that interested in when practising the *jhānas*. I've been interested in other aspects. But yesterday I tried to work with the

second *jhāna*, and really absorb and give myself to the depth and absorption, and feel the *jhāna* around me. It worked quite well. I got into a quite deep, silent state with *sukha*. After a while, I noticed that I am inside some very deep state, but the *sukha* somehow has disappeared. It has got so silent, so absorbed, that the *sukha* that was there is barely present, barely perceivable. With that, I noticed that the energy body sense, or perception of body, has almost disappeared also. I had decided to work with the second *jhāna*, so I sort of had to back off a bit, like reverse and try to build more energy body sense to find that *sukha* and find that body sensation again. Actually I had to open my eyes and move my body a little to find that. But I was wondering what's going on there. Does it work in that way, that if you go deep enough into the absorption it automatically starts to fade, the *nimitta*, and the energy body sense? Is it possible to endlessly absorb into a very specific – in this case, *sukha* – without it getting faded?

Rob: Right. I probably have to repeat that for the mic. Let me try. Have we got the roving mic? Well, maybe do it for the next one, yeah. So Mikael is asking: he hadn't heard much about the absorption, which I mentioned as one of the elements of this SASSIE, and thought he would try that, try focusing on that, and pick the second *jhāna* (or that's where your playground is anyway). He said, "Okay, let's see if I can get absorbed." And then did, indeed, after a bit of work, find himself very absorbed in this state, very deep state, but the happiness, he noticed, at some point, had gone, and also any sense of energy body experience.

So if I ask you, well, what was prominent in your consciousness at that point? No happiness, no energy body. What was it?

Yogi: It was silence and peace. It felt like a quite vast, dark space, where nothing was moving very much.

Rob: Okay. So yeah, this is definitely possible. There are two possibilities, really, within that. One is that what happens is the mind does get more absorbed, more concentrated, whatever we say, and actually goes beyond the second *jhāna*, either into a less fabricated state (so I'm going to have to explain this more; I've mentioned it a couple of times), and there's no longer the fabrication of the perception of happiness. So it might have gone into something like the fourth *jhāna*, where there isn't the fabrication of the perception of happiness. It might have gone even beyond that. As you say it was quite vast and empty, it might have gone into the beginnings of one of the formless *jhānas* – no body sense, no dominant emotional sense, really, apart from kind of stillness. Or it might have gone into something akin to that, that isn't, strictly speaking, one of the classical *jhānas*, but it's in that sort of territory.

So yeah, it's very possible. This is what I think I said yesterday: if you want to practise this or that *jhāna*, I need to know what's the factor in it that's the most important, yeah? And in the second *jhāna*, it's happiness. Unquestionably, it's happiness – for me, at least; that's the way I would emphasize things. It's not even the fact that there's no thinking or whatever; that's secondary, and I'll come back to that when we talk about the second *jhāna*. It's the happiness. Now, within the second *jhāna*, the quality of the happiness – as I said, *jhānas* are not one uniform experience. It's not like the second *jhāna* is like

this every time: you could take a snapshot, and it's just the same thing. There's a whole range within the second *jhāna*. So you get a very bubbly kind of happiness, and much, much stiller happiness. Part of the art of really learning the second *jhāna* is knowing that territory, getting to know that territory, but also learning to keep the mind focused and fed by the happiness.

What can happen, because it gets more subtle within that range, the mind is actually not quite able to stay – it hasn't been trained in staying with that more refined object, that happiness. And it might, because of past experience, be actually *more* trained with staying with a big empty space, even though, technically speaking, that's even more refined. So partly what you can think of what you're doing in each *jhāna* is training yourself to really stay with and really absorb in the primary *nimitta* of that *jhāna* over its range. And then the other thing is that, in the first four *jhānas*, that means – happiness is an emotion; it's a mental quality, but you really want to feel it in your body as well. So this double-aspected nature of the primary *nimitta* is actually quite important in the second, third, and fourth *jhānas*, particularly.

If you stopped a guy in the street in Newton Abbot, and just, I don't know, asked him to think of something that made him happy, and then said, "Can you focus on that happiness?", it would be the strangest thing. Most people would say, "How do I focus on happiness?" So we're actually learning to do that. And part of what helps, and part of anyway what is the nature of the *jhāna* (because it's a *rūpa-jhāna*) is that we feel the happiness in the energy body, as well as in the mind, but what we're focusing on is the energy body experience of happiness, as well as the mental. That has to be there. If you're saying, "Okay, my playground is now the second *jhāna*," I really have to keep it within those bounds. And for all kinds of historical reasons, it might want to slip out of it: the mind wants something deeper; the mind is just used to going to big, open spaces or whatever. But I have to keep bringing it back.

And in terms of the happiness, the intensity of the happiness, as well as its subtlety, can vary. Sometimes, in the second *jhāna*, you're really talking about this upsurge of joy – it's almost overwhelming. And sometimes you're talking about almost like it feels like this underground spring that the Buddha was talking about. It's really the subtlest thing. It's the subtlest thread that you're paying attention to. And your job, if that's your territory, is how can I keep paying attention to that? And by paying attention to it, I keep it in that realm. Yeah? How does this all sound?

Yogi: Yeah, that was the intention, to stay in contact with that subtler *sukha*. So if I understand, it might have been that the subtlety of attention was not able to stay with that subtlety of the *sukha* in the deeper absorption.

Rob: Exactly, yeah. The subtlety of the attention was probably not enough to stay with the subtlety of *sukha* as it got more subtle, yes.

Yogi: The silence that I experienced was somehow surrounding ... [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, sure, and you're probably more used to that silence a little bit, in different forms. So again, there's a habit of mind that's just created a groove there. It's great. It's not that we're saying, "We don't want you ever going there ever in your life." We're not saying that. We're just saying, "Okay, this is my

playground.” Eventually we want you to have everything, all the toys, and all the swings, and everything. But it takes a certain training for when the happiness gets subtle. Can I keep it on that subtle happiness, without it sliding somewhere else? That’s a training.

In terms of what you said about backing out, yeah. So you can back right out, open your eyes. That’s great. Well done. Then you come back again. In time, you can do it much more subtly than that. You can remember back a certain happiness that you *can* pay attention to, and then just do it again, you know? But you have to have enough experience with the happiness to be able to remember it back and call it back. Or if you’re familiar with the first *jhāna*, you can go back to the first *jhāna*. Rather than opening your eyes and all that, go back to the first *jhāna*. There’s definitely, by definition, the bodily experience in the first *jhāna* that’s more gross. The first *jhāna* is less refined, more gross than the second *jhāna*. So you find that, hang out in that for a while, and then see if it goes again by itself, or you can just encourage it to go, yeah?

So this kind of manoeuvring, as you meet different difficulties, that’s all part of the art of it: back up into a lower *jhāna*; sometimes even go forward and then come backwards, which we’ll talk about. Yeah? Well done. That’s great.

Q3: working with the *jhāna* the mind is more inclined to hang out in / tips on developing earlier *jhānas* that aren’t going as well

Rob: Let me read Andy’s note. Is it okay, Andy, if I ...?

“The *citta* wants to move towards peacefulness – a deep, delicious, beautiful, dark, juicy peacefulness – rather than *pīti* or *sukha*, which have been around. I’ve been working with the peacefulness just as recommended (SASSIE, etc.) and will continue to do this, as it feels like what the mind/heart really wants. There was such a sense of relief when I let it. Is there anything else I should consider or do on this front?”

Yeah. Part of the work/play you want to do is get used now to that peacefulness. Actually, let me ask you a question first: would you also say it’s got love in it?

Yogi: Yes. And grace as well.

Rob: Love and grace. So it has got love and grace in it. Would you say it has a tenderness to it? Okay, it’s got tenderness. Would you say it has a kind of emotional warmth? (And almost by implication, it does.) Yes. Okay: tick, tick, tick. Good. It sounds to me like we’re in the right territory. Fab. Great. So what you want to do is let yourself go – the mind really does have – it’s like it *wants* to go somewhere. And partly this is dependent on your past experience, a lot of sitting in different places and all that. So yeah, let it go. Let that be your primary playground even now. And your job then is to really know that territory inside out. And to me, there’s quite a lot to discover about the third *jhāna* – things start to get really quite interesting then in terms of the different aspects and levels of it. So rather than me tell you what to look for, you just hang out there with the awareness, with the sensitivity, noticing what changes, and then you can report back, and one of us can talk about it. Yeah?

Second thing is there's also – what would you say? – particular challenges, particular subtle difficulties, that are particular to each *jhāna*. And there are some that start to arise in the third *jhāna* – also, obviously, some really beautiful stuff that starts there – but some particular challenges that arise. And again, rather than me tell you what they are, you'll begin to encounter them: “Oh, sometimes *this* happens, and I wasn't quite sure what to do,” whatever it is, or “This happened, and I figured out what to do,” whatever. So those are two things to watch out for as you're getting to know that.

However, given the context of what we're doing – we've got this grid of the elements of mastery, and then all the *jhānas* – how are you doing with the first and second?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Awfully? Okay.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, yeah. So the first and second *jhāna* have been terrible. *Pīti* and *sukha* have been there, but first and second *jhāna* are just a no through road; it just doesn't go there. And then a lot of hindrances started to come, and difficulty. And then there was a sense that the mind wanted to go to peacefulness. So this sense of where the mind wants to go, this is also part of the territory of long-term *jhāna* practice. Some people have a style of practising *jhānas*, it's just I sit down, and I see where the mind wants to go, and I just follow that. So I'm going to say yeah, that's great. And we also want to say (again, back to the horse analogy), it's like, sometimes you just get on a horse – I don't know, do you ever get on a horse and just see where it wants to go? Does that ...? [laughter] No, it's a serious question. Maybe it's a stupid question, but ... [laughter] Kirsten, does one ever do that? Yeah? Okay. So that's a possible relationship with a horse ride. But we also want the ability to, “No, I want to go to the bingo hall,” or whatever it is. [laughter]

So we want that control. Often my answers to questions, “Should I do this or this?”, it's like, “Yes, both.” We want to have this range. So sometimes I just let go of control; sometimes, no – I want to have the choice and the mastery. But this is the reason why I chose to read this out, because what might be needed here – okay, in the long term, I *do* want the mastery of the first and second, but how I get there might be different. It might well be that actually taking the third right now as your learning edge playground, really getting to know that, and really hanging out in that, that's your priority, okay? After you've been sitting in the third, and you're just feeling really, really nice from it, then see sometimes if you can go back, backwards from the third. By that point, the mind has got a lot of what it wants in that particular sitting. It's drunk from that particular, beautiful well. It's had its submerging, refreshing dunk in that spring, yeah? And then it's much more amenable to going back.

You'll have to see: maybe it goes right back. You just have the intention to go back to the *pīti*. Maybe it's the *sukha*. So you go back to the *sukha*. That might be even easier.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, very good. Exactly. First of all, the third *jhāna* has *sukha* in it, so it's easier to get a sense of the *sukha*, and secondly, the mind is just – here's where I'm really stretching my horse riding [analogy] – the horse hasn't been given the right water to drink. How's that? [laughter] The right food to eat. Once it has, it's satisfied, and it will go. If it knows the food's *that* way, that it likes – the carrots are *that* way – and *you* want to go to bingo, and they won't let the horse in the bingo hall, then once you give it the carrots, it's happy to go to the bingo hall. Yeah? So that's one thing. It's also, as you said, the happiness is closer to the ...

Now, it might be that you just remember the happiness, and it comes back. Well, actually, if the happiness is there, it's fine. Sometimes people can't get back to the happiness, and then we would offer something else, but I'll leave that for now. And then from the happiness – remember, in the second *jhāna*, it has *sukha* and *pīti*, and the first *jhāna* has *sukha* and *pīti*. So you're just kind of, in a way, slightly shifting what you're bringing out of the mix. But again, attuning to a quality in the mix amplifies it. I amplify the *sukha* in the second *jhāna*, amplify the *pīti* in the first. And then going back to that, again, will be much easier, and the mind will be more amenable to that. Does that sound okay? Yeah, please.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. Well, no, not in the next few days. Marinate in that. That's your primary playground. But as you already reported, the happiness that's prominent in the second *jhāna* is already available after you've marinated for an hour, or two hours, or whatever it is, right? So after you feel like, "I've had a good, long, lovely, refreshing drink of the peacefulness," then try to come back in the happiness. But at the moment, you can spend much, much less time in the happiness and the *pīti*, and let the peacefulness be really where you're hanging out the most.

Look, I don't think there'd be anyone who said the first *jhāna* is a better experience than the third *jhāna*. I mean, unquestionably the third *jhāna* is lovelier. Maybe there's someone, but it would be pretty unusual. So there's no arguing with that. But what we *do* want is a sense, eventually, that "Gosh, they're all lovely. They're just lovely in different ways." And even the *pīti*, which, relatively speaking, is gross, it's like, it's really a treasure, you know? So somehow, whichever way we arrive at it, we want to get back – or get, if you haven't had it before – a sense that, "Yeah, the first *jhāna* is a really lovely place. The *pīti* is a lovely thing. I have a really good relationship with it." Yeah? So we're just kind of finding which way will help you get to that being the case. Does that make sense? Okay, very good.

Anything? Please, yeah. Shall we try that [the roving mic]? Yeah, let's try that, if you're happy to do that. Yeah, please.

Q4: equanimity in insight practice and *jhānic* equanimity / working with unpleasant *pīti* or energetic blocks

Yogi: So I've been on a bunch of insight retreats, and never deliberately spent time cultivating *jhānas*. I believe I'm one of a few people who have experienced third and maybe fourth *jhāna* as a result of just relaxing in the midst of an insight retreat, and the mind wanting to go to a very peaceful place. In all

the experiences of *jhāna* on and off of retreat – first of all, I’ve never really verified this with anyone – but it tends to have a flavour of, like, the floor kind of goes out from under me, and I drop into a place that’s very different from normal, sometimes incredibly peaceful, sometimes incredibly blissful. So I guess my first question is ... well, you don’t want us to ask, “Is that it?”, so I’m not sure if it’s even necessary ...

Rob: Don’t want to ask what?

Yogi: Like, if I’m on the right track in those experiences.

Rob: Oh, you mean if they are the right experiences? No, no, it’s not that I don’t want you to ask. Let’s take our time with this. I do really think it’s important to differentiate between *jhānas*: “Is that what we’re talking about? Is that not?” But I think all that stuff I was saying is just because people can get so hung up on where the division is, and “Have I achieved it?” The relationship with that question is not so helpful. But it may be really fine: “Is that the fourth *jhāna* we’re talking about?” So it’s not categorically that I’d rather people didn’t get into that. I absolutely do think it’s important. You need to map out the territory for yourself. There are certain ways that people can relate to that, and that’s quite common, in a way that’s kind of fed, that’s really not so helpful. So I would need to hear more about those experiences, just based on what you said. And again, bring it to an interview. Are we in fact meeting today?

Yogi: We are, yeah.

Rob: We are. So bring it to the one-to-one. We’ll find out a bit more about what’s involved there. What can happen is, for someone who’s done a lot of insight practice, as I was saying before, it might be that because of the insight/mindfulness, letting go, letting go, letting go, equanimity is a result of letting go, okay? You get that, right? Equanimity can be defined as the relative absence, the relative attenuation of pushing things away or trying to grab on. In other words, it’s a relative degree of letting go, and equanimity is a result of that. Another way of defining equanimity is a relative degree of letting go, and if you just keep letting go – aware, letting go, aware, letting go, aware, letting go – you will end up in some state of equanimity. Equanimity will arise. Does everyone understand that? Yeah?

Whether that state is a *jhānic* state of equanimity ... and technically speaking, equanimity begins in third *jhāna* and goes all the way to the eighth, actually. We’ll talk about this when we get to the formless *jhānas*. The Buddha sometimes describes the formless *jhānas* as almost like perspectives on equanimity, or things you do with equanimity. So *where* you are, I’d have to hear more. That’s one thing. The second thing is whether it’s an actual *jhānic* state of equanimity. You know, again, relative to the normal consciousness, any state of equanimity, and stillness, and peace, and the mind is quiet, is going to feel like, “Wow.” We still don’t know whether it’s a *jhānic* one. So we *do* need to map this stuff out. And partly we need to map it out because, again, it might give us information about, “Okay, well, how do you need to move now? What do you need to prioritize? Where’s your playground? How do we need to progress from here?” A bit like Andy: “What order are we going to move in here?”

Bottom dropping out from you – yeah, that can happen. One thing that can happen in the fourth *jhāna* is there's a real sense of sinking. Everything kind of goes down. In the fifth *jhāna*, though, the bottom can fall out, the floor falls out, because there's no solidity. It really feels like, "Oh, they've taken the floor away, and there's just space," you know? So there are different kinds of bottoms falling out. But we can explore more, unless you have more now ...

Yogi: That was sort of the setup for what's happening now.

Rob: Ah, okay, pardon me.

Yogi: Sorry.

Rob: That's okay.

Yogi: I mean, I figured it was useful for people.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: What's happening now is nothing *jhānic*, actually, on this retreat, as far as I can tell – nothing like those experiences, in any case. It feels as though, at times, there's plenty of *pīti*, sometimes plenty of *sukha* (less often), and I will feel kind of the beginning of that dropping that I'm used to, and sometimes be able to even conjure it, and it feels as though it's on the verge of entering a *jhānic* state. What happens instead is that I'm confronted by more intense – I guess it sort of feels like energetic blocks in the body. So as the resolution is being turned up, and the subtlety and the sensitivity is being turned up, *that's* what becomes prominent, and it kind of pushes me out.

Rob: So you're turning up the resolution at that point? What resolution?

Yogi: The sensitivity of the attention is going up. It sort of all at once goes up quite a bit.

Rob: How do you experience that? How do you know it's going up? What tells you that?

Yogi: The *pīti* becomes much more intense, at least in the times it's happened on *this* retreat. There's a sense of the *pīti* becoming prominent, and physical form becoming less. It's sort of happening now if I just relax into it. Yeah, so physical form becomes less; *pīti* becomes more, and pretty pervasive over the body. But at the same time, unpleasant emotion becomes ...

Rob: Emotion or sense of energetic ...?

Yogi: The sensation that I associate with emotion, which I was calling an energetic block.

Rob: But it's more of an emotion?

Yogi: Actually, in this moment, it feels like sadness. But sometimes it just feels like a contraction without much emotion.

Rob: So it's not always the same thing, and it can be in different places in the body as well?

Yogi: It can be in different places. I wasn't realizing that it's sometimes emotion till now.

Rob: Okay. So again, we're in the context of a *jhāna* retreat, so in another retreat I'd give a different answer, but let's just say a few things for now. One is it looked like a little more opening could happen. In other words, that mode of more opening, okay? So here's the *pīti*. It was building, and it was there. It was pleasant. And then more opening to it. And if there are movements, let it come out the top of the head, etc. Really go into that more kind of hedonistic sunbathing mode, but really *more*, you know? Really practise kind of leaning into that more and more. I think that, itself, is going to make a difference. That's one thing.

Second thing is, in the context of this *jhāna* retreat, what we do with contractions and emotions that come up – remember, I think I said this on the opening talk – my first choice is not to get too involved in that. So I give my attention more to where it *does* feel good. It might be, “Okay, there's some contraction *here*, but actually up around *here*, especially when I open, it starts to feel better.” And then you can play with all the ways we were talking about spreading. It's like, “Okay, let me, later, join this nice feeling to this not-so-nice feeling,” you know? And just put them in contact with that imaginary ... All the things we listed might really work and be helpful there. On another retreat, we'd say, “Sadness. Okay. Can we go towards that? Can we open to it? Can we care for it? What does it need?”, etc. But the first choice on this kind of retreat is actually something else. Does that sound okay? Yeah? If you've got notes, go through all the things that we suggested.

Third thing to say is, it's *mettā* you're practising with, right?

Yogi: Yeah. I will say I don't feel like I need to do it much of the day, because usually there's enough *pīti* to work with, that I'm more in the energy body with the *pīti*.

Rob: Okay. So there doesn't need [to be] much time with the base practice for the *pīti*.

Yogi: Maybe a couple hours.

Rob: Yeah, okay. Are there times when the *pīti* feels pleasant, or you're actually a bit ambivalent about the *pīti*?

Yogi: There are times when it feels pleasant.

Rob: Definitely. And relative to the times it feels like “Well, I’m really not sure I like this,” what would you say?

Yogi: I would say it’s 10 per cent incredibly pleasant, like 60 per cent mildly pleasant, and then 30 per cent not sure.

Rob: Okay. That’s not bad. So I was just wondering about whether you needed to bring in some of those other experiences that you’ve had, some of those other states that you’ve gotten into on the insight retreats, and actually let that help. But it doesn’t sound like it. It sounds like the *pīti*’s fine; it’s just sometimes you want to be playing with the relationship with the *pīti*. As I said, it looked a little bit like more opening would be the thing. And when I say “more opening,” you know – we can have words like “opening” or “paying attention,” but really, like I said, dial it up to ‘11,’ if we’re talking about opening. Yeah? What does it mean to maximally open my being, and surrender and abandon? Just that relationship with the *pīti*, you’re in a different relationship. Everything is a dependent arising, meaning how we experience *pīti*, and what it does, depends primarily on my relationship with it.

One way of thinking about what we’re doing is we’re playing with our relationship with the primary *nimitta*. That’s all we’re doing. And we’re playing with our relationship with other things which allow the primary *nimitta* to arise. So coming into a different relationship with something will shape the perception of that thing. When we talk about this emptiness, dependent arising, playing with perception, we’re talking about playing with the way of relating, and noticing that the very experience, appearance, perception of this thing – in this case, *pīti* – changes dependent on my relationship. It’s not *always* the case that there’s a formula: “Okay, you *always* need to go into this opening mode.” What we need, again, is this kind of willingness to be responsive, to try this, to try that: “Ah, that’s better,” or “That begins to ...”, or “That suddenly makes it much better,” or just gradually makes it better. But the very sort of willingness to be responsive and really try different relationships. It might be, a lot of the time, that it’s more of that opening – you know, really, really go into the opening mode. It might be that that’s just sometimes, and other times it needs something else, you know? How does that sound? Yeah? But we’ll still talk later. Okay. Great.

Anyone need any help with the hindrances, or anything? Nicole, yeah?

Q5: working with constant mental chatter about how practice is going, over-efforting

Yogi: I’m thinking of it as a hindrance; I think there are probably different ways to think about what happens. And it happens for me on every retreat, but for this one it’s really turned up, which is that I have a constant conversation, like I’m in an interview with one of you, about the experience as it’s happening. [laughs] In some ways, I really like it, because it’s kind of the way that I’m, “Oh, yeah, you said *this*, so okay, I’ll try that,” and in part it’s quite a positive thing, because it’s a way that I’m experimenting and playing. But also it gets exhausting. There’s a kind of neurotic tendency to keep doing that throughout the day. So I’ve been, since it’s on this retreat, trying to play with it as a kind of restlessness of the mind, and open the energy body from the top of the head, and see if it can get more space around it, and also trying the breathing and the counting in relationship, to add more pegs. I also

went on a walk, and did a little inquiry around maybe some more psychological reasons why that may be. But it is *really* insistent.

Rob: Okay. When you say it's a neurotic tendency, does that mean that you feel, for instance – well, one question I would have is, do you feel like the tone of it is quite anxious? Or, for instance, are you, “Oh, I’m trying to impress,” or “I’m afraid how they’re going to judge me,” or what’s the ...? I’m just interested in those words, “neurotic tendency,” as opposed to just “habit of mind.”

Yogi: Yeah, maybe it's more of a habit.

Rob: Yeah, that's my sense. So this is really, really common. If it was more like, “Oh, my gosh, I’m going to have an interview tomorrow with someone, and heavens, what will they think?!”

Yogi: There's sometimes delight in it as well.

Rob: Yeah. I’m just kind of saying for the teaching: if it was more that other one, then we would need to unpack a little more psychologically, etc. Back to Ajaan Geoff's translation of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, this evaluative thought, you know, it may partly be your way of processing and understanding your experience, that that's part of what's going on, and it does involve some pondering and that. So I personally wouldn't be too worried about it, you know? What might help is actually writing down your questions, very, very briefly. By doing that, you're telling the mind, “Look, I've got this. You don't need to keep rehashing it. It's there. I'll take it to the interview or whatever. That might help, just something like that, kind of reassuring the mind that it will get dealt with, you know?

In terms of a more moment-to-moment level, yeah, again, we can make so many things enemies that don't necessarily need to be enemies. If I think, “Oh, but this is all about stopping thought,” etc., then it's going to be regarded as an enemy. I just wouldn't go there. I don't think it's a problem.

Yogi: The only thing is that it feels like it's sometimes stopping absorption.

Rob: Yeah. So what I was going to say, on a moment-to-moment level, is there's a difference between a thought arising and me being entangled in a thought. Here's the thought, it's going over there, and it's dragging me along with it, or I'm willingly going along with it. Yeah? So if you're not clear on that, that's something to notice: what's the difference between a thought arising, and actually being attached to a thought so we get dragged along with the thought and we move with it?

Yogi: Oftentimes there's still *pīti* while it's going, and I can focus on the *pīti*, but I have a desire for it to be quiet so that the *pīti* can be more.

Rob: Yeah. I think this, again, is totally understandable, what you're saying. I just think in terms of strategy, it's like I said – when Ajaan Geoff, one of my teachers, started meditating, it was in a building site. I'm sure he had the desire that the – whatever those machines are called – demolition machines

and all the rest of it, that they *weren't* there, but that was just there. And so it has to be in the background. Or imagine we were here and there was just a radio playing, or we're having a conversation and there's a radio playing. It's just, "Okay, we'll deal with it." It doesn't have to be we get into *this*, you know? If I get into too much desire of, "I wish that would just shut up," then actually my attention is going over *there* in not a very helpful way. So if I can come into relationship with this, just, "Okay, it's just there. It's like a radio playing," there may well be some useful material in it, as I said, about digestion, and about what I need to remember, and all that stuff, but you can take care of that by making the notes, and in the moment, or moment to moment, if you're trying for more absorption, just aim at what's the prominent thing, and just get more and more into that.

The other piece is: remember what I said about that word, 'drifting' – it's a subtle manifestation of restlessness. And one way it often manifests is the mind *does* have more thought, and it tends to follow those thoughts a bit more. Sometimes that drifting is coming from too much effort, okay? Just a little bit too much effort is actually stimulating more thought in the mind, and stimulating the mind to follow those thoughts. So it could also be an effort thing. And then, of course, if I get into a desire for it to go away and absorb more, then that can just add to the over-efforting, because the usual thing is, "There's more thought. I need to try harder." It may be the case in some instances, but it may be exactly the opposite: "There's more thought. There's more of these kind of threads unreeling in the mind, and actually what I need to do is back off more, go into a softer mode, a more receptive [mode], etc." So it could well be related to that as well.

Yogi: Yeah, that makes sense, because I am also working with over-efforting, and finding the retreat really tiring, so I get most annoyed with the voice when I'm tired.

Rob: Yeah, yeah. Look – this is for everyone – this is hard work. Sometimes it just feels completely effortless and it's great and it's all wonderful. But a lot of the time, it's going to feel like hard work. It's hard work for lots of different reasons and in lots of different ways. But it might be that, yes, just a little bit too much effort accumulates to become very tiring after a while. Like I said, it's not like, "Oh, when will this effort question go away, and I can get into the real stuff?" That is part of the real stuff. It's not going to end. It will actually just become subtler and subtler, this effort question. So we really have to get our view screwed on right about that as well. So yeah, it sounds like *not* that you need to stop meditating and go for walks or all that. It sounds much more a question of subtle effort, and learning to back off, which may be more about this opening/receptive mode. It may be stuff like that. Is that okay? Okay.

Q6: a note about skilful work in turning contraction into something lovely

Rob: Let me just share a note that I got – I think it was last night:

I just wanted to share some practice. As I was listening to your talk [I think this was yesterday] I kept noticing some contraction and *dukkha* in the energy body. Finally, as you moved into the Q & A, I decided to see if I could untangle or smooth out whatever

was going on. Just a little reflection on emptiness and some long breaths opened up a beautiful, peaceful tranquillity. It was time for tea, but I continued to sit till my bladder suggested it was really time to go. I was inspired by what you said about carrying the *jhāna* around, so I thought, “Why don’t I try that now?” I made it all the way to the loo [laughter] and after that, through tea, fairly slowly, and into the lounge. I kept working, playing and re-establishing the *jhāna*, or perhaps more accurately, the connection to the sense of tranquillity. It was so easy! I really had a view of not being able to carry this kind of mindfulness/concentration outside of the sittings very well, and it has been a source of some measuring and self-judgment. I felt some of this healed tonight.

So I just wanted to share that as an example of skilful working with something that was initially a contraction, and then can quite easily, quickly – this thing about quantum shifts happening quite easily – turn into something lovely, and then a long-term view of being inadequate or measuring oneself, and actually, something opens up, and it’s like, “Oh, this is possible for me. I can do this.” So the content could have been different, but in terms of that general pattern, it’s like, not to believe this “I can’t do this. I’m like this. I’m not built for this” or whatever. It’s so much an important part of this. In time, confidence comes. Confidence comes. So it’s really important.

Q7: follow up on previous Q & A question about *ekaggatā*

Rob: Oh, there was something else. Boaz asked yesterday about *ekaggatā*, and I felt I could have said something else about that word. Usually it’s translated as ‘one-pointedness,’ which I said was a good translation. It’s just that in English, I think most people thinking of ‘one-pointedness’ would think of one narrow spatial point, and I said a better (though clumsy-sounding) translation would be ‘with one thing prominent.’ Boaz asked, “Well, why is that a significant factor in the *jhānas*?” In the Abhidhamma, as I said, in Theravādan Buddhist psychology, and maybe in the Mahāyāna as well, they would say every moment of mind has something that’s prominent in it. The difference in the *jhānas* is that a *jhānic* state continues. It’s moment after moment after moment after moment. So *jhāna*, that word, is from the Pali word *jhāyati*, which means ‘to burn.’ People say, “A *jhāna* is like a candle burning steadily,” or “*Jhāna* will burn up your defilements” – either way. But the point is, it’s something continuous. So this *ekaggatā*, what makes it characteristic of *jhāna* is moment after moment the same thing is prominent. So there’s a kind of temporal extension of what’s prominent, if that’s clearer.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yes, I think it’s *e-k-a-g-g-a-t-ā*. In the first edition of my book, I completely mistranslated it, so I changed it in the second edition. I had missed the double *g*, and I had translated it ‘gone to oneness,’ like unified, but that’s wrong. It’s actually to do with one prominence. So I made that change, yeah.

Anything else? Who is that there?

Q8: feeling pulled into different states

Yogi: I'm noticing that I keep falling in some stages – I don't know if it's a *jhāna* or not, but I find this very tiring and very intense, and I feel I can't stop it. Right now I was kind of going. It's like a pulling. I get pulled into some stages I don't really know.

Rob: Okay. Like we've been saying – I don't know *quite* what you're talking about – that sort of thing can be quite normal. We can get pulled into a hindrance. We can get pulled into a *jhāna*. We can get pulled into some other state that's more familiar because of our meditation habits. Again, I would probably say: come to a one-on-one, and we'll really try and identify what those states are, because that identification will help guide us. "Okay, how do you need to move from there?" Sometimes it's not a bad thing; it's just, "Okay, now we're *here* a lot. How do we move from there?" Other times, it's like, "Okay, we need to maybe help it *not* go there, in which case we need to try and do this and this," but we need to probably hear more about what it is, what those are.

Yogi: This sounds quite helpful, to know what it is.

Rob: Yeah. So bring it to a one-to-one interview, and we can really hear more about it (or them, if there's more than one), and get a sense of what it is, and that will guide us in terms of how to respond. But that sort of thing is very normal, yeah.

Yogi: Thank you.

Q9: strong *pīti* that feels very sexual

Rob: Good. [Robert, inaudible in background] Oh, I already said it, but just to say: if the *pīti* is really strong and feels very sexual, and like an orgasm, it's really, really completely okay. [laughs] Just enjoy it. Really get into it. Is that what you're ...? Yeah? So you see what Robert's going to bring to the retreat. [laughter] No, it's really important, because we have this, "This can't be right," or we feel like, "Oh, am I maybe emanating some kind of weird sexual energy into the hall? It's going to pollute the pure Gaia House pristine atmosphere of renunciate celibacy and all that." It's completely not an issue. It's just a manifestation of *pīti*. Open to it. Enjoy it. The whole same thing applies. There's absolutely no shame in it. It's something to open to and get into, and it's doing good stuff. It's really good.

I can't see who that is. Okay. Sabra, please.

Q10: difference between elation, excitement, happiness and *sukha*

Yogi: Just a clarifying question. I feel like I remember hearing you warn about elation, and I'm wondering about the difference between elation and excitement, and happiness and *sukha*.

Rob: Yeah, thank you. The difference between elation, excitement, happiness and *sukha*. I don't know – that 'elation,' I'd have to look up the original Pali and whatnot. It was something the Buddha [said] when he was talking to a small group of super-advanced meditators who were working on psychic power meditation and stuff like that.¹ One of the things they were doing was – what's it called? – the clairvoyance, the seeing far away in their meditation. And one of the subtle hindrances was either you get excited at being able to do that, or what's opening up, or it's new territory, or what you're seeing, or whatever. So I don't know the Pali offhand, and I'd have to find it. But my sense of it is it's something like excitement, is probably the closest thing.

Excitement's an interesting thing. If there's too much excitement, it can lead to the snatching, for example. It also can cause a certain amount of agitation that disturbs the serenity. We're *really* not going to talk about it on this retreat, but for those kinds of powers and whatnot, it needs a *very* still mind, super, super still. Any kind of excitement there is just going to make the waters a little bit turbulent, so it's going to be a hindrance relative to that. So that's my guess is what the Pali kind of translates – I don't know, but that's my guess.

But excitement itself is quite interesting. It's almost like an energy, like all these things. We go back to what I said with Jason: sometimes people come to me and they say, "I have fear about X or Y." And it's like, I'm wondering if this is fear or excitement. It's actually excitement, and the mind is relating to it in a certain way, and labelling it a certain way, that it actually *becomes* fear. It becomes an experience of fear. But at its *root*, so to speak – it's not a good word, but let's use it for now – it's actually excitement, or more naturally, it's actually excitement. So they have to learn to play with the relationship with it so that it can become excitement. And actually the excitement can be energizing, empowering, galvanizing, give you courage – all kinds of things. But excitement itself can also kind of wobble in different ways. So an excited energy could become bubbly happiness or *pīti*. All these things are quite close. And partly, you know, the different modes of relating to something like excitement will, again, shape the very perception so it becomes something else. Excitement and *pīti*, for example, are very close. And actually, there are probably times when *pīti* has even been, in the tradition of translating Pali to English, translated as 'excitement,' I imagine, or, I think, vaguely remember. So it's very close, and I would say part of the experience of the first *jhāna*, especially at first, is excitement. It's super exciting for lots of different reasons – the energetics of it, but also the sense of "Wow! Look what's happening!"

But the point is, we can come into different relationships with the energy of excitement, and that will actually – because of dependent arising, because everything depends on the way of looking; there's no independent appearance of anything – it can shape it. In itself, it's open to malleability, and you can shape it towards *pīti*. Maybe you can even shape it towards *sukha*. *Sukha* I usually translate as 'happiness' – I'm not sure what Keren had in mind when she asked yesterday, but just because that seems to me the closest word in English to sort of encompass the territory that it includes. I don't have them here, but looking back at some of the English translations over the past, say, thirty years, there have been all kinds of different translations of *pīti* and *sukha*, and some of them even reverse what each means. I find that a bit baffling. But I think probably, as time has gone on, it's gotten more consistent. So I use that word, 'happiness,' to translate *sukha*.

But you'll see, as well, when the third *jhāna* opens, the kind of happiness that's characteristic of the third *jhāna* – it's still technically *sukha*, but most people will never have experienced that kind of happiness. It's super serene. It's almost other-worldly, you know? Not *almost* – it really feels like an other-worldly kind of happiness in its flavour and texture. I just use that word because it seems to me the broadest, most stretchable word in English to cover the different ranges of what *sukha* might mean. So *sukha*, excitement, *pīti*, and elation. Does that ...?

Yogi: That's great, very helpful. Thanks.

Rob: Okay, good. I think last one. Is that okay, Danny?

Q11: training attention at each level of subtlety / being clear about intention for *mettā* (base practice) vs intention for *jhāna* vs intention for inspiration in creative projects

Yogi: That was helpful, actually, because I've been experiencing a lot of that kind of excitement today. It's getting in the way of my clairvoyance. [laughter]

You said that we need to train attention at each level of subtlety. So I'm really noticing that. It's like with a lot of *pīti*, there's a particular kind of *papañca* that comes with *pīti*, kind of very inspired ideas which seem really great, and I think they are, but they're a distraction from the point. So that's kind of one part of what's going on. My base practice has also mostly been *mettā*. And it seems like as there's a shift to more subtlety, the kind of habitual way of practising *mettā* doesn't work in generating the qualities that I associate with *mettā*. So there's been this exploration of, "Well, how do I practise *mettā* at this kind of level of subtlety?" So that's one alive avenue of exploration, and maybe moments of success, but not a lot of sustained, "Oh, I've got that now." There's just generally a lot of *pīti*, but just this kind of energy, and sometimes it's more blissful or whatever. So then, also, the question of, well, if that's not working – and it feels like every time I try and do that, I'm kind of trying to squeeze something, like I'm trying to use a gross practice at a subtle level. So maybe I should just abandon that, and just go with the *pīti* or do something else.

Rob: Okay. So let me see if I understand this. Let's take the questions in the reverse order. Is that okay? Yeah, everything changes. I mean, in a certain way, things get more subtle, and then I have to learn how to work with that different level of subtlety. So even if this wasn't a *jhāna* retreat, if it was a *mettā* retreat, I would expect things to get more subtle. You'd have to, "Okay, what do I do now that things are more subtle?" If there's a lot of *pīti*, at that time, in the context of a *mettā* practice for *jhānas*, you'd have a couple of choices, okay? One choice would be, okay, let the *mettā* go at that point. Let the *mettā* intention go. And if the *pīti* is at least strong enough that it's definitely pleasant, and stable enough (it's there for a few minutes without disappearing and coming back), then you can work with the *pīti* directly. Forget about the *mettā*. Let the *pīti* become the principal thing, okay?

The second possibility, which would be confined to – if this was a *mettā* retreat and not a *jhāna* retreat – would be that the *pīti* itself then becomes ... *that* is the *mettā*. In other words, "I'm feeling some really lovely stuff here. You have some. I want you to have some." And you radiate it out. And

anyway, you're bathing in it. So it's not like *you* get it and *I* don't, if I'm having the *pīti*. So the *pīti* becomes the flavour of the *mettā*, and that's what you imagine radiating out.

So, like I said, if this was a *mettā* retreat, and our intention was *not* to go to *jhānas*, or if this was a long enough *mettā* retreat, everyone would be experiencing *pīti* and *sukha* and all the rest of it, and it would just be, "Okay, that's the flavour of the *mettā* right now, so that's what I'm radiating." In order to radiate it, I still have to *feel* it, you know? At least that's the way *I* teach *mettā*. I wouldn't just trundle through the phrases at that point. This is actually, "This is the flavour that I want to share with you." And if that's super serene, subtle happiness, like *sukha* of the third *jhāna*, that's still the flavour, so I actually have to feel that, feel my energy body, and it's radiating out from every pore of my being, from the whole energy space. And you can kind of do *this* [palms up/outward], and imagine it coming from your hands – you know, that sort of thing. So you get used to integrating the *mettā*, the *pīti*, and the bodily experience, *if* you want to keep the *mettā* around, and *when* you want to do that with the *pīti*. Other times, just get into the *pīti*.

Now, if it's a question of it's not so much *pīti*, but there are more subtle manifestations of *mettā* around, and I don't know how to work with them, I don't know how to... Was that ...?

Yogi: Unfortunately not, because it's like I can't conjure *mettā*. It's just kind of a general well-being, but I can't bring up, like, those qualities at all, almost.

Rob: Of *mettā*?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Okay. So ...

Yogi: Except – sorry – just, like, not so much in formal practice, but if I'm walking around, and I have occasion to hold the door open for somebody, then that just, like, deeply touches my heart.

Rob: Yeah, lovely. So again, it may be, Danny, that it's a question of intention. So on this retreat, the fact that you just told me that there's well-being there, but there's not the *mettā*, not a problem on this retreat, because you're going with the well-being. If it was a *mettā* retreat, it would be like, "Well, okay, how do we get the *mettā* back?" Yeah? So you have to kind of remember your intention. Remember what I said about intention on the opening day. It makes so much difference. And even just a subtle kind of bifurcating or shift in the emphasis of the attention to "I'm worried about my *mettā* now" – don't worry about your *mettā*. You have plenty of *mettā*. You can worry about that on a *mettā* retreat, about developing that more and more, but (A) it's not something to worry about for you, and (B) it's not something to worry about on this retreat. It's the well-being, and you can let that be more primary. Does that answer the question?

Yogi: Yeah, I think so.

Rob: Yeah? What about the subtlety business? I didn't ...

Yogi: I think you spoke to it.

Rob: Okay. In terms of the first thing, yeah. So where there's *pīti*, there's often excitement, and there's often all kinds of creative ideas about projects that I'm going to do, and stuff like that. Sometimes, more than that, there's actual – I don't know what you'd call it – creative, not just the *idea* to do something, but actual ... you know, you start hearing poetry or music or whatever. Second *jhāna*, for some people, even *more*. It's almost like this spring that the Buddha talked about can be a spring of inspiration and creative – you can kind of plug into something. In a way, any of the first four, at least.

So this is a big deal. Again, I hesitated to even say that, what I just said, but again, really, my invitation and hope and wish to stress: we're on a *jhāna* retreat. At some point in your life, when you've developed a bit more of this *jhāna* business, you might decide to take a retreat where you actually meditate for a bit, get in touch with that inspiration, write whatever it is that's coming (poetry, whatever it is), go back to the meditation, do that, and actually do that. That's great, you know? Doing that *now* will pretty much abort your progress in *jhānas*. So I think, personally, my real hope is that you'll all keep the intention. That's why I'm here. That's what I'm hoping to serve and support. But if you get into this, there's no reason why you can't have another retreat at another time. You go somewhere for a week or whatever it is. You're playing with that. But that's your *intention*, and then that's clear. Here, if you really want these treasures to open up, it's what I said on the opening talk: there's something very, very powerful, much more powerful than we realize, about keeping the intention really clear and single and steady. *Mettā*'s a great intention. Even creative projects – I don't know what it is, but creative projects. They're all great intentions. But too many, pulling in too many directions, you'll end up with not so much.

Yogi: That connects, to me, to what you said, which I found really galvanizing, around this kind of gathering of soul-power.

Rob: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. That's good. Okay? Great. Let me just see. Do I have anything else? [shuffles papers] No. I think that's okay. So why don't we just have a few quiet moments together?

[silence]

Okay, thank you all. Time for tea. See you soon.

¹ MN 128. The Pali word translated as 'elation' is *uppīla*.

12-24 Q & A, and Short Talk

Okay. Time, again, if there are any questions that feel relevant to your practice, or to anything that's been said about the framework, or anything about the detail that we've covered at all. I have maybe just a few things I'd like to throw in as well, but why don't we start with some questions?

Andy, yes?

Q1: balancing opening and enjoying with fine-tuning and probing

Yogi: This was a question, Rob, about the difference, or the similarity and the contrast, between kind of tuning into the *nimitta* or the qualities of the *jhāna* – which feels, to me at least, quite probe-y, and it’s almost like – what do they call it? – keyhole surgery. It’s almost like I’m getting into the quality amid all the other stuff around it. And then, yeah, but also finding the need for something more expansive. So, you know, I’ve been trying to play with it, almost conceiving it as listening to those qualities, rather than a kind of probing in, a kind of listening, a tuning. I think you said something about trying to hear a noise, faint noise amid lots of other noise. It feels like I need to open more, and yet the very act of fine-tuning feels the opposite of that.

Rob: Yeah, thank you. So are you talking in particular about this space of peacefulness that opened for you?

Yogi: No, but with the first *jhāna* as well.

Rob: Ah, okay.

Yogi: Probably *more* with the peacefulness. More what I’m saying now relates to the peacefulness.

Rob: So it does? Yeah, okay. Good. Yeah, correct. [yogi chuckles] It’s both, you know? Sometimes the probing is a concentration thing – literally like, “How much attention can there be in a small amount of area?” But then there’s also the probing with the sense of “Can I really get the sense of this?” And then with the opening, as you say – that thing I said about what would be the best analogy, that thing I said about listening for a sound when there are lots of sounds, and there’s just some particular sound I’m listening to, maybe that’s a quality. You’re actually not scrunching anything up. You’re sort of opening more. It’s like your antennae are just becoming more sensitive within that openness. So yeah, those two modes will be important, and you can play between them.

What happens sometimes with the peacefulness is – I’ll get into this when we talk more about the peacefulness – sometimes what happens is there’s a very *large* peacefulness, actually, and it’s even larger than the energy body size. Depending on where you are, we want to spend more or less time in that. But at the beginning of the peacefulness, it’s probably more energy body-size. But you can still open up the attention wide – almost like imagine it’s a kind of realm. It’s a large realm where you’re almost listening to the music of the realm. So there’s very subtle, exquisite, quiet music there. (This is a metaphor.) That’s more open, and the whole thing can feel more open.

Other times, just as the first *jhāna*, you pick a place where it seems strongest, and you kind of burrow into it, probe into it, yeah? Sometimes, what else can happen – and it might be after you’ve just lost it for a bit, or it might be as you’re getting into it more – how would we describe this? – it’s almost like a filament of something, a filament of that peace. So spatially, it’s relatively – you don’t know where you’re going to find it in the energy body space. But it can tend to be more lower down in the

body. It's as if a filament sort of – I'm trying to think of some kind of organism, some sort of simple organism that has these filament-like things.

Yogi 2: Anemone?

Rob: Anemone? Do they have them? Yeah, that sort of thing. [laughter] It's physical, okay? The other thing to add here – and we'll get to it more when we talk about the third *jhāna* more – is sometimes you're talking about a point in space that you're probing more. Sometimes you're more open. Sometimes you're more tuning into the mental quality of peacefulness. And sometimes you're more tuning into the physical quality of peacefulness. Ideally, we want those two to blend. But what it means at any time in your responsive play and working, it's like, "What do I pick up here?" And if in doubt, pick up the physical one first. That might feel like it's just a filament. It might be located – "Oh, it's located in my belly button or my kidney," or whatever it is. But more likely, it's just a sort of place in space, a region in space, and there's this kind of filament of that exquisite peacefulness, and that's what you're going with. So there's that as well. Does that make sense for now?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Yeah? Then one more thing I want to add, if it's okay. The other aspect here, or the other metaphor, is really tuning the receiver. So if we think about tuning a radio receiver, we're thinking about the wavelength changing. There are lower wavelengths, sort of lower frequencies, higher frequencies. And really what you're doing in each *jhāna* is tuning to a particular frequency as much as you're probing a certain point in space. Probing a certain point in space is very helpful, but that's not *really* what you're doing. You're really tuning to a certain frequency, and *if* probing a certain point in space or opening up wide space or filament (or whatever) helps you lock in and get a sense of that frequency that's particular to that *jhāna* or that bandwidth of frequencies, then that's all good. In a way, the primary thing you're doing is focusing on a certain frequency.

As I said, the *jhānas* themselves are more and more refined. So one of the things I forgot to ask you, when I just asked you a few questions yesterday, is *is* this state of peacefulness more refined than, let's say, the second and the first *jhānas*?

Yogi: Yes. Yeah, definitely.

Rob: Yeah, okay, because that's also a signal. If you say, "Well, I'm not sure," then I wouldn't be so sure that you've moved into a deeper state, you know? It might be peaceful, it might be "Yes, it's very nice," but one of the real markers (apart from the other questions I asked you, and maybe some others I can't think of right now) is the shift in refinement. And as you shift in refinement, then you have to get skilled at kind of tuning your receiver and holding there. *How* that happens might be through the probing, might be through the open and with the antennae up, might be through the sense of filament, etc. But you can play with all of that. Does this address it?

Yogi: Yeah, that's really helpful. One more thing about that. I think the tuning is so helpful. It's completely shifted my thinking about this whole practice, actually, just like this tuning of the dial. But it seems like when there's tuning – or at least I'm finding it difficult then to also incorporate the enjoyment. I'm tuning, and then I'm, "Oh, no, wait – actually remember to enjoy it as well." Any recommendations about how to kind of make sure the enjoyment is there with the tuning?

Rob: Well, if we turn it around and say "maximize the enjoyment," and that's the most important thing – the **E** on the end of SASSIE – then you will inevitably find that getting your tuning right is part of maximizing the enjoyment. So it might be just reversing the intentionality. So many people obviously think of *jhāna* and *samādhi* as "I'm focusing on one point, and it's a spatial point" – even if they don't think that *consciously*, that's what it becomes – but that's a very limited and limiting way of understanding what's happening. So I would rather go with this frequency thing. But in terms of intention, you can reverse that. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yes.

Rob: So just, I'm here with this thing. It's like I'm listening to a radio programme, and I really want to enjoy it. "What is that music?", or whatever it is. "I love it!" Then I'm going to want to play with that dial, just because I love it. I'm just following my enjoyment. I can play with the volume. I can shut my door so I can't hear my siblings arguing, or whatever it is, my children, whatever. But that's going to be organically part of me being into it. Do you see what I mean?

Yogi: Yeah, thank you.

Rob: So it might be part of it is just a kind of subtle reordering the hierarchy of intention at any point. Like I said, sometimes I feel that all you need to do is trust this kind of wish to enjoy things to the max, and really let that kind of lead sometimes. But let's see if there's anything else. It might be, related to something I said earlier, the sense of tuning to the refinement might be helped, at different times, by tuning in more to the – let's say 'physical' in inverted commas, the energy body frequency of that refinement, and sometimes more to the mental. But that shift might also help incorporate, literally incorporate, the enjoyment more. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Yeah? Okay, good.

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Julia, yeah?

Q2: using insight ways of looking as a base practice for *jhānas*

Yogi: I have a question about using insight ways of looking in *jhāna* practice. So I've been using them as a base practice, and noticing that there's some anxiety about how indiscriminately or discriminately I'm using them – like, remembering that part of the instruction with them in emptiness practice is to use them for *everything*, whether something is pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. But then some worry about using them to look at well-being, for example – like that that will prevent *pīti* from fabricating. I guess part of what I've been playing with is just sort of using them indiscriminately for a little while, and then once a sense of well-being starts to open up, using them more discriminately. I found using *anattā* can help me to open some, relax some of the clinging around the well-being that's coming.

Rob: Yeah, really important question. Thank you. So it's a bit like ... [laughs] What's it a bit like? It's a bit like ... again, I'm sure there's a better analogy than this, but it's a bit like going down a water slide, you know, one of those theme park things. But imagine this water slide, at certain points all the way down, it has turnings off it. So it goes *da-da-da*, but every once in a while, it has a turning off to the left, a turning off to the right. Have you been on one of those? Yeah? [laughter] You can just kind of veer, if you want, to the right, hopefully without slamming ... [laughter] It's not a great analogy, but you get the idea. It's got padded sides, okay? [laughter] So what that means is, yeah, if you use it indiscriminately at first – everything that comes up, you said, *anattā*; let's say we're taking that as an example – *anattā*, *anattā*, whatever comes up.

If I just started with, I think I gave an example, if I've got back pain, and I just did *anattā*, *anattā*, *anattā*, to *everything*, including the back pain, what would eventually happen was the pain would attenuate. The body sense would start to dissolve. And at some point, pleasure of some kind would come up; let's say it was *pīti*. So at that point, okay, I'm sliding down this thing, it's great, and I've got a right turn there that I can lean into, which means once the *pīti* has built enough I can then stop doing the insight practice and just gently but completely switch what I'm doing to “Now I just want to enjoy, enjoy *that* particular thing,” which is the *pīti*.

If the *pīti* comes up – okay, back pain's gone to neutral, and then *pīti*'s come up, and the body's dissolving, and then I say, “Okay, *pīti*,” and I keep doing *anattā* on *pīti*, it will go beyond it. Have you found that already? Is that what's happening? Or you're worried that it might happen?

Yogi: Yeah, that's what I'm worried about. I find that I'm not even using it to look at the *pīti*. As soon as something in the realm of pleasurable comes up, I just stop, and then things shut down a little.

Rob: Yeah, okay. So you need to find a kind of middle ground between being – you know, as the Buddha says, “Don't snatch at it,” okay? So that's really important. But you can also kind of relax. It's like, don't worry, you know? You might overshoot, and then you can come back. It might be – and this is something I wanted to say to everyone – that you overshoot, and you find yourself most commonly in, I don't know, some other *jhāna*, and then either you can work backwards from there (and we can talk about how do you work backwards); or you can hang out there a while, get really used to that, and then work backwards; or that can become your primary playground. So, in a way, don't worry. I think the important thing, first, is to feel like you can do this and get a sense of well-being, which at some

point you can kind of steer your body into this thing, and then just enjoy. You make that shift. *Exactly* where it comes out, I think, first things first: don't worry about it. First get that confidence. That's really important. And then we can map it.

Just for example, let's say it ends up being the fourth *jhāna*. You say, "Okay, let's learn the fourth *jhāna* before we learn the first," okay? This is what I said about people who have done different practices. I realize now we have a roomful of people here who have a lot of practice experience, especially insight experience, so things won't necessarily evolve for everyone in the order one, two, three, four. It may, or it may not. But once the *pīti* has arisen, you know, don't snatch it. You may also – the *pīti* has arisen, and I'm doing my *anattā* on something else, and the *pīti* is arising. So that's another option. I wouldn't do it so much on the *pīti* itself, you know? I think I mentioned: if you just stay with those insight ways of looking, they'll take you all the way into the formless realms, and that will probably be just a bit disorienting for right now.

But how does that sound? I'm not giving exact instructions, but I think the most important thing is don't worry too much about it.

Yogi: That's what I wanted to hear.

Rob: [laughs] Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's really important. Anything more with it? No? That's good? Okay, great.

Someone else? Mikael, yeah, please. [18:15]

Q3: maximizing enjoyment to counteract subtle tiredness

Yogi: Thank you. I would like to ask about subtle hindrances. Yeah, hindrances that seem to be somehow coupled with increasing subtlety. I was practising the second *jhāna*, and doing the same thing as I was doing yesterday, what I mentioned about really absorbing into it, and trying to keep up with the subtlety of attention when the *sukha* gets really subtle. What I've been noticing again and again, after a certain point, when it gets really subtle, and especially when it starts to lean more towards peacefulness and the third *jhāna*, I notice that my attention somehow – there arises a bit of micro-level sloth and torpor, micro-level tiredness when it gets really subtle. So with the peacefulness, more or less, I just get tired somehow, and lose my focus, and it just falls apart. Then I have to reverse, come back. I might get some energy from increasing the *sukha* or increasing the *pīti*, and then, again, I would come to the level of very subtle attention, subtle *nimitta*, and then *zooom* – it sort of falls into tiredness.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: How could one work with this?

Rob: I'm wondering, as I'm listening, Mikael, if – I'm *wondering*; I don't know if this is correct – but if you could think about two things. One thing is maximizing the enjoyment, as opposed to maximizing the concentration, or even worrying about the subtlety – although we talked about that yesterday. The

other thing, or mixed with that, is: is it possible to keep it longer at a more bubbly level of happiness (which technically is just happiness with more *pīti* mixed in it)? And let it stay there for much longer *with* the intention and attitude to really enjoy it more, as opposed to, “Now I’m refining my concentration. Now I’m going deeper in the absorption,” etc. Yeah? They’re all important factors, but it might be that what’s happening – and again, because of your background and *citta* habits from practice – it might be that the absorption and the concentration are deepening faster than the enjoyment is deepening. I find the Buddha’s images so accurate in so many ways, his similes. It’s like, really drink that water from the spring. Really, really delight in it, you know? Because that’s doing something as well. It’s giving you energy, but it will do something to the way it then moves deeper, if you like. So it can go deeper through this increasing subtlety, but as you said, sometimes it gets too subtle and we’re not able to follow it, and sometimes it’s not *quite* the right thing that needs to happen.

I’m going to talk about the second *jhāna* tomorrow, but this is actually quite key. If you ask me what’s the most significant aspect of the second *jhāna*, you know, one might be tempted to say, “That’s where thought stops, the Buddha says. That’s where thought stops,” so that’s a very significant kind of threshold in terms of deepening concentration. I’m going to come back to that, but I’ll say it’s not as simple as we might think, what that means. It *is* important, but I would say in the grand scheme of things what’s much more important is the happiness. Bathing in the happiness is *doing* something to the being. Knowing these different bandwidths of happiness is *doing* something to the being. Marinating over and over again in that happiness, drinking your fill of happiness, is, in the long-term, in terms of its relation to insight, in terms of the work that it’s doing in terms of your capacity to let go, in terms of how it’s opening the heart, in terms of what it’s teaching you eventually about perception and malleability of perception, emptiness, dependent arising – that’s the key thing.

So we said, what’s the work that needs to happen in this moment? That’s a sort of very subtle question that’s going on for any meditator in ... not *every* moment, but a lot of moments. And one *can* say, “Oh, I really need to focus more,” “I really need to let it subtilize, drop down with the subtlety and corresponding subtlety of mind,” “I want to be absorbed more.” These are all valid choices at any time. But it might be that just delighting in the happiness is actually much more significant, and, as I said, it will probably deliver you to a slightly different place, or a *very* different place, even in terms of the third *jhāna*, when we get to it – in way, you can divide the third *jhāna* into three, and all those levels are important. But going with the happiness more and really, really enjoying it might help steer you a little bit better. Does this make sense?

Yogi: Yes, indeed.

Rob: Yeah? So to do that – it sounds like you already know, but just to add: I want to keep the happiness relatively gross, okay? It’s a little bit the opposite of the instructions I gave you yesterday. You can play between the two. Sometimes just keep the happiness more gross. How do we do that? It’s part of this tuning. It’s part of just an intention to keep it: I want to keep it in this ballpark, in this bandwidth. But sometimes what you can do – it sounds like you already are doing it – is just mix a bit more *pīti* in if it gets too subtle, or rather, if it gets too *calm*. If the happiness starts to get *too* serene, you just mix a bit more *pīti* in with it. Eventually, all these different bandwidths of the different *jhānas*

become just accessible without having to do any tricks; you just kind of remember back to this and that level within it.

But how does that sound?

Yogi: Yeah, it sounds very good, and you have been describing some of my experiences already. I just wanted to add that I just realized that many times my second *jhāna* works better when I'm doing it in walking meditation, so it keeps on a grosser level, just because of the movement of the body and coordination.

Rob: Right. That's great. And eventually, what we want is that it's not so influenced by posture – walking, sitting, standing – but by intention and this kind of steering. It's all part of the responsiveness and creativity that we're talking about, and you can do it by just a little bit more *pīti* in the gin and tonic. Yeah?

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Good.

Q4: working on different *jhānas* in parallel; access to *jhānas* in daily life off retreat; first *jhāna* less intense/interesting with more practice

Yogi: I have a couple of questions. I'll start with the first. I've been working on the first *jhāna* for a few days, and then it felt like I reached your mastery definition, and then moved on. But I kind of wonder whether it might have been too fast, because it feels like the access to all these different aspects of mastery is very dependent on the fact that they do it all the time. What I would really like to do is to be able to practise *jhānas* back home, on a daily practice, just one hour a day or two, and with all the noise of daily life in the background. So I kind of wonder ...

Rob: Yeah, you know, access to *jhānas* is dependent on a million conditions – well, not a million; a lot of different conditions. Off retreat, on retreat, there'll be lots of different conditions which allow that each day, each sitting. But one of them is just how familiar it all is, how familiar that *pīti* is. So a lot of those aspects of mastery are just dependent on being so, so repeatedly soaked in something that it's just easy to summon it, etc. So it might be, yeah, longer.

Yogi: Then how would you know? Just, like, spend more time with what already feels familiar and stable, or ...?

Rob: It might be, but it still might be that you have – because we talked about you having two or even three playgrounds, so that increasing familiarity, let's say, with the first *jhāna* might happen in parallel, at the same time – in other words, on this retreat – with the second and the third, and you're just

developing more and more of them like that, together. In other words, you're still getting familiarity with the first, but you're still developing familiarity with the second as well.

Yogi: I keep practising the first when I'm focusing on the second?

Rob: No, I mean in the course of the day you might move between the first and the second, but give yourself a generous time in the first, and a generous time in the second.

Yogi: Yeah, so I gave myself a generous time in the first, and now I've moved to give myself a generous time with the second. I wonder whether I should still be generous with the first kind of.

Rob: I don't know, you know. I mean, at a certain point – as maybe I'll say tomorrow – what will happen is it becomes almost maybe a little difficult to stay in the first. As Andy was saying, the mind so much wants to slide. It's almost got its own agenda and its own wisdom, you know? So it's a tricky question. But there's no reason why you can't just continue for a while with three *jhānas*. It doesn't have to be, "Right, the next three days I'll spend in one. The next three days after that ..." It's just like, "Today I'll do all three, and tomorrow I'll do all three, and the day after I'll do all three."

As to what happens in your daily life, it's hard to predict. Going back to the Buddha's description of the first *jhāna*, it's dependent on seclusion, dependent on withdrawal, but not from people and things; it's dependent on withdrawal from entanglement, withdrawal, seclusion from the hindrances. Yeah? So of course, sometimes we're in our daily life, and we're just entangled in stuff – relational stuff, work stuff, this pressure, that pressure – and the mind is actually more entangled. And then it's harder to withdraw internally from those pressures. And then health things – all kinds of things affect what actually happens. So it's actually hard to predict. I don't know, really. My intuitive hunch is: why don't you let yourself just have three for now? And they're happening in parallel, so your day is moving between those three as best you can, maybe roughly equally – doesn't have to be. This day is a bit more *this* one; that day is a bit more *that* one. And just trust in all of that, that it will bear fruit in different ways.

It's probably the case that whatever you can access regularly on a long retreat is further along than what you can access – for most people – in their daily life. But there's so much individual variation with things. That's just my intuitive kind of hunch. I don't know. Does that sound okay? Okay. Good.

Yogi: Can I ask one more thing?

Rob: Sure, yeah.

Yogi: With first *jhāna*, it was very different than the previous *jhāna* practice, the first *jhāna*, in the ways you said – it was less intense and all that. But also it was less wonderful, in a way. The first time I practised it, about a year ago, it was really deeply affecting the whole being, and very impressive, and kind of produced a lot of faith in the Dharma. Now it's as if there are some parts of the psyche that are just not interested in it any more, and they just don't get involved. The body is suffused with *pīti*, and

even the consciousness can be full of the *jhāna*, but some parts ... I kind of wonder both: is it important, and can I convince them to join again still? Or just say, “Okay, never mind. Now they’re in the second and third *jhāna*”? And also, is it going to happen with each of them?

Rob: It’s very normal. I think I mentioned this. It’s very normal then to become much less interested in the first *jhāna* after you’ve tasted particularly the third. It’s very, very normal. And you can go through a period like this. I think one thing is a larger view, that actually I’m really wanting all eight *jhānas*, you know? It *does* get less intense over time. It becomes more mellow. And that’s partly by the opening to the third *jhāna*, etc., and the more peaceful realm. So that’s all normal, you know?

Again, if you think about more of a direction, rather than “I’m trying to achieve a certain amount of this full involvement.” Just think – here I am now, practising the first *jhāna*, and maybe it’s a little less than I’m practising the second and third *jhāna*, but when I go there, part of my intention is: can I find this really lovely? Can I actually really get into it? Rather than “Am I, or am I not?”, it’s like it’s more a direction: “Is it possible to get more?”, without a sense of “Did I pass or fail that test?” Yeah? It’s a subtle difference. It’s a direction. Does this make sense?

Yogi: Yeah. I don’t think it’s like “Did I pass or fail?”, it just feels that some areas are just off, kind of – not interested in this.

Rob: Yeah, but your task is just to give yourself to it more, just to open to it more. It may be that when you’ve had more to drink from the third *jhāna*, etc., and maybe deeper *jhānas*, that your relationship with the first *jhāna* is then recontextualized, and you see it in a much ... When it first comes, there’s nothing else. There’s just normal consciousness or *papañca*, and the first *jhāna*, and it’s completely the most amazing thing. It’s a signal to the being that completely other states of consciousness are possible. So oftentimes it really makes a dramatic effect, a dramatic impression. As you go on more, it’s more like it just takes its place in a much larger jigsaw puzzle or *maṇḍala* of the eight *jhānas*, you know? But you still have a sense of “This is really valuable.” So part of your task is to, in that larger context, really, “Can I just really find the enjoyment here?” And you’re just trying to work in that direction. But it probably won’t be as dramatic, etc., as it was the first time. That’s okay, because it’s just one part of a much bigger picture. Does that ...?

Yogi: Yeah, I think so. Does the same thing happen to the other *jhānas*, as well, or is it just the first because of the third?

Rob: Well, in a way, it does. I don’t know. I’m not sure. In a way, it might, but in a way, it might be that there’s something particular about our relationship with the first *jhāna*. You’ll have to find out. I think there’s a way, once you’ve done more and you have a whole context – it’s almost like having that context takes the pressure off, having it to be a certain way. Does that make sense, what I’m saying about context? It’s like you have a larger context, and it just takes the pressure off. I also think, you know, if you spend more time, let’s say, in the third, then the quality of the rapture is yummy in a

different way. You have to kind of find, “Oh, it’s a different taste than I was originally used to,” and “Oh, that’s actually really nice.” So that might be something. Yeah? Okay.

Yogi: Thanks.

Q5: increasing *pīti* and *sukha* when *samādhi* is dry; *jhānic* equanimity vs non-*jhānic* equanimity

Yogi: Sometimes the *samādhi* is quite dry, actually, and I recognize myself quite much when you’re talking about people who have been in traditional insight retreats – it’s quite spacious, a lot of equanimity, usually, but quite dry, actually. No big deal, no big pleasures. The energy body is quite light, but not really pleasant. More like neutral. I tried different things, like warming the whole thing up with *mettā*, and pleasure, trying to find pleasure. But sometimes there is no pleasure. It seems so, at least. So any advice? [38:30]

Rob: Yeah. So this is really important. The movement to equanimity, or the tendency to find oneself in a sort of equanimous space, will be quite common for people who have done a lot of insight practice, etc. The question for our purposes here is whether that equanimity is close to a *jhānic* equanimity – and there are different kinds of *jhānic* equanimity, like very big ones, or smaller ones with the energy body – or whether it’s just equanimity, and it’s not really close to a *jhāna*. Now, what you’re describing actually doesn’t sound like it’s very [*jhānic*]. It’s still a skilful state. It’s much better than being [in] *papañca* or whatever. But it’s not really close to a *jhānic* equanimity. So for some people, actually, what they’re describing – they just work their way into it, and actually it becomes something like the fourth *jhāna*, let’s say, or whatever.

The sense I get from what you’re describing is actually it’s *not* that close, and so rather than trying to go in there first and come *back* and convert that to fourth *jhāna*, actually, from the beginning, try to think more about *pīti* and *sukha* and what will ignite that. So are there ways that *pīti* and happiness – what would bring up *pīti* and happiness? If I asked you that, what would you say? In other words, not letting yourself go to that state – something else, from the beginning.

Yogi: I mean, in the big picture, I’m going between the first and the second *jhāna* quite easily today; it’s not happening *all* the time, the dry *samādhi* thing.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: But it does. I can just come back to the first – I mean, I’m a bit snobby about the first *jhāna* now, I have to say, and I go easily to the second one. It’s like I really love to explore the different subtleties of this *jhāna*, so I really love that one. It became sort of my base.

Rob: The second?

Yogi: Yeah, the second.

Rob: Good. Okay. So it's only going to this equanimity place that's not very *jhānic* sometimes?

Yogi: Yes.

Rob: Yeah, okay. When it goes there, bring it back. In other words, at the moment, it's not ripe enough. The others are not ripe enough to turn that into a *jhānic* state at the moment. You need more time in the happiness and the equanimity. As I said – it's not quite, but a little related to Mikael's question – then they will deliver you to a different kind of equanimity that's much closer to a *jhāna*. Yeah? So when it goes there, like I said, relatively speaking, it's a pretty skilful place to hang out, but it doesn't really sound like it's got in it, at the moment, what will allow it to blossom into an actually *jhānic* equanimity of any kind, really. So when it goes there, fine – just see: “Oh, it's done that again.” And do something to bring back – if you can summon it just by itself, the happiness or the peacefulness of the third, great; just go back. If you can't, then how am I going to get back, you know? If I can remember it, if I can add a happy thought in, if I can just have a subtle intention, if I need to go back to the base practice, or whatever. But at the moment, I wouldn't hang out in that kind of equanimity too much. Yeah? So that's what you're liking, the second and third, and you just need more time there. It really works on the being gradually, and it prepares something to ripen in its time. So this space that you're in now is more a result of your other practice, rather than the *jhāna* practice. Does this make sense?

Yogi: Yes:

Rob: Yeah? Okay.

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Great.

Is that Lauren? Yes, please.

Q6: how to increase pleasure with tingling/effervescent sensations; inquiring into fear around deepening *samādhi*

Yogi: I felt your suggestions yesterday were helpful, and I've today been able to work a little with *pīti* – well, a lot with *pīti*. Two questions about it that feel like coming up today, but also coming up in the past when I've worked with *pīti*. The first one is related to some of these questions around enjoyment. So there will be, sometimes, especially if I'm working with the breath energy, there will be a lot of pleasure, but if I let the breath go, and I bring the attention to what are like sensations of tingling, sort of like an effervescence in the body, and compression/expansion, the energy body feels harmonized, but there's not a lot of pleasure in it. So that's one question. And then the other one is that sometimes when that harmonized energy body, when there's a sensation of that sort of coalescing even more, like a deepening of the *samādhi*, that there will be, actually pretty frequently, sort of like an immediate – like

my mind will immediately pull back and be like, “Uh-uh! Nope! Not going there.” So yeah, those are two questions.

Rob: I’m struggling a little bit today with the medication and things, so the first one, I just want to make sure I understand. The first one is you’re working with the breath in the energy body, and *pīti* arises, but when you switch to the *pīti*, you find it’s not really strong enough to work with? Is that correct?

Yogi: Well, yeah. There’s a lot of sensation in the body. There’s a lot of, like, tingling, and that feels throughout the whole body, but it’s not necessarily pleasurable; it’s just kind of odd.

Rob: Okay. So here’s an interesting thing. It might be that you need to spend more time working with the breath. You’re working with the breath and energy body, right? Yeah, that’s your principal practice. Okay. So it might be you just need more time with the breath and energy body to allow that tingling to become clearly pleasant. It might be. Or it might be that actually you turn your attention to the tingling, and you find that whether you perceive it as pleasant or unpleasant – I think I just threw this out very briefly the other day – is actually something you can play with. You can just decide to see it as pleasant. It may be that that’s the case. So it’s a bit like when we talked about excitement. It’s a bit like sometimes it’s kind of on a fence, and you can flop it either way – that it’s just odd, or it’s a bit unpleasant, or it’s pleasant. And you can learn to play with the perception that way, and then it’s like, “Okay, that’s what I’m doing again and again,” until it’s established in a kind of flow of pleasantness. But I would try both, you know? Both the playing with perception – just decide to see it as pleasant – and also let’s just stay a little longer, or maybe even a lot longer, with the practice, let the tingling build up, and see if it transforms by itself. Yeah?

And the second one was ...

Yogi: When the *samādhi* starts to deepen, the mind pulls back from ...

Rob: Pulls back from what though?

Yogi: The felt sensations of the deepening, or the experience of the *samādhi* deepening.

Rob: Okay, but what might be interesting is to get a little more specific. Is it fear arising at that point? If so, what exactly ...

Yogi: Yeah, it’s fear.

Rob: What exactly are you afraid of at that moment? Because *samādhi* deepening involves a whole bunch of different things happening, a whole bunch of interwoven aspects. So what exactly is it that you’re afraid of? Do you have a sense, or ...?

Yogi: That's a good question.

Rob: You might not know now.

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: So that would be something to take and find out, you know? There are all kinds of things that a meditator can get a little bit afraid of at that point, and the pullback is maybe coming from fear, maybe. So that would be just an inquiry to take into practice, really valuable, potentially. Find out what is it exactly, and then we can kind of target more specifically how we might need to work differently with that. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yeah. That feels helpful.

Rob: Yeah. Why don't we just say that for now? So give it to you as an inquiry, as something to begin to discern a little bit more clearly.

Yogi: Great. Thanks.

Rob: Okay, good.

[end questions]

Rob: Okay. Let me just say a few things that have come up in interviews or whatever that might be useful to everyone. First thing – and I didn't mention this in the opening talk, but – I never said, and I never say, on a retreat, "Don't make eye contact," or that kind of thing. Some of you will be coming in from other retreats and other forms where that's what you're taught, and you're just plugging that in. Like I said, I don't consider it a particularly helpful teaching to give, or kind of guidance to give for a retreat generally. So you can make eye contact with each other, and with coordinators, and with whoever else, *if* you want to, *when* you want to. Again, can you be responsive to what you need at any moment? Because actually, the connection with each other is part of the appreciation. It's part of the *muditā*. It's part of the rich soil of what allows *samādhi* to deepen, right? Shuffling around slowly, staring at your feet, and being kind of insular like that – it may not open up much *samādhi*, because something might get dry in the heart and feel not connected. But you have to see at any moment what you need, because there might be moments where actually you *do* need to be a bit more inside – something's going on in your experience or whatever, and you need to kind of, "Yeah, I'm not into that right now." You're not *obliged* to make eye contact. Eye contact gets very complicated psychologically, or it can on retreat – what's involved in eye contact, or what it triggers, or what it means, or all this; what are my psychological patterns of sort of avoiding contact, or needing it, or seeking it? We could probably talk for hours on this. I'm certainly not going to. But it's quite complex, you know, psychologically.

But we can say one thing: what do *I* need right now? And I might need to be a bit more within, and a bit more focused, for whatever reason. Maybe it's an emotional thing. Maybe I'm just working with a certain energy at that point, whatever. But correspondingly, if you make eye contact or smile at someone, and *they* might be at a moment or at a time when *they* need to be more insular, and so you might come at them with eye contact and a smile without realizing it, that you're hoping for a smile back, and they just completely blank you. And if you're not careful, that can be kind of, oh, I start to take that personally, and I start to think "They don't like me for some reason," or whatever it is, and the mind just spins with that. So if we're going to let ourselves at times make eye contact and be open, you have to be also kind of quite spacious about, "Am I putting pressure on this situation, or expecting or demanding something?" And really respect other people's space, and their rhythms, and what they need.

So in response to Keren's question, we were talking about when the Buddha – I've said this before, but I'll say it again – he hardly ever says, "Dependent on really focusing very hard and very steadily on the tip of the nose, the first *jhāna* arises." He hardly ever says that. Basically the standard formula is, "Dependent on withdrawal," or "Dependent on seclusion from the hindrances, from entanglement, the practitioner opens and enters into the first *jhāna*." So it's not that we want to close sense contact. I mean, that's one way of doing it, but you might be drying something else up inside. And I've said, how much the *samādhi* practice depends on open-heartedness and openness of being.

So this is something, as I said, it can be quite subtle, as usual, quite some responsiveness. It's dependent on open-heartedness, but not getting entangled, rather than just shutting everything down. To me, part of the art and part of the beauty of being on retreat is really sensing deeper levels of connection that we can have with each other, sense of communion in silence, without talking to each other or having someone listen to my story or whatever it is. You just get the sense of each person's being, and the particularities, and the uniqueness of each person's being, and it's just in the vibe. And one's open to that, and one's sort of cherishing, in a way, sensitive to each person's particularities, and enjoying that.

So sometimes we're a bit more like *this*, and sometimes we're a bit more like *this*, but being open and feeling connected is actually quite important, I think, and it's part of the art. Some of you have probably *never* been on a retreat where anyone said to not make eye contact, but for a lot of people in the Theravādan Dharma world, that's very, very common. So hopefully that makes sense.

If I'm going to be open, etc. – again, we go back to, related to this in a certain way, is I really need to keep my intention steady. My intention is *jhāna* practice, and that's why we're here. That's what this retreat was set up for. So I can be open, etc., but my intention is steady, and that very steadiness of intention is what allows you to be open. Again, there's a difference between being open and getting entangled, and then getting lost, and my intention has gone somewhere else, versus I can be open partly because I'm just really clear about what my intention is.

So the intention is really for *jhāna* practice primarily. And then secondly, this intention: what is my playground? This should, hopefully, if it's not clear for you already, it should be getting very, very clear soon. Now, some of you, like I said when we responded to Karen, and I've said in interviews, some of you are going to have multiple playgrounds at once. So it's not necessarily, "Oh, it's the second *jhāna*," "It's the first." It might be. Some of you might be working on two or three at once, and partly because

of how they interact with each other, or what that enables. In other words, for example, the third *jhāna* might mellow out the first *jhāna*, or the first *jhāna* is just too intense and so the second *jhāna* helps it a little bit. It should be getting clear, and if you feel it's really not clear where your learning edge playground is, let's try and get everyone clear with the three of us, with Sari and Robert, really what your playground is in the next day or two, max, so you really, "Oh, this is my learning edge playground." Yeah? And as I said, for some of you, because of your past experience, it will be a kind of multiple playground. That's completely fine. So this is different than teaching a retreat where people are just starting from the beginning in meditation.

Is anyone who's quite familiar with imaginal practice getting confused about what the difference is between imaginal spaces and *jhānic* spaces? Or is that okay? So I don't really need to talk about that. Okay, good.

Here's a funny thing. And again, it's like, everyone brings their own unique psychology, etc., to this. So sometimes we're too easily satisfied as human beings. A lot of people, what you're running into is too much pushiness – so either "I want this to be better," which we've talked about, or "What's next? What's next? What's next? What's the next *jhāna*? What's the next? I'm ready for the next one!" But sometimes we're a little bit too easily satisfied with something that we can already do, and it's nice, so it's like, "Okay, well, I'll just stay here." It's so individual, and it can change at different times, but this is part of the art of the whole thing, and to check out with a teacher. I learn a lot about my life psychology here, but you see it in the microcosm of something like *jhāna* practice. *Jhāna* practice reveals a lot because it's inherently kind of goal-oriented, and so we learn so much about our relationship with goals and all that.

[57:57] Some of you, or some of you in some moments, will be being too pushy, and probably everyone has encountered that. But some of you will be a little too easily satisfied with where you are or where you've been for a while. Again, that's something you might want to bring to interviews and explore a little bit. The interviews, they're quite regular, aren't they? They're every other day for people. And really, you know, I don't know if you've been feeling this, but there's no pressure on the interviews. Don't feel like you have to come in and say something super insightful or interesting, or have a big problem, or a really great question. I mean, hopefully you will have all of those things, but you don't have to. Sometimes what happens in the course of a long retreat with *jhānas* is the practice itself is just kind of plateauing for a while. It's like something's gestating, and then at a certain point it will just take a quantum leap. So if that's the case at any point, "Well, I'm going into this interview saying pretty much the same thing I said in the last interview, or reporting the same thing," no problem. Just report it. Maybe the interview's a lot shorter, you know? I'm just checking how you're doing. Maybe the teacher will ask you a couple of things, or find something that you can work with, but maybe it's just shorter. So I don't know if it is arising, but if you feel any sense of pressure for the interviews, you don't have to.

Something I've said before, but I think it really bears repeating, maybe in just slightly different words: *pīti*, if we're talking about *pīti*, will have a huge range of how strong it is, how intense it feels. And in a way, it really doesn't matter. It's got to be strong enough to work with, strong enough to get into. But sometimes it can feel relatively weak, and especially, like I said, maybe that's compared to the first few times I experienced it or whatever. In a way, what we want is to be okay with that whole range

– okay when it’s really very intense: can I bear that? Can I open to it? Can I actually find that enjoyable? Can I really come into a relationship with it where that’s fruitful rather than almost like cringing in relationship to it, or holding back, or contracting (which would be very normal for most people)?

But also on the other side, when it’s kind of relatively weak – it’s fine; it’s okay; it’s definitely pleasant, but it’s definitely nothing to write home about – can I still get into that? Can I learn how to work with that relatively unremarkable *pīti*, and still really get into it, and give myself wholeheartedly, and see what’s possible there? It may not become more intense. I mean, it may become more intense, but as we said with the SASSIE, the **I** is not so important. What’s important, though, is here is this – in this sitting, or this walking, whatever it is – this *pīti* that’s not so intense; it’s still *pīti*. Can I stay interested in it? Can I work with it? Maybe what has to happen is I have to actually increase the intensity of my attention. Not the intensity of the *pīti*, but the intensity of my attention. And again, it’s like, do I know how to do that? Do I actually get a sense of what it feels like to have a very intense attention, and a less intense attention, and a kind of medium attention? Do I recognize what that feels like? Can I turn the dial on that, or the fader switch? Can I have an intense attention without getting a headache? Or is it, with this slightly weaker *pīti*, that I actually need to go into the opening more, and *that’s* what needs to happen? So can I open intensely? We tend to think of intensity as a kind of probing. What would it be to really, really intensely – that’s why I use words like ‘surrender’ and ‘abandon oneself.’ So it might be that *that* needs to get more intense. It’s not the *pīti*, necessarily, that needs to get more intense, but I need to find, of all the aspects of attention, all the different dials there, all the different faders there, what’s the maximal setting for each one. That’s a way too technical analogy, but I’m playing with all these different aspects of attention, playing with all the possibilities there to really make this work even though the *pīti* itself is not very remarkable. So that in itself is a really useful skill. It’s part of the art.

I just want to throw out two things which I hardly mentioned, just in case people who haven’t encountered them before *are* encountering them and are a little fazed by them. One is – did I mention the *nāda* sound? Or I just mentioned it, but I didn’t really ...? So it’s pretty common for some people in meditation, or common at certain stretches of their meditation life, when the *samādhi* deepens in some degree (it might be even not *jhānic*), to hear a kind of ringing in the ears, a kind of buzzing or that sort of thing. It’s very normal, okay? Some people take that as a meditation object, and there are a couple of different ways you can work with it as a meditation object. You can work with it as a concentration object. You can work with it in a way that is a kind of platform in insight. But really what I wanted to just say right now is just that it’s normal, and nothing weird is going on if you hear a ringing in your ears that sounds like it’s really loud, even, sometimes. You don’t *have* to take it as an object, and if you’re fine with whatever practice you’re doing, leave it. Just let it be there. It’s just something that’s going on. It might come and go. It’s not a big deal. It doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with your brain or anything like that at all.

The second thing that can happen – it happens a lot with insight meditation, and certainly if you’re doing these actual insight ways of looking that Julia mentioned and I mentioned the other day, but it will also happen with *samādhi* practice – is that sometimes, after a practice, you look around you, or you’re walking around, and it’s almost like everything feels like ... like you’re looking at a wall, and it

just feels like it's made of paper, or it's see-through, or it's lost its solidity. Very, very normal, okay? Not a problem at all. You're not going crazy. It's completely normal. What's going on there is actually really interesting, and it's something I'll come back to when we really start to talk about insight and *jhāna* more. But I'm saying both these things about the sound and the visual perception of sort of loss of solidity or that sort of thing just to reassure, in case these things are opening up and you're not used to them.

I think that's it. Yeah, I think that's it.

[Transcriber's note: this was followed by some practical retreat information, omitted in this transcript.]

The Second Jhāna

Today I would like to talk about the second *jhāna*, and weave into that, as usual, some things that apply much more generally to maybe any *jhāna* or *jhāna* practice in general. As I said at the beginning, the teachings will progress through the retreat at the pace that they do, dependent on a lot of factors: partly my medical appointments, and things like that. And it's highly unlikely that – in fact, it's totally undesirable if your practice progresses at the same rate. So at some point, you're going to coincide, and you may have already done that, or maybe later, but what we're really interested in is *your* pace. That's really, really important. What's your playground? What's your pace? When is it a maturing or transition time, etc.?

Let me read again – I was very rushed through when I first read them – the Buddha's description of the second *jhāna*, of which, again, there are two. There's a simile, and there's a sort of more technical-sounding one. Okay, so again:

A practitioner, with the subsiding of [listen to these interesting translations] thinking and pondering [again, there's that *vitakka-vicāra*, how different this translation is from the usual, or more common these days – 'initial and sustained application'; it's really the *vitakka-vicārānaṃ vūpasamā* in Pali, so it's like, this is a fine translation], by gaining inner tranquillity and unity of mind, reaches and remains in the second *jhāna*, which is free from thinking and pondering, born of concentration, and filled with delight and happiness.¹

So again, filled with *pīti* and *sukha*, actually, so this person's translating *pīti* as 'delight.' Actually, I think maybe even the other way around – doesn't matter. It's:

With the subsiding of *vitakka-vicāra*, by gaining inner tranquillity and unity of mind, reaches and remains in the second *jhāna*, which is characterized by, it's *free* from thinking and pondering [free from *vitakka* and *vicāra*], born of concentration, and filled with *pīti* and *sukha*.

I will read another translation, just so you get a sense. So he's described the practitioner going through

the first *jhāna*, and then said:

Furthermore [more than that], with the stilling of directed and evaluation [again, so here's quite a different translation of *vitakka* and *vicāra* – with the stilling of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, directed thought and evaluation – however we're going to translate *vitakka* and *vicāra*], she enters and remains in the second *jhāna*: rapture and pleasure [*pīti* and *sukha*, so again, let's just go with these words, *pīti* and *sukha*; I'm going to translate *sukha* as 'happiness,' and I'll come back to that] born of composure [that's interesting; the actual Pali word is *samādhi*, which the first person has translated as 'concentration,' and this person has translated as 'composure.' And as I said, I would translate *samādhi* as quite a broad term – it's a unification, it's harmonization, it's the agreement of the elements of being, right? But different – born of *samādhi*], a unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation [free of *vitakka* and *vicāra*], internal assurance. She permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture [with the *pīti* and *sukha*] born of composure [born of *samādhi*]. There is nothing of her entire body unpervaded by *pīti* and *sukha* born of *samādhi*.²

So there are a few other elements in here that we need to – so basically, the *vitakka* and *vicāra* fade, and born of the *samādhi* is *pīti* and *sukha*, which is then spread. That's all we've got as a description. Couple of other things: that it's born of *samādhi*. So it's 'born of *samādhi*' is distinguishing it from the first *jhāna*, where the Buddha said it's 'born from withdrawal' from the hindrances, or 'seclusion' from the hindrances. So this is born of *samādhi*. Remember how rich that term *samādhi* is, how wide – for me, at least; hopefully for you.

What's this 'unification of awareness'? The Pali is *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ*. The *citta* – *cetaso* – unified or raised to oneness. It's unified. And then this word at the end, we'll come back to later: *ajjhataṃ sampasādanaṃ*: 'internal assurance,' this person has. Sometimes you hear the word 'confidence,' 'internal confidence.' So we'll come back to that, actually, later.

That's what we have from the suttas. And then we have a gorgeous simile – I find it gorgeous:

Just as a lake fed by a spring, with no inflow from east, west, north, or south, where the rain-god sends moderate showers from time to time, the water welling up from below, mingling with cool water, would suffuse, fill and irradiate that cool water, so that no part of the pool was untouched by it – so, with this *pīti* and *sukha* born of *samādhi*, the practitioner so suffuses their body that no spot remains untouched.³

Remember, we're talking about a very hot climate where that kind of image is going to be super appealing, unlike Devon in December. [laughter] To me, that's a lovely, lovely image, and I feel very much, as you get more into the *jhānas*, some of these similes – they actually seem *more* accurate than the more technical-sounding descriptions, which are open to all kinds of ambiguities over translations and terms, and what they might have meant at one historical period, and then another. So just to me, there's something much more accurate about the poetic translation than there is about what *sounds*

more technical. And the kind of descriptions and languages, and there are *these* five factors, and there are these three factors, and we tend to think, “Oh, that must be the really accurate one.” But you’ll see how you do with it. See what you gravitate towards, what opens, what you learn as time goes on.

So these are the descriptions we have. They’re pretty brief. Again, as I think I mentioned – was it yesterday or another time? – when the mind opens into a new realm, a new territory, a new level, it tends to experience that level as effortless at first. It’s just, “Whoa!” We’re suddenly not in Kansas any more. We’re suddenly, “*What is this?*” And you’re just going along with the ride, it feels like, and it’s effortless and wonderful. There are always exceptions, but it tends to be that that’s the case. Then, at times, after that – after those first few experiences where it’s all just effortlessly kind of happening, and you’re almost just a bewitched witness of the whole experience – then it might be that at times, the relationship with the second *jhāna* matures, so that at times, we’re actually practising, we’re conscious of, “It’s not effortless any more. I need to actually practise tuning to this frequency of happiness,” which at times may be super obvious and blow-your-socks-off remarkable, like “Wow!”, and other times much more subtle, and maybe not so remarkable. I need to practise tuning to that and steadying my attention on what is essentially a more refined object. The *sukha* is more refined than the *pīti*.

As I mentioned, the *jhānas* are not primarily a spectrum of stronger and stronger concentration, “The eighth *jhāna* is invariably a state of more immovability of mind than the fourth *jhāna* or the seventh *jhāna*,” or whatever – that’s not necessarily the case. That’s not the primary thing that’s changing it. It might happen that time, but it might just happen completely otherwise at different times. But rather, the *jhānas* are primarily a spectrum of ... [inaudible question from yogi] Increasing refinement, let’s say. I’m aware there’s a bit of ambiguity between the words ‘subtlety’ and ‘refinement,’ so let’s choose the word ‘refinement’ for the way that *this* cloth is a lot more coarse and less refined than *this* cloth. The texture of it is much more refined. They’re primarily a spectrum of deeper, of more and more refinement. They get more and more refined. Technically – and we’ll come back to this – there’s a reason for that. It’s because they’re also a spectrum of less and less fabrication. On the spectrum of the fabrication of perception – if you’ve never heard that term before, I’ll explain it in more detail later on. This is really, really central, and it’s really, really important to understand that in general, I would say, in terms of understanding what the Dharma is, where we’re going, what emptiness means, what dependent arising, what liberation means. This is a key concept.

The *jhānas*, too, map onto that very key central concept, because the *jhānas*, too, in their spectrum of more and more refinement, are also, you could say, places or areas on a spectrum of less and less fabrication. It’s like this coarse cloth has almost like more material to it. It’s thicker and denser. And this fine cloth has got less material to it. It’s thinner, and there are more filaments. So we’re actually fabricating less as we go deeper and deeper into *jhānas*. We may or may not be aware of that. But to become conscious of it, and to understand it, and to understand its implications, is huge, is massive. And in a way, I would say, we don’t really understand what the *jhānas* are, really understand how they relate to insight practice, or how they integrate into the whole practice, and we don’t really understand what we’re doing when we’re practising ‘concentration’ – we don’t really understand that until we understand *this* and its relation to the whole notion of the fabrication of perception. One fabricates more or less at different times. How? *How* does that happen? And *what* happens when we fabricate more or less? We will come back to that.

However, having said all that, in the second *jhāna*, we've just got "born of *samādhi*." So I think it's true to say that usually, a state of second *jhāna* is an improvement of concentration on the first *jhāna* – usually. But that *samādhi* – again, it's a wider word: unification, harmonization, etc., a wider word than it usually gets translated, as just 'concentration,' I would say.

[13:57] So it may be that a practitioner is still, at this point, staying with their breath. The breath is the primary object, and the *pīti* has come up, and they're really mixing that with the breath, and getting into that. And then the happiness comes up, and one *can*, if one wants, stay with the breath. Or the *mettā* might be the base practice, and one can, if one wants, stay with the *mettā*. But what happens, or what *should* happen is they get mixed. It must feel at some point that I'm *breathing* happiness, or the breath has *become* happiness. Or the *mettā* has *become* happiness; I'm radiating out *sukha* and happiness. Or the body has become happiness. The Buddha says: "No spot, no part of the body left unpervaded by this *sukha* and *pīti*."⁴

Now, what I meant by saying what I just said, you have the option of keeping with the breath, if that's your base practice, and you want to, and that's what helps, or keeping with the *mettā*. But it should integrate. The sense of the base practice objects, the *mettā* or the breath, should completely integrate with the happiness. Like I said, they just *become* happiness. Or you can, like I described with the first *jhāna*, you can make the happiness the primary object, and what you're primarily paying attention to. And then the breath or the *mettā* may support that a little bit, or it's just gone. You're really not concerned with it. And you have a bodily – we'll come back to this – a body-sense of happiness, an emotional sense of happiness, and that's what you're concentrating on.

[15:50] I think I threw this out already – if we were just all to take a sort of school trip to Newton Abbot, and each one of us were to stop someone on the street and say, "Think of something that makes you happy, and then, can you concentrate on that happiness?", I think most people would just be baffled, and it would feel impossible or very, very difficult. So for most us, actually, happiness, as an object to focus on and to steady the mind to, and to tune to, is actually something we never do, and we wouldn't know how to do, and we wouldn't be able to do. So we're training that. We have to train that. We're not, as I said, concentrating so much on a spatial point. We're concentrating, if you like, on that frequency or that bandwidth of frequencies which is happiness. That's really what we're doing. Within that, or within our intention to do that, and our playing with that, there may be times when the attention is really steady and really focusing on a spatial point. But that spatial point is happiness, or it's the centre of the happiness. So again, what we're *really* doing is focusing on the happiness, and that's central, rather than thinking of concentration as a focus on a spatial point. It may be, at times, that that's what's helpful. And at other times, that's *not* what's helpful; we let go of the sense of the spatial point being so important. And it's the frequency.

Okay, so this word *sukha* in Pali – it's an emotional quality, the emotion of happiness. And again, I mean that word in quite a broad way. So it's technically, in Buddhist psychology, it's a *citta* quality. It's a quality of the heart and mind. However, it's also physical, and this we really want to emphasize. You feel it as much in the body, and you *need* to feel it in the body. This is why, partly, the person in Newton Abbot (or wherever we're going) won't be able to do it, because it's just an extremely ephemeral, extremely wispy mental quality. They can't locate it in their body. So feeling it in the body, pervading the body with it is exactly, partly, what enables us to really get into it, and really stabilize

with it.

So when I say ‘in the body,’ I mean in the energy body, in the whole space, in the vibration-tone. It *becomes* happiness. The vibration-tone of the energy body space becomes happiness. So at the beginning, at first, when you open to this level – either the second *jhāna* or just the emergence of the *sukha* – identifying it as an emotion is, for most people, actually quite a crucial distinction to make: “Ah, the *pīti* is a primarily physical quality. The *sukha* is an emotion.” Just making that distinction – although, because of what I just said, it’s actually not quite true; they’re both energy body vibrations; they’re *different* energy body vibrations – but it will really help you make the distinction, get a sense of the different playgrounds, get a sense of the territory, and actually build the whole thing, if you recognize it and feel it as an emotional quality as well. That’s what’s going to really start to distinguish it from the *pīti*. So that identifying it as an emotion, an emotional quality versus a primarily physical quality, which the *pīti* – we could regard the *pīti* as, and the *pīti* isn’t *just* that either.

So again, it’s not this black and white, but sometimes making things black and white is actually really helpful, at a certain stage, to make things clearer. Is it the ultimate truth? Definitely not. But just making that division at first is really helpful. It will help to draw it out of the mix, to draw out that emotional quality of *sukha* from the mix: “Ah, this is the emotion. Ah, that’s what I’m paying attention to,” at first. And to begin to distinguish: “This is *pīti*. This is *sukha*. Aha!” And you really need to *taste* it, which really means *feel* it in the body, and *feel* the different qualities and enjoy them several, you know, quite a few times, perhaps, to really get used to this.

At first it might be very, very obvious. If the second *jhāna* just explodes out of the first, it’s very obvious: “I’m in a completely different territory now.” But again, as time goes on, there might like, “*Hold* on a minute. Where’s the division here?” So this distinguishing, this making discernments, is actually really [key], because again, what we’re talking about when I emphasize sensitivity, attunement, discernment – that’s all really key, not just to *jhāna* practice (what we said right at the beginning), [but also] to the quality of your relationship with your own emotions, and your wisdom with your own emotions, your sensitivity to all kinds of things in life, your capacity in relationship, the skill you can work with in emptiness practice, in soulmaking practice, in *brahmavihāra* practice. That’s why we emphasized it.

I would say (or rather, a lot of people say, and I agree with them) that, as the Buddha says, *pīti* and *sukha* are both present in the first *jhāna*, and they’re both present in the second *jhāna*. But what’s characteristic of the first *jhāna* is that the *pīti* is to the fore. We’re kind of entranced by that more, and maybe there’s more of it in the mix. And then in the second *jhāna*, that flips, and the *sukha* becomes prominent over the *pīti*. The *pīti* is still there, but the *sukha* becomes prominent. And the *sukha* is our primary *nimitta*, whereas in the first *jhāna*, the *pīti* was the primary *nimitta*.

So Keren asked me, “Is that ...? That’s not in the Pali Canon.” No, I’ve never seen it in the Pali Canon. I mean, it might be somewhere. I very much doubt it. I don’t think so. Maybe it’s in a commentary somewhere. I’m not sure. So when I say that, I’m speaking from the teachers that I have really trusted, and who have taught me *jhāna* practice, or from whom I’ve learnt *jhāna* practice, and from my own experience. Just so that’s pretty clear. Is it in the Pali Canon? Don’t think so. We get these very brief descriptions; as we go into the further *jhānas*, the descriptions are even briefer, so we have to somehow discern and get a sense of what the territory is.

But as I said – I think I’ve already said it twice, and I’ll say it once more – back to this distinguishing between *pīti* and *sukha*, really making that distinction: what can happen if we *don’t* is this kind of stagnation. It’s the discernment that takes us deeper. It’s the sensitivity that takes us deeper on the whole path, deeper on the *jhāna* path in a full way. And again, I know people, I know practitioners who sit a lot, etc., did sit a lot, put a lot of work in, and they reach a kind of place that’s sort of around this area, and it’s a kind of a mix. And either they do not take the instruction, or they do not bother to make the differentiation. And it’s twenty years later, and they’re still pretty much hovering around in the same kind of soup. You know, that might be completely fine with them, or they might want something different. But they’re not going to open up anywhere deeper unless they make the distinctions, the discriminations, the subtle discriminations. It’s *nice*, where they are, and they can sit for quite a while, etc., but it hasn’t gone anywhere, and not much even new insights. So it doesn’t just apply to the depth of *samādhi* practice; it applies to the insight practice as well. That all got stagnated as well. I don’t know why they didn’t want to make the discernment. Maybe it was – I don’t know. Why do people ...? It’s a whole other question.

Sometimes, though, they’re a mix. The *pīti* and the *sukha* are mixed, and it’s hard to tell at the beginning. So if you’re new to the second *jhāna*, there will be times when, “Well, I’m not quite sure.” But generally speaking, we want to be clear: “This is *pīti*, and this is *sukha*.” Generally speaking, they do kind of separate like that. But there will be times when it’s actually quite hard to tell.

What all that means is that part of the work and/or play, depending on your favourite word there, part of the work and play at this stage is exactly that. That’s part of your job. Can I really get used to what the differences are? Can I make the discriminations? That’s really part of the work.

So how does the second *jhāna* arise? Well, what colour is an unripe mango? Is it green? What colour is a ripe mango? That kind of yellow-red. Yeah? [inaudible response from yogi] But let’s say it’s more yellow-red. Yeah? Is that okay? So one of my teachers, Ajaan Geoff, used to say: “Don’t take a green, unripe mango and paint it yellow-red, and then call that a ripe mango.”⁵ Don’t take your practice, wherever it is, and try and do some *stuff*, and call that the second *jhāna*. Don’t take your first *jhāna* and push it or put pressure on it, or just *do* something that you’re kind of forcing a mango to ripen. So his approach was very much, like, these things will ripen in their own time, and if you do it that way, rather than kind of jumping the gun or forcing anything, or wanting to achieve something, or having some kind of timetable, it will be much, much more fruitful – again, generally speaking. There are all kinds of exceptions, and I’ll come back to some of those exceptions.

So again, remember when we talked about *pīti*, we said, generally speaking, you could say there are two ways that *pīti* arises. **(1)** One is, I take an object – maybe it’s a point in the abdomen or the nostrils if it’s the breath, maybe I take the *mettā*, whatever it is. And I just work with that, work with that, work with that. I *do not* put up with the hindrances when they come. I really try and work with the hindrances, *and* I have this background awareness, *and* I play with this idea of more intense attention, less intense attention, delicacy of attention, subtilizing the attention. If I do all that, those four things, then the way the *pīti* tends to arise is sudden and eruptive and quite strong, after (for most people) quite a while. So that’s good.

(2) And then there’s another way, which is taking the energy body experience from the beginning, and actually just kind of tending to the little ember of well-being there, fanning it when it needs

fanning, protecting it when it needs protection from the winds, etc. – building, in a way, coaxing it to become more of a campfire, the *pīti*. But that needs work and play: playing with the modes of attention, playing with kind of very intense probing at times, or intense attention, intense opening, radical opening, receiving, etc. So I have to be intense. At times, at least, I have to be intense with how I’m coaxing this ember. Sometimes, let’s say, my intention and my attention and my whole work and play has to be quite intense – *without* putting pressure or a demand on it. So that’s also part of the whole deal.

[28:34] When we get to the second *jhāna*, this happiness, it might be the case, as I said, that it probably relies more on its arising in a way that’s helpful. It probably relies more on a really very gratifying relationship with the *pīti*. The *pīti* – one is *really* into it and *really* enjoying it. So if you’re sort of, “The *pīti*’s okay, and it’s kind of ... eh, it’s okay,” and then a bit like, “Maybe the second *jhāna* would be better,” that goes back to the foolish, inexperienced cow.⁶ Remember that? It means then, that again, with the *pīti* that’s arisen, I have to work and play with that, in these ways. I actually have to shape it. I need to really take care of it and take care of my relationship to it. The *sukha* of the second *jhāna* will only arise when I do that.

So if it matures, if the *sukha* of the second *jhāna* matures organically like this mango, it emerges through working and playing with the *pīti*, and through the *pīti* feeling really lovely, really pleasurable, really enjoyable, then the *sukha* emerges in a much clearer way. It’s like, “Whoa, okay, this really is something else now. Now this is really something quite extraordinary. And this is *clearly* what that word *sukha* means. It’s *clearly* the second *jhāna*,” whatever, depending on where you end up.

After that, to say in different words what I said earlier, after a few times of that – in other words, after quite a bit of experience with the second *jhāna*, then you might find yourself needing to go back, and you can work with a much more subtle and unremarkable *sukha* and build it up, the way we built up the ember of well-being into *pīti*. So does this make sense, what I’m saying? It’s like, if I’ve got a *pīti* that’s not that great, then my chances of taking a happiness that’s, “Yeah, you know, it’s okay,” and building it into the second *jhāna* are probably – *probably*; there are always exceptions, and I’d be really interested, if there are, actually, to hear back, just for teaching purposes – but it’s more likely that the happiness that comes when the *pīti* wasn’t that remarkable, and then the *sukha* is not that remarkable ... it will be hard to get that to feel really gratifying, and like, “This is really something,” versus the *pīti* that can arise, with patience and time, from just working with the ember in the energy body. *Can* be. Does this make sense? The distinction? Not quite. Okay.

With the *pīti*, we can go two ways: (1) I take an object. I stick with it, but I have to be careful *how* I’m sticking with it – be intense, and watch it, be subtle with the attention, and delicacy, and all that. I can do that. Or (2) I can just take the ember of well-being in the energy body and build it and build it and build it. So basically I can get either of two ways to a *pīti* that’s really nice.

When you come to the second *jhāna*, I’m just wondering whether the probability of coming to a *sukha* (which is characteristic of the second *jhāna*) that’s really nice is – it’s not an equal probability. I can’t start from a happiness that’s not *really* that gratifying, especially if that was built on a *pīti* that never got really that gratifying. It’s probably possible, but at first it’s unlikely. At the *pīti*, I have to get *really* into the *pīti*. I have to *really* get that fine, *really* enjoy it. And then it’s more likely to succeed. After a lot of experience with the *sukha* in the second *jhāna*, then you can take a really quite

unremarkable happiness, and you're already quite skilled, and it's already quite familiar, and that can grow. Yeah? I'm sure I could have said that more elegantly.

Okay, so having said all that, sometimes what happens, sometimes what I encounter in teaching is someone whose first *jhāna* is just great, and they're getting all the elements of mastery, so it's usually the case, as a person really starts to gain those elements of mastery through practice with the first *jhāna*, that the second *jhāna* is already kind of intruding, emerging, showing itself. That's usually the case. Occasionally, or sometimes (I don't know, can't remember; I don't know what proportion of times), someone's first *jhāna* – they're really enjoying it, they're really into it, and there are some of those elements of mastery, but the second *jhāna* is not showing. It's not emerging, etc.

This is not how Ajaan Geoff would teach this – you never paint that mango at all, or you never force a ripening. I would say sometimes there are some things that you could do, little tricks you can play with.

(1) One is: **here's the *pīti***. I'm really used to it. I'm really into it. It's going great. Right now, it's going great. Generally, I'm into it, I've practised with it, etc. I've gotten used to all that, all the mastery, or a lot of the mastery. And then, *right now*, it's going great in this sitting, walking, standing, whatever it is. And then, **when it's going great, I can just drop a question, like just a really light question: "What is the emotion right now? What's the emotion I'm feeling right now?" And the answer should be: "Happiness."** It should be *sukha*. So that's one possibility.

(2) A second possibility: again, here it is, going quite well. Again, this is something that it doesn't *need* to be going well; after a while, after a lot of practice, it doesn't *need* to be going well for this one to work. But here, let's say, at the beginning, when it's not quite happening, here I am, and I **drop in the word, whichever word I prefer, a whisper, a grain of magic alchemical chemical, just drop it in, a drop into the *citta*: "happiness," or "joy," or "*sukha*," or whatever word it is that you prefer**. As I said, the mind goes deeper in *samādhi*, becomes more and more suggestive, and potently so. More and more sensitive the mind becomes, sensitive to suggestion, sensitive, becomes more malleable in all kinds of ways. So that would be a second.

(3) Another funny thing you can try is, you've probably noticed that most often, ***pīti* tends to flow upwards in the body**. One feels a sort of upward current of it. And what you can try sometimes is, just **feel that upward current** – again, this is when you're really used to it, and it's great, and you're enjoying it. And then the upward current – **imagine it shooting out the top of your head, like a fountain**, like a spout of a fountain. The water comes out the top of your head, and then, like a fountain, it falls back down. Just imagine that. See what happens.

(4) A fourth possibility. I'm not sure how much one might want to try this. We'll see. It may well be very useful for some people at some times. Again, here's the *pīti*. It's going well. I'm into my practice right now. And just the **memory, introduce – again very subtle, just the memory of something that makes you happy, or a happiness. Just like a little tincture, a little drop of tincture into the *citta*, the memory of a happiness**. While the *pīti* is there, drop that in.

These are all little tricks. In a way, the safest gamble is to let something mature, and just get really, really into the *pīti*. Find that enjoyment. Find that intensity of relationship with the *pīti*. So don't confuse intensity with this kind of forward probing, narrowing. That's one *form* of intensity. Another form is, how intensely am I opening? But an intense and intensely enjoyable relationship with the *pīti*,

and it matures out of that in time. If not, or if you feel like, “Well, I’m kind of ...”, or if the teacher says, “Well, kind of ...”, you know, maybe you want to try one of those tricks.

If you’re playing enough, you will discover your own tricks, at this point, at this threshold, at this border between the first and second *jhāna*. You should discover your own tricks, and come and share them with us. All kinds of things are possible. Eventually you won’t need any tricks, because hopefully, you’ll have mastery of the second *jhāna*, which means you just have the subtle intention for the second *jhāna* or for the *sukha* to arise, and it goes there. And all the tricks – it’s like, I can’t even remember the tricks I’ve learnt, I used to play with. This was all I could come up with, because I couldn’t remember. So after while, one just doesn’t need them. It’s just from intention. But there is that point of learning new territory, where you will be like, “Well, it’s gone there before. And how do I get it back?” Or if it needs a nudging.

Okay, so going back to something I mentioned earlier, there’s this phrase there, and in Pali it’s *vitakka-vicārānaṃ vūpasamā*, which means something like, “With the subsiding, with the allaying, with the cessation, with the calming of” – *vitakka* and *vicāra* are what? Thinking, thinking about, initial and sustained application. That begins to not make much sense at this point. So what is that? He refers to that as part – that’s characteristic here. *Vicāra*, that word, also has a particular meaning sometimes. So it’s used as a pair; *vitakka-vicāra* just means ‘thinking.’ *Vicāra* has a particular meaning of ‘discursive thought.’ What I mean by that is the mind getting hooked on a thought and following a thought, for more than one moment. So this thought leads to that thought, or I’m following a train of thought. This is discursive thinking. So ‘discursive’ in English comes from the Latin *currere*, which means ‘to run, to move, to move fastly.’ The mind is hooked and it’s moved. The mind is moved with a thought. One thought follows another. So when we reason, “This, therefore that, therefore the next thing,” that’s also, in English, discursive thought. That’s also one of the meanings of discursive thought. It’s a consequential movement of thought.

I would say that if you’re careful enough in your attention, and if you’re sensitive enough in your attention, you will notice, in the second *jhāna*, that it may be that thought arises at times. This *citta*, which has infinite depth and subtlety – it may be that thought arises at times, but what there *isn’t* in the second *jhāna* is any being *hooked* to a thought. The mind is not then moved off on a thought. One thought does not lead to a second thought: “This follows that, or I was thinking this, and then ...” Or the kind of thought that arises is probably very, very wispy, very, very subtle; it’s not extended in time either.

So there’s a larger point here, I think, just about, in addition to mapping out what actually is the range of experience of the second *jhāna*. And there’s a larger, perhaps even equally important point: what is it to have a thought? We use that word so much. “I’m thinking,” or “There was thought,” or “There wasn’t thought.” I would say the whole idea of thought, the whole experience of thought has an enormous range to it: the mind shouting something, and completely lost in a tangle of shouting at itself or whatever it is, and very coarse thoughts, to extremely, extremely subtle – the kind of subtlety that most people wouldn’t even notice. And we’re not used to, we’re not even aware that, “Oh, there might be this level there.” So an invitation, alongside all this, to open up *that* investigation, to pay attention and notice: what do we mean when we say ‘thought’? And what does it mean when the mind gets quiet? Is it completely quiet? Is it quiet at a certain level? What kind of thoughts have gone? What kind

of relationship with thought has gone?

What *has* gone is the being hooked onto a thought, and one thought hooking us to the next, one thought being hooked to the next. That's gone, and also gross thought has gone. Again, this is the sort of thing – it may take a while to notice this. And I really mean, again, this is also why I keep – sorry to anyone who doesn't like this, but – why subtlety and sensitivity are such an important part, for me, in the teaching. One begins to realize, "Oh, these things are not so black and white." And there's way more subtlety of range for most phenomena than we tend to realize at first, and we can develop our sensitivity, and *get* aware of that range of subtlety. And that pays enormous dividends. All this business about "What is thought?" actually has huge implications for very, very deep insight. [43:17] People talk about non-conceptual awareness, and "The mind was completely non-conceptual," etc. What's the difference between a conception and a thought? And does a conception have to be verbal? Does a thought have to be verbal? I need to notice all this for the really deep end of insight, when you're talking about *really* deep unfabricating, or understandings of emptiness, and the way certain words are used in texts and stuff like that. But we won't talk about that now.

So like I said, it may take a while to notice this. In a way, what happens with the *samādhi* of the second *jhāna* is: partly what enables us or *should* enable us to do this is to begin to notice this a little bit. But as I said (whenever it was), usually, at first, when the mind enters a new level, it's like a dam bursting, and the water is just gushing, and you're just going along for this water ride. And it just seems like there's no thought happening. In time, it's like your eyes getting used to a darkened room. You see, "Ohhh, hold on a minute. There are some things here I didn't notice at first." But we're talking about something very, very subtle, and it's a whole different relationship, a whole different level of thought. So you don't need to go – well, let's leave that.

But this encouragement, I said: how wise would it be to use my perception of the presence or absence of thought as a kind of measurement of where I am in *samādhi*? And I keep kind of glancing there, "Has it stopped thinking yet?" I don't think that will very helpful or very wise at all. And given (A) the confusion of what *vitakka* and *vicāra* means, and (B) the subtlety of the range of what thinking might be, I can't see that much value in it. You will notice something in relation to thought if you're really getting into this. So don't make that the primary criterion.

I would like to say, as I said before: each *jhāna* has a primary *nimitta*. And the second *jhāna*, the primary *nimitta* is *sukha*. That's the thing that we're really making primary, really getting into, and we're really taking care of, and we're really opening our relationship with, etc., and getting into. So there's what's significant in practice, but *why* is that significant? Why are we making that the significant thing in practice? There may be – I would be very surprised if there aren't – people out there with the idea that the most significant thing about the second *jhāna* is the quieting, the stilling of thought. I don't know. Maybe there are.

Again, we have to think: why do I choose *this*, to make *this* an emphasis over *that*? Of all the things I could emphasize in practice right now, of all the things I could make a priority, why this and not that? Or why that and not this? Remember we were talking about this? How I think about *samādhi*, and how I relate to *samādhi* in the present moment, is related to my big view.

So we apply that here. Here's this bag of little factors. Which is the most significant one? And why? I'm going to choose the *sukha* as the most significant one. Maybe there's someone who chooses the

less thought as the significant one. I would say the quietening of thought is not the most significant or transformative aspect or factor. It's actually an absence of a factor here, isn't it? It's the absence of two factors that were present in the first *jhāna*. I would say that's not the most transformative factor or aspect of the second *jhāna*. I would say *happiness* is. And it's the happiness, it's the *sukha*, it's the range of happiness, it's the remarkability of that happiness, it's the fact that it comes pretty much independent of someone needing to praise me, or some sense pleasure or something – *these* are the things that transform, *if and only if* I really marinate in it, and I really drink it, lots and lots of times, for a long time. *Then* that happiness is really, really going to make a difference in one's life, a huge difference as a resource (we've talked about this before), *tremendous* resource.

Just imagine several hours a day, just drinking that kind of happiness, that depth of happiness, that beauty of happiness – even half an hour a day, whatever it is. Or just after a while, just knowing it's there, and that you can access it if you want to. The sense of what's possible – this is also really transformed by the tasting of that happiness. One's ability to let go – so that's part of the function of a resource in Dharma. This lovely, lovely feeling means it doesn't so much matter how much money I have, or this or that, if I get famous, if I get rich, if the food is nice, where I'm staying, or not nice, or pleasant. It's completely relativized by that kind of experience. So one's ability to let go is made much more vast, much more steady, much more profound, much more wide-reaching because of the happiness. And it's a happiness, as I said, that's pretty much independent of what someone is giving me, or sense pleasures, etc. It's massive, the difference – *only if* we marinate, for a long period of time, with the happiness as what I'm drinking: I'm drinking, I'm drinking, I'm drinking. I'm drinking that, slaking the thirst for what we're *really* looking for [when] chasing the sense pleasures or the praise, or whatever it is.

I'm going to leave Soulmaking Dharma and sensing with soul completely out of this conversation for now, because some of you know that that gets a lot more *interesting*, and there's a lot more to say there. But I'm just leaving it out for now, not to complicate things.

If, though, I decide to say or to take, "Oh, no, it's the quietening of thought – that's the most significant thing about second *jhāna*," my question would be: *why*? Why do you think that's [most significant], and can you explain how that fits into and makes more sense in a bigger picture? Is it that you believe that when the mind is free of thought, it's 'seeing things as they really are,' or revealing, it's thought that is the problem, and the thought creates this kind of smokescreen in front of reality or 'what is,' or whatever language? How does it fit? What actually is most significant, and why? If I'm choosing to emphasize this, or if a person's choosing to emphasize that, *why* is that significant? And how is that significant (A) for *jhāna* practice, (B) for what it's going to deliver, and (C) in the whole path?

Sometimes what happens in practice is that – again, I don't know the figures of how common this is, but I've certainly encountered it quite a few times – a person is in the first *jhāna*, great, and then they just completely leapfrog the second *jhāna* and end up in the third *jhāna*. That's the next thing that just emerges by itself. So that's quite an interesting thing. Again, maybe we have to think back to: where are we trying to go? And this way of setting up, we *want*, eventually, to have mastery of the second *jhāna* too. Then it will be a question of, okay, do we need stop now and go back, or should we let the third mature, really get into that, and then go back? It's possible.

But it may also skip, and we had this with Joel's question⁷ – well, it wasn't exactly that question, but the possibility of it skipping or moving from the first *jhāna* to a peacefulness that is not really akin to the third *jhāna*. It's peaceful, it's relatively still, there's some equanimity there, it's certainly not unpleasant – but it's not really the third *jhāna*. So again, partly depends on background practice, partly depends on one's psychological patterns. For some people, there's a kind of resistance to a sort of intense happiness, for whatever reasons, or however that came to be, as a sort of karmic formation or *saṅkhāra*. So sometimes that needs a little unpacking, or the relationship with happiness and sort of bubbly happiness needs a little looking at. But eventually we want to tick them all off, in terms of mastery.

[53:27] We could say that each *jhāna* kind of delivers its particular insight. We could say something like that, but more accurately, we could say each *jhāna* delivers something particular in relation to the ability to let go. And that's, anyway, what I would translate 'insight' as. Insight *is, has* to be directly related with letting go. Insight is what allows letting go. So the first *jhāna*, people are different, whatever, but it might just be the fact that, like, "Wow! A whole other realm is possible." I think I said this already. Other states of consciousness, other dimensions are possible when the mind is not entangled. And just that knowledge, that firsthand, intimate experience, and the way, the intensity with which it impresses on consciousness as something completely different than we have experienced before – that makes a big difference for a lot of people. Not for everyone, but for a lot of people, it will.

With the second *jhāna*, it's related to this happiness, I think. There is, like I said, in the Buddha's very short description, there are just two words there: *ajjhattaṃ sampasādanaṃ*. And it translates as something like 'internal confidence' or 'internal assurance.' But (I think I was talking about this with Juha last night) it's actually, to me, that the confidence could mean three things – one of three things, or two or three of three things:

(1) It could mean, right then in that moment, because of the stability of the *citta* – it's born out of *samādhi* – and **because of the stilling of thought and the sense of how integrated it is, it could be a confidence in the stability of the *citta* then.** And that, instead of having to, like with the first *jhāna*, the soap mixer is doing it, quite active, and the *vitakka* and the *vicāra*, and I'm thinking, it's just kind of more still. And there's a kind of confidence from that, in the stability. Like, I'm confident that this is stable. Maybe.

(2) It could be **a confidence that has more to do with the discovery, like I said, of such a profound and fulfilling happiness, that doesn't seem – let's say – certainly not primarily dependent on external conditions.** Just knowing that, tasting it, drinking from it – that's going to give one quite a bit of confidence in one's life. Do you get that? Yeah?

(3) Or it could be – I don't actually know what it's referring to; it's just sort of *there*, hanging in a mid-sentence – **a confidence in the Dharma, and a confidence in one's self, in one's own ability to tread the path that the Buddha described.** One really has a sense – it's like, "Wow, here I am, 2,500 years later, experiencing these remarkable experiences that the Buddha described." And he's got them in a kind of spectrum. And then he describes this other stuff, and if I'm experiencing this, and it has such an intimate sense of "This really is what we're talking about," then one's confidence in the Dharma itself, and in one's ability to tread the path, gets you know, quite a support there. We say, "Well, maybe I can do more. If I can do this, I can do more, and all the way to liberation."

So I don't know which of those confidences it is, but confidence is part of the gift. And certainly the confidence of that resource. That's the one I would plump for as the primary one, but I think maybe they're all there. And certainly, actually, if I remember back, the confidence it gave me in the path, and in that *I* was actually walking this path, and that it was possible, and what the Buddha was talking about was really – it made such an impact, much more impact than just being mindful, and being a little calmer, or whatever it is, or seeing impermanence and saying, “Oh, the Buddha talked about [impermanence].” It makes such an impact because of the beauty, and the depth, and the remarkability of the experience. So it really gave me a lot confidence in the path, and that I was on the path, and that I could do that, because look, I'm doing it! I feel it. But I think, probably, for me, the most important one is the discovery of this kind of happiness, that we have access to this kind of happiness. It's open to us, and it's not dependent on external conditions.

[58:32] So I mentioned earlier that (probably when we were talking about the first *jhāna*) each *jhāna* has a primary *nimitta*, in our language, and a secondary *nimitta*. And I think I just gave one [example] – I'm not sure how many examples I gave – of a secondary *nimitta*. In the first *jhāna*, the primary *nimitta* is *pīti*. In the second *jhāna*, the primary *nimitta* is *sukha*. But in the first *jhāna*, for example, or any *jhāna*, you could have a secondary *nimitta* of, say, a bright, white light in the mind, or a cloud of light – that sort of thing. For some people it's aural. They hear a sound or sounds, or whatever it is. There can be different ones. Those two are probably the most common. But there are also other kinds of secondary *nimitta*, which are a little bit more, let's say, intrinsically important or valuable. And one of them – it's quite common at this stage, the second *jhāna*, and then, in a way, even more, or *differently* so, let's say, in the third *jhāna* – is that *mettā* is there. So sometimes, people are *not* doing a *mettā* practice. I'm just working on the breath, and now it's opened to second *jhāna*. Sometimes people have come to me and say, “I think the *mettā* is the primary thing, not the happiness.” It's not, technically. It's the second, or rather it's a secondary *nimitta*. But it's very valuable, you know. So automatically, in a *jhāna*, there is *mettā* in it. It's kind of impossible to be in a *jhāna* and have ill-will or aversion, the opposite of *mettā*.

So it's more, again, back to, like, what will I become sensitive to? What can I pick up on? What's in the mix of frequencies here? And *mettā* – especially noticeable, in different flavours, in the second and third *jhānas*. We can allow that. And sometimes, you can focus more on that. You can lean your emphasis more into the *mettā* there. You know, again, it's a dialler. Like, how much? Does it become completely primary? Does it become kind of 50/50? Does it become just in the background? And there can be, for a lot people, obviously, a lot of healing – a lot of healing with the love that's there, and particularly when we talk about the third *jhāna*, but a lot of healing. But we need to be clear: what's the primary *nimitta*? And that's the *sukha*. That's the happiness. So not leaning too much and too often, too long, into the love, over the stretch of our practice.

Why would *mettā* come up at that point? Why would *mettā* reveal itself, do you think? [inaudible response from yogi] Yeah, so Wah is saying, because they're both unfabricated. So if I say that slightly differently, if that's okay: when we're in a *jhāna*, we're not fabricating – so I'm introducing more of this conversation about fabrication, this teaching about fabrication. When we're in a *jhāna*, and more and more so as we go down the *jhānas*, we're fabricating less and less self, and less and less of any kind of otherness, other person, or whatever, so that the duality between self and other gets less. And

there's more sense of non-separation, more oneness. There's less like, "That's your space, and this is my space, thank you very much," or whatever it is – or less judging, or less irritation. There's just a tendency – self and other, less, both less fabricated, more non-separateness, less duality there, less polarity and all that, and all the difficulties. So in a way, there's a kind of natural arising of *mettā* because of that, because we feel less separate. Afterwards, even the *mettā* gets unfabricated, but we'll talk about that later, and that's when we get into equanimity and things. We'll talk about that later.

So, if you're practising in this territory, or when you're practising, and when this territory opens up for you, and it feels like, "Okay, now that's my playground, and that's what I'm really exploring," and you're really into it, and you've, let's say, just spent a standing period in the second *jhāna*, whatever it is. And it's time to end because you have to go to wash-up or whatever. So you know it's coming up, time to end, but it's still going well, and there's still energy there. Then you can spend a few minutes, if you want, just a few minutes at the end of the session, playing what I call two games: ping-pong and leapfrog.

For example, here I am in the second *jhāna*, and then I go, "Okay, well, let's go to just a normal consciousness." I'm leapfrogging the first *jhāna*, yeah? And then I go, maybe, "Okay, I'll go from there to one. And then I'll go from one back to two. And then I'll go from two back to one. And then I'll go to two again." Then I'm ping-ponging: one, two, one, two, one, two. I actually need to practise that transition both ways. So this is a minor part of our practice, but one of the elements of mastery. Can I really just move back and forth, at ease, between any *jhāna* and its adjacent *jhāna*? So if I'm practising two, can I go to one? And I haven't got to three yet. Then two, to one, to two, to one, to two. And it's all very light. It's all just a game.

And then I can also practise leapfrog. And here there are not too many leapfrog options, because we've only got zero, one, and two. You can go: two, to zero, to two. There aren't many leapfrog options. So you can just spend a few minutes of fun at the end of the sitting, playing ping-pong and leapfrog. And these are the elements of mastery, and again, I would like to encourage this. I wouldn't spend a whole sitting doing this, but they're part of learning the territory. They're part of the discrimination. They're part of the mastery. They're part of what makes the mind and the *citta* really malleable, and all that.

[1:05:08] So again, when we come to talking about mastery, etc., we have to think about pacing. Is it not ripe yet, to try this stuff? I'm just getting used to the second *jhāna*. It's like, it's too soon to try going for a walk in the second *jhāna* when I'm just getting used to it. I need to be really, really familiar. And when I do try all that stuff, like the whole practice and the whole tenor of the days here, we really want to encourage this kind of light playfulness. If I get too heavy and too tight and too pressured, it just squeezes – basically, it squeezes the *sukha* out of things, and then there won't be the fruit. So the whole thing is very light, when it's time to play.

Okay, so I don't know where things are at in the Dharma world these days. I don't get out much. [laughter] It's actually true. But certainly, if I think back years ago, I don't know – and maybe it's like, this is a question for you: who's heard from anyone at all, "Ooh, careful with the *jhānas*. There's a danger you might get attached." [laughter] Okay, so some years ago, this would've been everyone. It would've been the default. Like: "You don't really want to be ... (A) What's the point? It's not insight. And (B) there's really a danger there that you're going to get attached, and that's really pretty serious."

Like I said, it's interesting. (I'm not sure, maybe two-fifths of the people? I don't know. Anyway. Half of you put your hand up.) If you go back to what the Buddha said, what did he say about all this? There's one occasion where I can remember him talking about a monk who then was very ill, and because of the low energy, was not able to access whatever level of *jhāna* he was able before his illness, or when he was well. And this monk was, I don't know, having some *dukkha* about that. And the Buddha said, "It's *anattā*. It's *anattā*. You see it as *anattā*, both the *jhāna* and the self. So it's not-self."⁸ So there's that kind of attachment.

But what the Buddha mostly said a few times is this. Talking about the pleasure of *jhāna*, and he said:

This [the pleasure of *jhāna*] is a pleasure I will allow myself.⁹

This is someone who talks about the Middle Way, you know, in terms of renunciation and senses, but basically, relative to most of us, he's a pretty extreme renunciate. This extreme renunciate says:

This is a pleasure that should not be feared. This is a pleasure that *should* be pursued and developed.¹⁰

And when he talks about sense pleasures, he talks about them as a pit of vipers, a pit of upward – you know those elephant traps? Old hunter-gatherers, they've got these, like, big wooden stakes, you know, and the elephant, the mammoth is supposed to fall in? That's the sort of image he gives for sense pleasures. It looks like a nice piece of grass, or whatever it is there, and actually it's ...

So he talks about the *jhānas* in *that* way: "They're not to be feared. This is a pleasure I will allow myself. This pleasure should be pursued and developed." And he talks about sense pleasures – there's a whole list of, like, pretty extreme negative similes for sense pleasures.¹¹

Is it, or was it the case that somewhere along the line, modern Dharma teachings have kind of reversed that: reversed the Buddha's teachings in relation to these kinds of pleasures, sense pleasure and *jhānic* pleasure, and reversed the Buddha's concerns regarding sense pleasure, *jhānic* pleasure, and attachment to either? I find that really *interesting* – I mean, historically and psychologically, and how that may have evolved, and why that may have evolved. And it may be changing. I mean, it's definitely changing, no question. It's changing.

But the Buddha's pretty clear about this. Again, I don't know if anyone is still unsure when the *pīti*, for example, feels very sexual or feels, like, orgasmic, and "Is that okay?", and "Surely, it's a bit much," or "It can't be right" – just to remind you again of the Buddha's words that we've heard before, describing the *jhāna*, *pīti*, *sukha*: "Whole body pervaded, leaving no spot untouched."¹² So what he does not say is: "The whole body pervaded, except below the waist." [laughter] "And kind of above the middle of the thigh." He says, "whole body." So I think, again, this is one of these things. It's very easy – it's changing now, but back X number of years, it was really quite a pervasive thing about this, "Ooh, you really shouldn't mess with the *jhānas*. There's a real danger that you'll get attached." Again, this [encouragement]: can we bring a little intelligence to this, a little questioning?

I mean, it seems to me that there are three kinds of attachment that are potential in *jhānas*, with

jhānas: **(1) One is attachment to the pleasure.** That would be the most obvious one that people would think of, that you're going to get attached to the pleasure. So after – I don't know how many years I've been teaching. Sixteen, seventeen years? Something like that. I honestly struggle to remember one person – *one person* – who had experienced an actual *jhāna*, let's say, more than ten times, who was attached to the pleasure there. I mean, maybe other people are encountering that sort of thing a lot, but I'm not. I don't think it's a problem for Westerners. I just wonder, what would that attachment look like? This someone who's attached to ... like, what, there's like a basement at Gaia House where it's a bit like an opium den ... [laughter] and these old yogis are there, just like ... [laughter] in the dark, and getting old, and not doing their work? [laughter] What do we actually think it would look like? Maybe what I think it would look like is, this person who's attached to the *jhāna*, they're unwilling to explore or investigate the difficult. I think it's extremely rare. I've *never* encountered it. I really, really sit here, struggling to think, "Okay, is there *anyone* I can think of?" I just can't. After about ten times of a *jhāna*, you're not going to be attached to the pleasure in any way – or let's say, you're not going to be attached to the pleasure in any kind of problematic way. I can't, I just can't see that.

What I *do* see, and what we might recognize in ourselves much more commonly, is an attachment to looking at, obsessing with, prioritizing, attending to the difficult. And we mentioned this before. Sometimes that's just a psychological tendency. Sometimes it's a cultural tendency. Sometimes it's a Dharmically trained tendency. So when I have the option of giving equal attention, or attention an equal number of times to the pleasant, I find that I can't. I'm so trained. Immediately there's a contraction in the body, immediately there's some *dukkha* – the mind goes there. And that's great. That willingness is great. But if it's not balanced with an equal freedom and willingness the other side, there's actually effectively an attachment.

And sometimes that attachment is ideological, because a person thinks: "Well, this is where the real stuff is, and what's happening in a *jhāna* is you're actually suppressing that or hiding it. But what's *dukkha* is what's real. *Jhāna* is a fabrication. *Jhāna* is a kind of construction or irreality. You're stepping out of touch, hiding from the *real* stuff." Again, we talk about how common attachments are, and how entrenched attachments are. That can be extremely common and *extremely* entrenched. So sometimes as a teacher over the years, I have to be *really, really* delicate and careful how I bring that sort of point up, and what I say to people, and how I might say it. So it could be an ideological attachment. It could just be habitual. It's just habitual – again, just a tendency of personality, tendency of culture or upbringing, or tendency of Dharma practice.

And in a way, then, practising the *jhānas*, and doing that wholeheartedly, and being open-minded will actually remedy that opposite attachment (which doesn't even occur to people that it might be an attachment), because I'm practising them. Let's not buy into that view. Let's not get sucked into the difficult. Let's go *here*. I want to keep them both open, and I'm really able to do both. I'm really free to do both. That's where we want to get to: range, possibility.

(2) Second, what seems to me a second way of getting attached to the *jhānas* is to get all like, "Look at me, what I can do! I can reach this or that *jhāna*." And there's a kind of grandiosity of self-view. Again, I would say, let's say after twenty times of a certain *jhāna*, it should be really obvious to a person that it's not *self* making it happen. It arises, this *jhāna*, when the conditions are there. When the conditions are there, a *jhānic* experience, a *jhānic* perception arises. It depends on the conditions –

all kinds of conditions, all kinds. I mentioned that monk; the Buddha also says, at a certain point, it depends on the digestion being “not too hot, not too cold.”¹³ In Asian medicine, they have this idea of digestion being too hot, too cold. I certainly know: yeah, *samādhi* is a lot dependent on things like digestion. All kinds of things: energy levels, all kinds of factors. So one really sees. It’s almost difficult not to recognize, let’s say after twenty experiences, that it’s dependent on conditions. It’s not something the self can get grandiose and sort of pumped up about.

Again, what’s actually much more common is a negative self-view in relation to *not* reaching a *jhāna*, or “I’m not far enough along yet. I can’t. I’m a failure. I bet everyone else is better. I’m going too slowly.” And then what can happen is a person thinks, “I want to attain this deeper *jhāna*,” or “I want to attain the *jhānas*,” or whatever it is, “this *jhāna*, that *jhāna* beyond where I am.” But actually the intention is one of achievement, for decorating the self-view and propping up the self-view, or addressing a more negative – that’s a better way of saying it – of wanting to address a negative self-view: “If I could just get that, then I’d feel better about myself, get a badge,” whatever. And sometimes that intention is not fully conscious. We actually don’t quite realize what’s in the mix of our intention, when it comes to this. We don’t realize, what’s actually operating is a kind of avoidance, an intention to avoid a negative self-view. And that can be quite subtle, and operating subtly. So even there, the attachment is the opposite of what we tend to think. And we tend to think, “Oh, attached to the self-view and the grandiosity: it looks like *this*.” Actually, no, it’s happening in a reverse way, and sometimes much more subtly.

[1:18:34] Let the *jhāna* give you the deepest things it can give you, and the deepest things are the beauty of that happiness, and the way it touches the being, and the way it bathes the whole body and the whole *citta*. That’s a much deeper, more far-reaching, more long-lasting, more impacting gift than it gives me “I have achieved,” and I can say to myself, “I have achieved X or Y,” or tell other people, “I have achieved X or Y.” Or when there’s a conversation, and several people have achieved X or Y, I can also say, “Yes, I have too,” or feel to myself that “I have too.” Let the *jhānas* give you the deepest gifts that they want to give you, that they can give you. And that also goes back to, what’s significant? What are we emphasizing? We were talking about the happiness.

(3) Perhaps for me, the most interesting kind of question of attachment that might arise from *jhāna* is **attachment to view**. So for example, someone, let’s say, opening up to the sixth *jhāna*, and the sort of infinite consciousness, and the experience there – and it gets *really* brief when the Buddha talks about that – but the experience of an infinite consciousness, and it’s there, and it pervades the cosmos. Or it’s a realm, almost like a transcendent realm. That’s more accurate, but can be felt both ways. We’ll talk about it. [1:20:10] It’s possible, then, that someone opening to that experience says, “Ah, this is ultimately true,” or “This is what they’re talking about. This is the Cosmic Consciousness. This is” – whatever, and decides that it’s ultimately true, and gets attached to that as a view. To be attached to a view means to really believe this view is true, this perception is true. Or the fifth *jhāna* or the seventh *jhāna* or whatever.

Again, here, there’s something opposite, because I would say, attachment to that kind of view – let’s say, this Cosmic Consciousness, this infinite awareness, this vast awareness being the ultimate reality, the eternal backdrop of all things, the source of all things, etc., the nature of everything, it is emptiness, etc. – someone’s much more likely to get stuck in *that* view and believe it’s the end and the ultimate

truth when one hasn't done *jhānas* five, six, seven, eight. So it's the opposite. It's exactly having the map of, for example, something that goes beyond this quasi-sixth *jhāna* state of infinite consciousness, because once you get to the seventh *jhāna* or the eighth *jhāna*, you see: "Oh, that's a fabricated state. It's only a stage."

So it's actually the *jhānas* that help us wean off a view to this or that as the ultimate truth. The *jhānas* are a remedy for certain attachments, rather than a concern, I would say. That kind of view of a vast awareness being ultimately real, Cosmic Consciousness, awareness being the nature of things, that awareness being eternal, etc., unruffled, that being the nature of awareness, all that – that's much more likely to arise from sort of standard insight meditation practice, with a lot of practice. It's a very common experience. It's also very common in other spiritual traditions. It's actually *really*, really common. But if we can go beyond that kind of experience, and we have the map, and it places it, we begin, hopefully, to experience something beyond. "It can't be ultimate. I've gone beyond it."

And we begin to understand its context. So what is that, exactly? How did that experience – this vast, eternal-seeming awareness, Cosmic Consciousness, whatever it is – how did it arise? How did it dependently arise as a perception? We understand its context. So this understanding it dependently arising, dependently ceasing – it's more than saying, "We see that it's impermanent," as a view, because a person can go in and out of the vastness of awareness, or the Cosmic Consciousness or whatever, many times, and think: "Yeah, my *experience* of it is impermanent, but *it's* not impermanent." That's really common: "*It's* eternal. It's just there, and unchanging, and radiant forever, and serene and untouched forever, and it embraces everything, and it permeates everything." There are different variations. So they say, "Yeah, I realize my experience of it is impermanent. I can either accept that my experience of it impermanent" – we'll go into that – "or I can just work towards making it more and more of the time I'm hanging out there." But that's not what I mean by understanding its dependent arising and dependent cessation. What I mean by understanding its dependent arising and dependent cessation is: *how* does this perception arise? And *how* does it cease? Not *that* it arises and ceases, but *how*? It's dependent on a certain amount of unfabricating. And if I unfabricate more, it goes beyond it. It's a different thing than just, "Yeah, it's impermanent. Or my experience of it is impermanent."

So hopefully, if we have, again, the right context for what we're doing in the whole of the Dharma, and how what we're doing in the whole of *jhāna* practice fits into that, this kind of attachment doesn't arise, or we can get beyond it – put it that way. So the more common danger here is attachment to what the Buddha would call Wrong View, or a misunderstanding, or a limited and limiting view of emptiness, of the nature of awareness. So if I think that's the ultimate nature of awareness, it's *not* ultimate. It's a perception. It's a relative perception. It's incredibly useful, incredibly healing and valuable and liberating to a certain extent. Is it ultimate? No. How am I going to find out that it's not ultimate? Limited [view], or a misunderstanding or wrong view about what *nibbāna* is, and all this stuff.

[1:25:25] The shoe is rather on the other foot, I think, in terms of attachment and *jhāna*. They're actually very powerful in terms of weaning us off what *can* be really difficult kinds of attachment – to sense pleasures, and in this case, to certain spiritual views. And this one, that kind of thing that I've just described – I mean, I said I couldn't really think of anyone who got attached to pleasure, anyone that I've encountered as a teacher, or I've heard, talked to, over however many years of teaching, meeting a

lot of people. Couldn't think of anyone. But I think in the first six months of teaching, how many people I encountered who, it seemed to me, were actually pretty entrenched in some version of that vast awareness, and that's ultimate, etc. I lost count, easily in the first six months. It's so common. And it can get very, very entrenched. So there are people who are there, in that kind of view, for, really, decades, and they'll *never* get out of it.

Sometimes the *language* that goes with it is very free and easy. There's this very light, "Well, awareness is ultimate, and I don't have to *do* anything. It's just there. Whatever happens, whether I'm aware or not, it's there. And everything's kind of equal within that." And so it can sound very easy, and the person seems unattached, and it's all very free, and maybe even goes with the view: "There's no need to meditate, because this is just there all the time." And actually, all that is hiding a really quite entrenched view that's very, very difficult to budge.

But one of the ways of going beyond it is actually with the *jhānas*, and with the *jhāna* map, and actually just putting things in their context, and as I said, understanding their dependent arising and dependent fading, and understanding the whole process, and then having this context, and a whole different relation with all these beautiful and actually really valuable mystical openings, and their relationship with truth, and therefore with liberation.

I think that's all I wanted to say today. (Nicole, was this a note for now? No? So I'll look at it later.) Should we take a couple of questions, or should we just leave it? That enough for now? Let's just sit quietly. I think that's enough.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everybody. And time for tea.

¹ E.g. DN 2. Cf. Maurice Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Somerville: Wisdom, 1995), 103.

² The translation containing the phrase "born of composure" may be based on one of Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's older renderings, e.g. of AN 5:28. See Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, tr., "Samadhanga Sutta: The Factors of Concentration" (1997), <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.028.than.html>, accessed 18 Feb. 2020. Cf. "born of concentration" in an updated translation of the same sutta at Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, tr., "The Factors of Concentration: Samādhanga Sutta (AN 5:28)," https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN5_28.html, accessed 18 Feb. 2020.

³ E.g. DN 2. Cf. Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 103.

⁴ E.g. DN 2 and AN 5:28.

⁵ Cf. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath: A Guide to Meditation* (2013), 116, https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/WithEachAndEveryBreath_181215.pdf, accessed 18 Feb. 2020: "Try not to be like the person with a tree bearing unripe mangoes who – told that ripe mangoes aren't green and hard, they're yellow and soft – tries to ripen his mangoes by painting them yellow and squeezing them until they're soft."

⁶ AN 9:35.

⁷ Rob Burbea, "Q & A, and Short Talk" (24 Dec. 2019), question five, <https://dharmafeed.org/teacher/210/talk/60873/>, accessed 20 Feb. 2020.

⁸ SN 22:88.

⁹ Attributed to the Buddha in Ayya Khema, *When the Iron Eagle Flies: Buddhism for the West* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 133. For a similar quote in the Pali Canon, see MN 36.

¹⁰ MN 66 and MN 139.

¹¹ E.g. MN 23, MN 54, SN 3:6, SN 5:1, AN 5:76.

¹² E.g. DN 2 and AN 5:28.

¹³ AN 5:53, AN 5:78.

True to Your Deepest Desires (Talk and Short Guided Meditation)

Okay. I was planning on doing a Q & A today, but I changed my mind. I want to start by talking about Q & As, actually, because when I thought about doing a *jhāna* retreat, that was the first thing that I thought about, and the thing that I felt would be most challenging for everyone, including myself. How do you put a group of people with hugely different backgrounds, who have hugely different amounts of experience with a goal-oriented practice like *jhāna* practice – how do you put them in the same room, and allow them to ask questions and hear the questions of other people, without psychological mayhem, and extreme *dukkha*, etc.? [laughter]

So this – I’m not exaggerating – this was really the main thing for me about the retreat. It wasn’t about mapping the *jhānas*. It wasn’t about teaching the nuts and bolts and all the subtleties. It was that. That was the thing, and “Hmm. How are we going to do that?” And I meant to talk about all that near the beginning of the retreat. I don’t know what happened. Sari says I *did*, but I don’t remember talking. [laughs] I meant to really, really raise it as an issue, and really put it in the room for us to be conscious of and to take care of. Maybe it’s just all the preparing for the retreat, and the busyness, and the medical ... I don’t know what happened, but I didn’t, so apologies for that.

You know, what happens for some people, at some times, when we hear someone ask a question, and it sounds like, well, they’re at a completely different level than us? They’re way beyond, or whatever it is. Or we feel, “Hmm, am I going to be perceived as some kind of grandiose, fancy, arrogant meditator if I ask my advanced question?” Or “Is my question not advanced enough, or too beginning?” All that, all that *dukkha*, all that potential for comparison in an unhelpful way, self-judgment in an unhelpful way, making conclusions about selves, about others, views, etc. It can be very difficult to ask questions for some people, very difficult. Even the people that manage to ask questions, it can be so difficult that oftentimes – not on this retreat, but on other retreats – a person has asked a question in the hall, or if we go into the lounge or whatever, and I’ve given a response, and they’re there, and they’re nodding, and *da-da-da-da-da*. And afterwards, we have an interaction, and I say, “Was that helpful?”, and they say, “I don’t know because I was completely checked out after I’d asked the question, and I just wasn’t there.”

So all that’s very, very normal, and it can be very painful for some people, at some times, to hear a certain question, or whatever it is, or a certain back-and-forth, or a certain instruction. I mean, it’s not just about Q & As. Even yesterday, just moving to the second *jhāna*, giving instructions for those – even though I say, “You know, your pace is your pace, and it *needs* to be your pace,” how easily we can think, “Oh, I’m not there yet,” and how painful it can be to just hear things in teachings, about states or

openings or insights, whatever, that seem to be beyond us, and what can happen, and the way the mind can tie itself in not just knots, but knots of barbed wire, you know? Really, really painful.

We could, and maybe we *should* – I don't know – add the possibility of asking questions by note, as well, so I can just get some notes, and they can be anonymous, and I can try my best to do that. Maybe if the person wants to identify themselves, they could, and if they don't, they don't, and just hope that my answer kind of hits the spot. That's certainly a possibility. We can think about it. But, in a way, you know, I just wonder whether, to some degree, that might be avoiding a much larger issue. I think the issue is cultural. I can't think of one passage in the Pali Canon where it reports something like this: "So-and-so was there, and wanted to ask a question, but felt they would be judged," or "They heard so-and-so's interaction with the Buddha or Ānanda, whatever it was, and they felt really bad." It's just not there. And I don't think it's there, as far as I've heard – I haven't really practised much in Asia, with Asian people, a lot, but I have teachers who have, and from what I've heard it's not really there. Somehow they're able to be in a group together. One person is working on the last stage of awakening to final enlightenment, and the other person's in the middle somewhere, and the other person's somewhere else, and it's all somehow okay. So I think the larger issue is partly a really cultural issue.

So what has happened to our culture – I mean our Western culture, with all its gifts, and all its wondrous achievements – what has happened that this has become such a difficult sort of scenario to be in together? And it's partly to do also with – and I think I've mentioned this in here, and certainly other talks – we actually have quite a different sense of self. Not just an *idea* of what a self is, but actually our *sense* of self is very different. We live in a different culture, that the self is differently supported and differently alienated. And there are pressures on the self in our culture, in our time, that did not exist, say, for example, at the time of the Buddha or in other cultures. There are a lot of gifts that come from that in terms of individuality and self-expression and creativity, but there's a price. Sometimes those very potential gifts – *my* potential creativity, *my* potential self-expression – they become really, really painful things. They *don't* become gifts. They become things that become really painful because a person feels like, "Well, I know I can, and I should, and other people seem to, but where's mine?", or "Mine doesn't compare."

To me, it's a really interesting question. I really mean: what actually has happened? How did this happen to our culture, and to our society, and our sense of being together? I'm not going to go into that. I certainly don't know all the answers. But I find it really interesting, and it's something I think about, and something I try and read about and whatever.

So I just want to say a few things. And having said that, you know, with all the teachings on the retreat, and everything that's said, it's like, some of it will feel relevant to you right now, and some of it won't feel relevant, but it *should* be relevant at some point. So these issues should be relevant at some point, about the problem of having a goal, and the problem of comparison, and the problem of having a desire for something, and what comes up with that, and the problem of really wanting something and getting frustrated. So if it doesn't feel relevant now, it should at some point. If it *never* does, then that's, in a way, its own problem. That should be relevant, the inquiry: why do I never feel any issue about that? So it may or may not feel relevant today, but that goes for all the teachings in the retreat. I think it will be, should be, relevant at some point.

Some of what I want to say is just some reminders of things. There was a lot of information the first – whatever it was – six, seven days of the retreat. Some of it will be reminders. As I said, there was a lot that was said there, and some of it, the significance, I think I said – I don't know if you remember me saying – you won't realize the significance of some things I'm saying. So some of them I'm going to repeat, just as little reminders.

The first is: you *can* do this. You *can* do this. Everyone in this room can do this. And by 'this,' I mean what I'm talking about with all the marination, and the mastery, and the wonderful-sounding experiences. You *can* do this. Sometimes you *believe* that you can't, and that you never will be able to, but you *can* do this. You really can. I was just hearing from someone yesterday – a couple of days ago in that, "Ohh, I can't," and everything shrinks, everything gets contracted, stuck; hatred, self-hatred, the whole show gets going. [The yogi] still shows up, thankfully, and then a couple of days later, lo and behold, an opening like they'd never had before. You *can* do this.

If you have ever experienced some lovely well-being from meditation, in meditation – say, *pīti* – some lovely well-being through the body, I stand by this: if you have *ever* experienced that, it means that *everything*, what I'm talking about, is possible for you. The whole thing, the whole nine yards, the whole eight *jhānas* – it's possible. You can do this. The fact that there is a dip, a disappearance of what you had experienced before, a non-occurrence of it for an afternoon, a day, three days, whatever it is, does not imply that it has then become impossible for you. It doesn't actually even imply that you're going backwards in practice. It really doesn't imply that.

What it *should* imply instead is – okay, here's the dip. It's probably just a hindrance attack of one form or other, one degree or other, that has maybe got more and more, spinning out more or less *papañca*. So it's a dip. It should rather imply, "Okay, what should I do with this? What *can* I do with this?" It should bring some questions, which is part of the whole art of responsiveness that we've been stressing. What might be helpful right now in relation to this, in relation to this dip, in relation to this non-occurrence? And dips, in the context of *jhāna* practice, yeah, they can last three days or something, and three days *on retreat* in a dip, in a hindrance attack, especially if it's wound up and gotten the *papañca* stuff going, three days is a long time to sit through that. There's no TV. [laughter] It's Christmas, and you haven't had a drink, and it's like ... [laughter] It's a *long* time to be through that. If I'm *believing* it, that's a long time, and it seems like forever. It's not. It's a dip that's lasted three days. Of course you can get dips of a couple of hours, or half a day, like I said.

Responsiveness, question: "Okay, what might be helpful now? What should I try? Let's play." Of course you feel very heavy and down; you don't feel playful. So think of it as work, or think of it as play. Just find a way of relating and responding. How should I view the meditation object? What way of viewing it right now, when things really don't feel like they're working, what can I play with there? How should I view my practice as a whole? How should I view *jhāna* practice? How should I view my self on the path? Remember I said that? The view of the self on the path is *extremely* significant. It's a make-or-break factor. I know people – I don't know if I said this; I'll say it again – I have known people meditating for years, have had all kinds of deep experiences, all kinds of what could be very liberating experiences, and somehow they're not. They add up to very little over the long run. And what's kind of locking the whole thing in this unliberating incapacity is a kind of self-view that's operating. They're not even really conscious of the view of the self on the path, and it's almost like it

strangles anything else. It squeezes out the potential of any experience or opening or insight delivering anything really either stably or radically liberating.

How should I view, then, the object of meditation? How should I view my practice? How should I view my *jhāna* practice? How should I view my practice in general? How should I view my self on the path? How should I view this dip, this absence, this trough of the wave? I mentioned for the soulmakers how important it might be to have a really supportive imaginal fantasy of the self on the path. Or is it actually, “Okay, it’s not going well right now. It’s either very rough or very dry or something, and I just need to stay steady with that. I just need to keep plugging away. It’s a hindrance attack. I just need to keep showing up. I need to be patient and just keep working”? The pivotal question, really, is: does it imply a reality or a truth about you, this dip, this non-occurrence, this absence (even if it’s three days)? Or does it *really* imply a truth about you, and about your practice, and your capacities as a practitioner? Or is it just that there’s a habitual tendency of *believing* something about the self? I’m just used to believing that I can’t, that I’m a failure, that other people can – whatever it is.

So I put that question to you. How do you hear it? It’s kind of like, “Rob’s saying *nyeh-nyeh-nyeh-nyeh* ...” [laughter] “He’s being kind and nice and saying don’t worry about it.” No, I mean it for you to take as a question, and ask the question intensely sometimes. You can, “*Nyeh-nyeh-nyeh-nyeh*, nice, nice, nice.” It’s not! I really mean it as a question. Is this, does it really imply a reality, a truth about me? And what might I believe that truth is? Or is it a habitual tendency to believe something about the self? So it’s a real question for you. Remember this thing about listening on your toes? That’s what I’m talking about here. We can easily hear something like what I just said, and it’s just – you’ve heard it so many times on insight retreats, like, “Oh, yeah, here’s the nice, kind bit” sort of thing, and it goes in one ear and out the other. No! Grab it by the ... [laughter] Yeah? Ask it! Intensely ask it.

I tried to remember – I can’t remember, so these figures may be a little wrong – but if I remember back, I wouldn’t say I *stumbled* into the first *jhāna*, because it was something that I was interested in right from the beginning, when I first heard of them. They really piqued my curiosity in practice. But somehow or other, I got into the first *jhāna* on an insight retreat years ago. I’d had quite some *pīti* and stuff, and actually problematic relationship with *pīti* that, as I said, I went pretty lunatic for a while. So there was that whole period – really *pīti* in a very unfruitful way, quite some years, in fact. You don’t have to replicate my mistakes here. [laughter] I just want to give you a kind of reality check. Remember I said this thing about “drop schedules”? If you’re attached to a schedule, it will bring *dukkha*, is what it will bring. Remember me saying that?

So just to give you a comparison: I had this opening to *pīti*, which was very pleasurable for a little bit, and then got very, very problematic for really, I think, the better part of two or three years. I had to stop practising for quite a while, do all kinds of other explorations, and then come back to practice and start very gently again. You don’t have to do all that. It was partly, as I said, coming from over-efforting. Then I resumed practice, and in time, I got a little bit of *pīti*, and then even some happiness at some point. And then a little while later, on a retreat, I got into the first *jhāna*. It was an insight retreat. Luckily, the teacher that I told, I’m pretty sure, was Christina, and she was very, very pro-*jhāna*, encouraging of that (at least she was to me). I didn’t get a negative, “That’s a bad thing.”

Then I was lined up for a whole series of retreats. I can’t remember exactly. Then I think I came on a month retreat, and most of that month I didn’t do anything else but *jhāna* practice. That was my

intention. It took me the whole month to really feel like it became stable, and it became good, and there was maybe some of that mastery. Then, quite a while later, I came back for *more* retreats, and I sort of started – I probably didn’t need to, but I took the time; I don’t know if I needed to – I took the time to do it all over again. What I’m really saying is: it’s a slow process, or it *can* be a really slow process. If you’re thinking, “Oh, Rob’s sitting there. He probably just ... *this* and *that*,” it’s not true, okay? I’ve said this in imaginal contexts as well. I’m not particularly a person who has a lot of images or whatever.

So is it something about *you*, or is it something about the way we *relate*? What I can say is – and I’ll come back to this – I feel like I’ve worked hard at how I related to things that I really wanted, goals that I really wanted, openings that I really wanted. *That* makes the difference. It’s not some super-duper talent or something, a natural inclination. I can’t remember if that’s exactly, completely ... but something like that.

Sometimes in the hall, someone will ask a question, and maybe I might even say, “Oh, yes, that sounds like the third *jhāna*,” or something like that, and you feel like, “Well, if I’m still trying to get *pīti* stable or coming ...” But maybe that person who’s asking that question about what seems to be the third *jhāna*, what may well be the third *jhāna*, you know, maybe they’ve been doing this for years. Maybe they’ve been doing *jhāna* practice for years, or on and off for years. So it’s just good to bear that in mind, and also bear in mind that, okay, they may have *that* opening, but they may have other gaps in their practice, or they may be struggling with other difficulties that aren’t in the question at that point. The mind shrinks so easily around what it hears, and with comparison, etc.

Another thing I said earlier in the retreat was I see this three weeks, or however long we’ve got together, I see it in a much larger context, a much larger *potential* context of your lives and your practice. I would really encourage *you* to see it the same way. So this three weeks that we’re spending together has its context in potentially *years* of *jhāna* practice. I think I said one time, you could take a three-year *jhāna* practice – yeah, if that’s what you want to do, and if the opportunity arises. But I mean just periods. Most of you – maybe not all of you, but most of you in this room – will be dedicated seriously to Dharma practice for the rest of your lives, and I hope those are very long lives. And within that, you may have periods, stretches, where you just revisit *jhāna* practice, and I’ll talk about that at the end of the retreat. So I see this retreat in that context.

It’s interesting, you know – a lot of people wanted to come on this retreat. There wasn’t room. For some reason, Gaia House made it a much smaller retreat, the number. So a lot of people were disappointed. And I partly felt like, “It’s only three weeks.” It’s like, don’t put too much pressure on, expectation on these three weeks. The recordings will be there. The teachings will be there. So really, it’s like, what is it to work and play now, on these three weeks, as I say – play hard? Play hard. Give it wholeheartedness, your work and play, but without putting too much pressure on these three weeks.

I really, really mean this. It’s not like, “Oh, if I say that, somehow you’ll feel better” or something. I mean, you hopefully will, but ... three weeks is just three weeks. This retreat is just three weeks. The fact that I’m here, it’s like, it’s not that much difference, you know? Or the fact that we are together, and that other people are not now with me here.

Okay. So a lot of this is repeat. Am I doing the practices that have helped, in the past, give rise to well-being and *pīti*? Am I actually choosing those practices? Or am I, for some reason, choosing other

practices? That's a really important question. If you ask that, and you find you're *not*, then why? What's actually happening there?

A couple of other reminders of things I said earlier: remember about the intention, and how important that is. What do I think I'm doing when I come into a formal practice (sit, walk, stand, whatever it is)? What do I semi-consciously or sub-consciously think I'm doing? I'm wanting to develop *pīti*, wanting to develop *jhāna*, but there are a whole host of other, beautiful things that we could potentially realize that we're developing at the same time, such as ... [yogis respond in background] Attunement, wholeheartedness, sensitivity, patience, kindness. Very good. Trust, love for Dharma, mindfulness. What was the other one? Non-judgment – beautiful. This is really important. Those are really, really important qualities. So if you get to the eighth *jhāna* and you're just as unkind, or just as self-judgmental, or just as impatient, it's like ... [yawning sound] It's not that interesting. We have to look at the big picture. So those are really important qualities, *and* opening up the intention, again and again, to realize: this is what I'm doing here. We get so tight. Even now, some of you, this may not be landing at all. We get so tight. Opening up the view will help everything. It will help your well-being.

We talked also about opening up the intention so that it's not just about *me*, right? We talked about practising for each other, and showing up for each other, and practising for all beings. And again, this is one of the things it's very easy to sort of like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, sure. Yeah." Can you be radical with this? Would you know how to do that? So we can just, "Oh, yeah, that's a good idea," and kind of do it once or twice, like a bit half-heartedly. What would it be to be radical with this, really radical? Try. And if you don't know what it means to be radical with something like that, try. This intention to practise, like I'm just giving away the intention, not for myself; for others, radically for all beings – see if you can get a sense of that and the power of that sometimes.

I talked about exchanging self and other. Some of you don't know that practice, but I briefly described: this *dukkha*, these hindrances, this misery, this pain of stagnation, this pain of not getting what I want, of not opening to what I love, this pain of self-comparison in a negative way – whatever it is – I take this *dukkha* on, I take this suffering so that, magically, somewhere, someone can have the openings that they yearn for. That can apply to all kinds of *dukkha*. It's a radical practice. It's a radical re-orienting of will, of intention, etc.

Okay. Who's heard of the noble eightfold path? Who's heard of the four foundations of mindfulness? Who's heard of the seven factors of awakening? Okay. You're good at this. [laughter] Who's heard of the four bases of power? Mmm! [laughter] *Iddhipādā*. It's one of the Buddha's lists, *iddhipādā*. Four bases of power, sometimes translated as 'four bases of success,' 'four bases of accomplishment.' I'm not going to go into them. I'm just going to mention the four: desire, persistence, intent, and discrimination (discernment about what is skilful and unskilful). So I'm giving a very shorthand version, but the four *iddhipādā*, four bases of success – let's call them that, four bases of success or accomplishment: desire, persistence, intent, and discrimination about what's skilful and what's unskilful. [inaudible question from yogi] *Iddhipāda* is the Pali for *siddhi*, basically.

And the Buddha says,

Whoever develops [whoever cultivates, whoever gives attention to] these four bases of power gives attention to and develops the eightfold path [the path to the ending and to liberation. And] whoever neglects these four bases of power neglects the eightfold path [neglects the way, forsakes the way to liberation].¹

It's quite interesting to me that most of you had never heard of this list before. Sometimes it's a list that gets associated with psychic powers and stuff, but actually, in the quote I just gave from the Buddha, it's very connected with the eightfold path and liberation. It's quite interesting that we haven't heard of this. Why do you think we haven't heard of this? Might it have anything to do with the fact that desire is one of them? And the word 'power,' yeah. So 'power' is not 'power over.' In physics, power is kind of related to the capacity to work, the capacity to do or to make something happen. It's like, "Oh, desire. Let's maybe sweep it in the corner. We'll put it under the rug where it won't be seen to be part of ..." I wonder whether that's partly to do with the whole deal.

So I want to talk a little bit about desire. And I've talked an enormous amount about desire, as some of you know, in other contexts – in the context of talking about eros and soulmaking and all that stuff. I don't want to talk at great length. I just want to say a few things, and not so much about the soulmaking and eros aspects of it.

Here we have a desire, and a desire is always *for* something. We always have a desire *for* something. So there's – whatever word you want – something I want to achieve, or a goal, or some thing I want to open or attain, experience. And then, in this case, we're on a retreat. We're working or playing and trying to move towards something that we desire. Here's the desire, and I'm not just going to abandon my desire. I want to get *that*, whatever *that* is (in this case, *jhāna* or whatever). What I learn in that process, what I develop in that process, what I learn about my relationship with desire, and about my relationship with goals, it may well be the biggest or the most important part of this practice. It may well be more important than attaining this or that *jhāna*. How many people believe what I just said? [laughs] It's really interesting! Okay. I really, really mean that.

So what happens when we put ourselves in a context like this? We're only really doing this practice. We're only really meditating. There's nothing else. And then what we're putting most attention to becomes what the self is most likely to judge itself about or in relationship to. If we were doing something very different, you wouldn't be judging how your meditation is going, and the self would be constructed around something very different. Put yourself in an environment like this, it's meditate, meditate, meditate, there's talk of different goals, there's nothing else really going on – that's what the self will get constructed [around]. The self needs something in relation to which it constructs itself. It constructs itself either in a nice way, a good-feeling way, a grandiose way, a problematic way, a contracted and difficult way. But in this kind of environment, it will construct around practice and around how practice is going.

So we notice: practice can't help but be up and down. And what happens in this environment, when there's this emphasis, *huge* emphasis, kind of obsessional emphasis on meditation – and not just meditation, but meditation along certain lines and towards certain ends? Practice goes up and down, and then how much, because of that, with it, the mood goes up and down. And with that, very easily the

whole belief gets dragged into that, and the whole perception and belief of self, of others, of the world, of practice, of Gaia House, of whatever it is. This is so, so important.

So this business, this real up and down, where everything feels like it's really difficult, feels like I'm not getting anywhere, feels like maybe I'm failing, etc., this – what's the word – the amplitude of that curve, if by the end of the retreat it moves to *this*, the amplitude is smaller, that would be a *massive* success. And what makes the amplitude smaller? That we don't believe so much what the mind is saying then. Back to this thing when I talked about the hindrances: I don't believe so much the stories that get spun. When I have a strong desire for something, an intense desire for something, it gets charged. It becomes a focal point of charge, and in relation to that focal point of charge, my mood and my whole sense of self gets constructed in a very turbulent way on these waves. And then the whole world of *papañca* can get constructed with it. And if the amplitudes of that construction and that whole curve can decrease, that would be huge. It gets less primarily through learning not to believe what the hindrances are saying, what the mind is saying, what the conclusions, what the beliefs are about self, about practice – not to take them personally. I'm just repeating what I said before, but it's of such great significance.

So really, I'm being totally honest saying this stuff. By the end of the retreat, I would view that as a huge development and a huge success if that's what happened, that's what you could report back to me. And in terms of the whole life, that may be *more* significant, and more transformative, and more liberating than that you attained this or that *jhāna*. Or another way of saying it is: remember I said *jhāna* practice is *this*, it's not *this*? It includes the difficulty and how I'm relating to the difficulty. Remember I said that? *Jhāna* practice includes the really grotty, grimy, sloggy, boring, unsexy, unglamorous, unimpressive bits. I really, really invite you, again, into that much bigger view of what we're doing. This is what I mean by *jhāna* practice. Anything smaller is a kind of immature understanding. It will not bear the same fruit. If I have a limited view, I will limit the fruit. So I really, really, again and again, invite you into this much larger view of what you're doing here, what the territory is, and what counts as fruitful *jhāna* practice. It doesn't always feel good. The half of the time, or whatever is the proportion of the time, when it really doesn't feel good is just as valuable, at least as valuable. So can I somehow have that bigger view, and work, and play, and play hard, and be wholehearted and all that, without giving up the desire?

Slight risk in saying this, but I'm going to say it anyway: what exactly the desire or desires is or are in doing *jhāna* practice, or devoting time, at any time in your life, to a period of *jhāna* retreat or *jhāna* practice, what *exactly* the desires are, what *exactly* are you wanting there, and why, and also how we relate to those desires or that desire – those two things, how we relate to our desire and desires, and what exactly are we desiring and why are we desiring – so all that whole conglomeration there, that may be, it may be extremely significant and determinative in what actually unfolds for you. It's interesting. I'm tentative to bring this up, but ... Why would I do a *jhāna* retreat? I might want the pleasure. I've heard about these lovely states of pleasure. Or I might have, for instance, met or read some monk who said, "Oh, you need to have *jhānas*, and if you don't have *jhānas*, you're kind of wasting your time on the Buddhist path," so I *should*. Is my desire for the pleasure? Is my desire coming out of a *should*, in which case maybe it's "I should because I really want liberation," but maybe

that's another *should*? Going into the desires a little more, actually unpacking the range and the layers, the variety and the layers of desires.

Is it because I like the teacher? Or maybe I know someone who likes the teacher, and they said he/she/they were cool, whatever? Is it because I want to achieve something? I want to get my badges? And again, why? What's that coming from? I talked about this yesterday – it's like, how the desire for achievement may be coming from different places or different impulses in the psyche, in the self-sense. Is it because I want to improve my focus, the ability of my mind to concentrate and focus on something? And again, if so, why? And then maybe I get an answer to the 'why,' and then again, why? Is it that I heard about these mystical states, and I'm curious about them, or I have a desire for a mystical kind of opening? Is it that I want to go on this or that particular retreat because my friend is going, or my partner is going, and they're really enthusiastic, and I just kind of go with them? Or is it I'm actually not quite sure, or I really don't know? Or lots of other things.

Do we realize what the mix of desires and intentions and impetuses are? And do we realize what I said earlier, that they're actually very significant, and that my relationship with the desire is extremely significant in what actually unfolds? Again, I would say that, for many people, *that*, what I've just said, is more significant as a teaching than if I were to give a certain technical explanation, how it might help to move from this *jhāna* to the next *jhāna*. Remember I used this phrase, developing a nose for it? Partly what I mean, and what I was talking about then is, what's significant, and what's less significant? What has a kind of meta-significance, and what just a kind of smaller significance? So if I were to give two teachings – let's say, one about what I've just said about desire, and one about, let's say, what I just said: "Okay, here's how you can move from this *jhāna* to this *jhāna*. Just try this" or whatever – do I have the kind of wisdom and the kind of intuition, the kind of nose for it that recognizes, "*That's* the really significant teaching. *This* is subsidiary"?

I hesitate to say all that because all what I've just said, and those questions, and those points, they may be quite agitating for some people, and maybe confusing for some people. But a few of you, or a few people listening to this, let's say, a few people maybe need to get clearer about that, or there may come a time when exactly those questions, and going deeper into those questions, is exactly what you need. And it may be there are people listening who don't realize that later on, at some point, it will be a very significant question. But do you understand this thing about – it's like, I think it's hard for human beings sometimes, or it's hard for us to listen and get a kind of structural understanding of teachings? That's partly what I mean by "a nose for it." What are the sort of top-level hierarchy teachings, and what are the sort of lower-level detail teachings? It's quite a rare sort of gift or skill to actually develop this sense of being able to order the hierarchy of teachings. Something on a top level is actually much more significant. Oftentimes, when it's given as a teaching, it doesn't sound significant. The thing that sounds significant is this little detail or little tip or whatever it is. But over time, I think, we can develop that art and skill, actually learning to think more structurally, more globally, and in that process, it's not so much a thinking as – well, it *is* a thinking, but it's also an intuition. I feel it's really, really important.

So, you know, what happens to us as human beings with desire, when we have desire, when we have strong desire? Do we even recognize, as I said, what kinds of desire we have, or what's actually moving us? And is it a deep desire in our being, or is it something else? What's running us? What desires run in us, etc.? But having a deep desire and something you really want, it's difficult. Unless

you just get what you want immediately, it's difficult. I've been in this hall as a yogi lots of times. I remember in another context – it wasn't a *jhāna* retreat – I was on a long retreat, and hearing an interaction between a student and teacher, and it seemed to me at the time that the teacher was corroborating this student's awakening. And, you know, I had to go for a long walk after that, a long, long walk. At that time, it didn't generate all this, "I'm a failure," etc., but, you know, I wanted something so much, and just to hear – back to what we were talking about, about Q & As and that sort – just to hear or witness something where it seemed like someone had something that *I* wanted so deeply, so much, that I cared so passionately about, it was difficult. It was difficult for me. And that was even without the whole self "I can't, I never will, *da-da-da*" by that point. That was not there so much.

To give you another example, some of you know I was a musician before I was a Dharma teacher. I started playing the guitar very late. I was introduced to Jimi Hendrix at about 17 years old, and just fell in love. I was also introduced to this young guy I watched on TV playing a guitar concerto, and I just thought, "Wow, I want to do that." And it doesn't matter the details, but I went to university, had to do the whole academic thing at university. I was really a beginner for years after that, into my twenties, etc. I went through university studying something else, and I really, really, really wanted to do music. I had such an almost viscerally painful desire that felt like something wanted to come out and express and manifest. This could be a very long story, but ... [laughter] So for different reasons – complex, painful reasons – my father was really not supportive of this idea, and for him, it was very important that I pursued an academic career and this sort of thing, etc. What happened was I disagreed with him. I found a music school in America where I could go, still being pretty much a beginner, and they would let me in. I had enough money for a few months – not even a whole year. And I just went. Very difficult with my father, etc. There are reasons for him for that; we don't have to go into it.

People around me thought, "You're crazy! I mean, clearly you're into guitar, but you're not very good." And it was true. I wasn't very good. I was a beginner. I want to say a few things together about all this. It's about desire and how we handle desire. My mother, I would say, if I compare musically myself and my mother – well, first thing is musical talent is not one thing. There are lots of different talents in music, as there are in meditation. It's not one thing that we're talking about. There are a lot of different talents. So in music, it's like, okay, there's compositional, and how your ear is, and the ear can do this and that, or the sense of form – there are a million different things. Even compositional talent is a bunch of different things; improvisational talent. I was into jazz guitar. It's like, even that's a lot of different things. My mother, I would say, is, in some respects, at least, much more talented musically than I am. She can do things easily that, for me, didn't come easily or naturally.

So here I was. I probably could have had my pick or choose of any academic direction at that point that I wanted to go in. And I went off to America instead to try and become a jazz musician, with not much money, etc., but I had this intuition. And I knew I wasn't very good; I mean, it was obvious. [laughs] I knew I was a beginner. I had this intuition that my desire and my longing and my eros, the depth of love that I had for music and the sort of need for it to come out – it was obvious that it was much more than my mother's. She's able to do this or that, quite facile, but she doesn't love music anywhere near the depth that I love music. And so she never really developed it. But I had this intuition that somehow the depth of love and the depth of my desire was somehow proportional to my talent that

wasn't manifesting, or the possibility. My love and my desire itself indicated something that wasn't visible. It indicated something about what *might* be possible for me. And it indicated something about a talent that really was not visible. You're probably thinking, "Oh, yeah I bet he was brilliant, and he's just ..." No, I was really a beginner.

And so I got to this music school where the joke was, "All you need to get in is a cheque and a pulse." [laughter] And I took advantage of that. At least for a third of a year or whatever, I had the cheque. I didn't know what I was going to do after that, but I had that cheque, and I had the pulse. Then the joke went – the second half was, "Lately it seems all you need is the cheque." But this school, at that time, it was pretty much the only school in the world where you could study jazz, so that was the place to make it to. This was years ago, in the eighties. And so I was really the bottom of the bottom there, and I really mean it. Because it was the only place, a lot of people would come from all over the world. They were already totally accomplished musicians. They were just there so they could get an American visa for a while, so they could make connections, move to New York, and be a jazz musician in New York, etc. You had this enormous range – I mean, really, really super-accomplished musicians; they didn't need to be taught hardly anything – all the way down to me. [laughter] And I had this, like I said, visceral desire, so I would go to college, and I was really happy to be out of that whole scene in England and doing what I loved, but it was really, really painful. I would go and have a sort of humiliating day in college, playing and being heard, and then hearing other people play and all that. I would sometimes drag my guitar case home. I'm not exaggerating. It was really, really difficult. I'm glad you find it funny. [laughter]

Somehow I stayed fifteen years, and I developed as a musician. I worked so hard at it. And it was difficult in all kinds of ways. My point, really, is if I love something deeply, if I really desire something deeply – and I was right about the talent thing; I feel really touched and blessed by what eventually manifested. So that intuition about "If I love it this much, there must be something that wants to express," I would say that turned out to be right, and I feel very humbly touched by what came in the end. But the main point is: if we really desire something, if we let ourselves feel that desire, and don't just throw it away, and don't just shun it, then I've got to find a way of tolerating that, tolerating, being okay with the pain that comes with it often, the cut of it, the burning of it, the frustration that comes with it sometimes, the setbacks of that whole journey.

So one journeys with a desire. The desire, that's why it's 'the bases of success,' 'the bases of accomplishment' – it's part of the fuel. And somehow, if I have this desire, and I'm not going to throw it away, and I'm going to let myself be on fire, then at least some of that time, I'm going to meet frustration. I'm going to meet difficulty. I'm going to meet setbacks. I'm going to meet hurdles that seem insurmountable or problems that seem "I don't know." I'm going to, and the question is, how am I going to hold that? How am I going to relate to that? Can I tolerate it?

Looking back on all that time in music, from one point of view, I suppose I could say the desire to express and to manifest what wanted to manifest, I suppose I could say that that desire was bigger than my desire to be free of the pain that came with the desire, the pain of failing, of not measuring up, the pain of feeling like I was behind people, of comparing poorly; the pain of, for a long time, falling short of where, even in my mind, what I could hear in my mind – what manifested was so poor in

comparison. What manifested in terms of what came out was so poor. The pain of all that, that desire, one way of seeing it was, thankfully, that was *less* than the desire to manifest.

So this is interesting. To me, it's interesting. How much of my *dukkha* right now, in relation to my desire and whatever it is I love – in this case, *jhāna* practice, on this retreat – how much is about negative self-view? In other words, it would almost latch onto *anything*. Put you in another context, and it would latch onto that. Put me in another context where everyone's doing this, and we're doing this all day, and it would latch onto that. How much of it is coming from that? It's just the propensity for negative self-view, finding some charged [object], or object that becomes charged through repetition, through teaching, through environment, and the *dukkha* builds on that, the negative self-view builds on that? And how much of it is from the frustration about what I *deeply* love, which is a different (to me) *dukkha*?

How much of my *dukkha* right now is coming in relation to there's something I really deeply love, and it's just frustrating not to be there, not to have that opening, not to reach it, but it's in relation to something I deeply love? And how much of my *dukkha* is actually just a kind of propensity for negative self-view, which *could* latch itself onto all kinds of things? If I put myself in another situation where we're emphasizing again and again and again something else, that thing gets charged, this practice, that practice, this thing, that thing, and other people around, and then the self gets constructed, as I said before, in relation to that charged thing through repetition, through environment, and then the propensity for the self to get constructed with a negative self-view in relation to that thing – how much of my *dukkha* is *that* kind of *dukkha*, and how much of my *dukkha* is the other kind? I don't need to know in percentages, but in terms of practice, it's more like, is it possible at times to focus on the former, on the real, deep desire?

Now, to do that, I might have to go *into* and *through* my pain – not *around* my pain – because there will be a certain kind of pain with that desire: I want something so much, so deeply, I yearn for it, and it's not here. But the pain is different than the “I'm crap, and I can't do this, and *da-da-da*,” the self-view pain. So can I focus on the former, desire, through focusing, finding that pain that goes with that, feeling that? Where there's that pain, there will be the desire that goes with that pain. The pain, that specific pain, takes me to that specific desire. And that specific desire is actually a beautiful thing. Is there a way that I can then be with that desire in a way that I feel the energy of that desire, and the love in the desire, and the devotion in the desire, and the alignment in the desire, and even the beauty of desire?

So there's a kind of potential alchemy here through the *dukkha*, but I have to, again, discriminate, discern: which threads am I following here? Desire is hard. It's hard. If I say “yes” to desire, I'm saying “yes” to – the Buddha's analogy – a burning coal. Either I throw that burning coal away, or I learn how to relate to it, and I tolerate my burning. And where there's burning, there's beauty, and even blessing, benediction, and gift. But I have to find the right way to let myself be on fire, let that fire burn in me, let that desire move in me, in a way that's actually fruitful. Some of that takes quite fine discernment through the pain.

Okay. That's all I want to say for today. Maybe that didn't feel relevant right now. It should, at some point, feel relevant, because if you do this kind of stuff long enough, if you have the desire, it can

get hard. So I hope that, at some point at least, it will certainly be relevant, but also *feel* relevant, and you'll recognize that.

[1:05:10, guided meditation begins]

Let's just have a bit of quiet together. Right now, is it possible, however you're feeling, and however you feel your practice is going – whether you're flying right now, and really pleased with how things are opening, or whether you're actually quite struggling, and quite unsure, and feel a little bit disappointed or dejected about how it's going, or somewhere in between – is it possible right now for you to get a sense of the beauty of your desire, the beauty of your desire to practise, for practice, for what you want in practice? For the deepest callings that brought you here? Can you get a sense for how beautiful that is, how beautifully it manifests in you, that seed and that calling? The desire itself is something beautiful. *Your* desire, your soul's desire – a treasure. For sure a double-edged sword, but something wonderful, miraculous, potent, a gift.

Is it possible, too, perhaps, to look back, perhaps over the days of this retreat so far, perhaps over your life of practice, and recognize, acknowledge, open your eyes to, open your memory to all those times you've been willing to show up, try again, put effort in, put up with what's difficult, worked patiently, played persistently? Recognize that. Is it possible to acknowledge that? Can you, again, see the beauty of that, of that willingness, of that work, of that play, of that patience? Can you love that one? That one who keeps showing up? Can there be appreciation towards that one who keeps showing up? Kindness towards that one? Cherishing of that one? Maybe even a hug for that one? However modest or imperfect they might seem to you, your desire, your willingness, these are the gifts in you, to you, planted in the core of your heart from the divine, from the Buddha-nature. Seeds planted, this desire, this willingness – *your* desire, *your* willingness. Seeds, jewels, given to you, planted in you, coming through you from the divine, from the Buddha-nature.

[1:16:00, guided meditation ends]

¹ SN 51:20.

12-27 Q & A

Okay, so we have a period today for some questions, if there are any. I've got a couple – I think at least two – written, and maybe just three little things I wanted to throw out. I will get to all these things, including the written questions, but maybe to start with an oral one, if there is one.

Q1: practising with *nāda* (ringing/buzzing sound)

Yogi: Correct me if I'm wrong. I don't recall you actually describing the way one might practise with the ringing in the ears as a concentration practice. Did you, or could you?

Rob: I can. I didn't. Deliberately I didn't. The reason I deliberately didn't is because the more you pay attention to it, the more prominent it becomes, and the more sort of sustained it becomes, and it's possible, further on down the line, that you decide that you don't want it to be prominent and sustained. So I feel a little tentative about giving that as an instruction. I guess there are three ways you could relate to it – actually, four ways.

(1) One is: this is actually tinnitus. And I don't know, is there a medical solution for tinnitus? What's that? Ignoring it? Which is what I was going to say – not so much *ignoring* it as not getting into a fight with it. One option is, in other words, that either whether it's tinnitus or it's just the ringing in the ears, the sound that comes up as the mind gets still and energized for some people, and you decide, "This isn't something I'm particularly interested in. I don't really want to work with it meditatively" – I know that's not what you're asking; I just want to give a teaching – if that's the case, then the best attitude to it is I'm not really paying it attention, and the most important thing is not to get into an aversive relationship with it. Okay? So what I'm really watching is my aversion in relationship to it. It's just some noise happening. It doesn't mean anything about me.

I'll get to this more when we talk about emptiness and dependent arising: if I get into an aversive relationship with it, I *make* it unpleasant. I will perceive that sound as unpleasant. Then that unpleasantness triggers more aversion if I'm not careful, and it's perceived as *more* unpleasant, and the whole thing cycles around, just because of dependent arising, because there was even just a little bit of aversion at the beginning that I wasn't taking care of. Do you understand that loop? Okay. It happens with *any* object of perception: there it is, and I'm in an aversive relationship (even a subtly aversive relationship) to it. It cannot help but colour and shape and form the object of perception – in this case, the internal sound – and it colours and shapes and forms it negatively. It becomes more unpleasant. Then, usually, again, without mindfulness, without care, without skilful relationship in the moment, what's more unpleasant just triggers more aversion, and the whole thing loops around. That can become, eventually, as maddening as it is for people who really don't like their tinnitus, you know?

So whether it's organic in origin – let's say that it's actually tinnitus, if there is such a thing – or whether it's this thing, if I decide that I'm not really picking it up as an object, then I really need to just watch that aversion. So that's one thing, if I'm not really interested in it.

(2) If I *am* really interested in it, again, with the caution – the reason I didn't put it out was because one might change one's mind. I explored it for a while; it doesn't come up that much any more. In other words, enough time has gone by. It got prominent, you know, the whole thing, but enough time went by that I just wasn't that interested in it. I didn't get aversive, and the whole thing died down. But if one *did* decide, "Okay, I'm at least willing to experiment with it," then basically, there are, broadly speaking, two ways, okay?

(2.1) One is with using it as a kind of concentration object. That would be like the base practice. That would be the primary thing that you're paying attention to, but it's a sound. So when you get distracted, that's what you return to. And as with if we were working with the breath here, again, it's like, can I get really intimate with it? Can I really listen in a very fine way? Do I need to play with a delicacy of my listening, the intensity of my listening? All that stuff. It's the same kind of thing.

What often happens for people who choose that as an object is that, as they listen more carefully – or it might be obvious from the beginning – is that it begins to reveal that it's actually not so much a

spectrum as a collection of frequencies. In other words, there's a lower one, there's a higher one, there's stuff in the middle, and maybe they're slightly different, and you can kind of begin to discern. It's almost like listening under a magnifying glass, so to speak. Everything's individual, but it often is the case that listening to the higher-pitched one will bring more energy into the being. Everyone's individual, but find the highest pitch in this kind of chord, if you like, that's what you listen to, and that brings more energy. It is, if you like, a more refined object. So we were talking about the refinement with the *jhānas* and that kind of business – it's similar to that. It's a more refined object, partly because, in a way, a higher-pitched sound, in terms of physics, is a more refined object.

What can then happen, if then you're tuning to that – the higher pitch, the higher pitch, the higher pitch, and probably, again, the background of the whole thing, with the body. You *really* want to include the body. It's a bit like the instructions we gave to Julian: if I paid attention to my upper lip here with the breath, I still want the body in the background. Eventually what will happen with the sound or with the body is the body just gets integrated into, in this case, the listening, and one is listening with the body. Some people can start that already because they're familiar with listening with the body, but at some point, just by including the body in the background awareness (this sound is the foreground, the higher pitch is foreground), it starts to integrate, and the connection between that and *pīti* in the whole energy body, etc., can go.

And what happens, this higher pitch that I've been paying attention to, it may be that after a little while, *that* starts to kind of split into a chord. It was perceived as one pitch, and then it becomes a chord, and again, you can go to the highest one. So that's a method, and for some people, it's really, really helpful for their *samādhi*. But again, not to get confused what the primary *nimitta* is once the *jhānic* factors arise, yeah? So it might be that some people listen to that, and they listen to that, and that's the object, and they're really, really steady, and very focused, and very concentrated, but they're not getting so much into the *pīti* or the *sukha* or the whatever. So again, in *this* way of teaching that we're exploring on this retreat, once the *pīti* or *sukha* or whatever it is comes up, and it's constant enough, it's strong enough to work with, definitely pleasant, then *that* becomes the primary. Then the sound, it's a bit like the breath in the energy body: is there a way that it helps it? Probably is, because energy body, in energetic terms – which, remember, is completely an illusion; it's a *relative* truth – but in energetic terms, in that language, energy body, we're talking about vibrations. When I say “pay attention to the energy body,” I say “frequencies,” “vibration,” “tone” – this is all musical language. A tone is a note. A frequency, a vibration – that's all music, you know? So it could be that the energy body and the sound are just kind of mutually vibrating like that, and that's what allows the whole thing to grow in the *samādhi* direction, if that's what I want.

(2.2) There's another way of using it which is more – some people use it as a kind of insight practice. So then it becomes less an object of concentration in itself, and more a kind of backdrop that relativizes the arising and passing of other phenomena. In other words, this sound feels like it's going on forever, and it's just there, even though – it's a bit like when I talked about that vastness of awareness; in fact, they're very parallel practices. So this sound, people who really get into it give it a kind of cosmic significance, like it's the primal, primordial sound of the universe or whatever. The concepts and views wrapped up in that are that it's eternal: it eternally pervades the whole universe forever, maybe even before the beginning, before the end of the universe. It's just there. My ability to

hear it at any time might come and go. That's actually really important. Is it an ultimate truth? I would say absolutely not. But it can be a really important stepping-stone in terms of insight. So if I have this sense of it as constant, eternal – eternal not in the *transcending time* sense, but as in *lasting forever* – and I have that sense of it, then anything else that comes up, any other sounds, the birds, the heating noise, the voice, any other sensations, the pain in the back, the whatever-it-is, tastes, smells, touches, thoughts, all of that is kind of given a constant backdrop with which to kind of offset its relative impermanence, and the fact that it's just coming and going, and *this thing* just stays. Does this make sense?

So that's very similar to what people get into with the vastness of awareness. And what that does, because you've got something that's constant, and I haven't got the view this is an irritating tinnitus sound; I've got the view this is something mystically lasting forever, etc., and it pervades the whole universe, so it's less a thing that you're *doing* that to, more a *backdrop*, and that enables one – if it's working well – to let go in relation to the phenomena (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts) that arise impermanently (arise, pass, arise, pass) against the backdrop of that forever-lasting ... Does that make sense? So that would be a way of using it as an insight practice. Some people, either way can be really, really powerful. The reason I didn't was because of what I said – because some people end up just really getting irritated by it, and then kind of feel a little bit stuck with it, and don't realize that then you actually have to work with the aversion to unstick yourself if you change your mind. But yeah, for a lot of people, very, very profound. The question I would still have – let's say for an insight meditator doing it that second way that I described – is “Great. And then how are you going to transcend that? How are you going to go beyond it?”

Yogi: Are you asking me?

Rob: No, I'm asking anyone who does that for a long time and gets a lot of fruit out of it. And 'a long time' means probably months. I know people who have been doing that for decades. But I don't know anyone who's gone beyond it. It's not to say you *can't*; it's just the *how* becomes a real question. In other words, I might have set up my whole view of practice and goal – through that practice, it comes with sort of views that are conscious and semi-conscious, and through all that, I might have set up my idea of what practice is and what the goal of practice is in a way that actually doesn't permit me to go beyond it. So it's just a question: how? I'm not saying it's impossible. Of course it's not impossible. But it would take a whole kind of reworking. In that system, there's nothing that's kind of integrated into that view that you can rely on that, in time, will go beyond that. It's rather you'd have to actually then re-examine the whole view and do something really quite different probably, whereas there are other ways of insight practice that I would like to talk about on this retreat that have within them, actually, you just keep doing the same thing – not the same *practice*, but the same *principle* – and it just goes beyond wherever you are, beyond, beyond, beyond. It'll eat up everything. But that's a whole other subject. So different possibilities, yeah? Okay, good.

Is that Nic? Yeah.

Q2: possible different kinds of subtlety and intensity; inquiring how to get more into pleasant sensation rather than inquiring about whether it's blocked

Yogi: An exploration has kind of opened up in the last couple of days around the spectrum of subtlety to intensity of experience – so experience of the energy body, and in the energy body, and of the *nimittas*. I think I feel like I've done most of that work within a soulmaking context. I don't know – within that context, I feel really confident about working with subtle energy body experiences, especially when there's image present as well, but I kind of realized that I was finding here that because there's this map, and there's more universal things that we're after, and kind of trying to tap into, or these realms that we're trying to tap into and experience, I began to get really confused about what is subtle and what's intense, and whether subtlety actually has some near enemies, because I had two really strong *pīti* experiences two sats, and then I had one which it was much, much less intense – it was much gentler and softer. And I wasn't sure. There was some doubt around, "Is this subtle *pīti*? Or is it blocked? Or is it hindered in some way?" And then you gave the image of the glowing ember, and fanning that a little bit to get the flames going. It seems obvious that the ember is the subtle thing and the flames are the intense thing, but you can also have a really intense feeling of a glowing ember and subtle feeling of flames. So I've just been thinking a lot about it. I might be making too much of it, but it seems like quite an important thing to feel into and to tune into a bit more, to be more confident. Do you need to experience a quality really intensely before you can know it in its subtle aspects, for example? That's one question.

Rob: Okay, yeah. So let me give a response and see if it addresses what you're asking, Nic. I think the problem is with the word 'subtlety,' which I've been conscious of in myself when I use it, that actually it's – what is it when a word has at least three meanings? Not ambiguous, but ... triguous? Anyway, it's confusing, potentially. So we can talk about the intensity of the *pīti*, how strong it feels, and that's an element of SASSIE, right? The **I**. And that, I said, doesn't matter. It only matters that it's definitely pleasant, okay? Over the course of [practice], if you *really* get into *jhāna* practice, you'll probably experience *pīti* over that whole range. And basically the point of the SASSIE is, the **I**, I don't need to worry about that too much. As long as it's relatively pleasant, I don't need to worry about it. If it's so pleasant that actually I'm really struggling with opening to that, and it's kind of almost uncomfortably pleasant, then I may need to work in different ways with that. But generally speaking, I don't need to worry.

Initially with *jhāna* practice, you'll notice – depending on whether you've gone via the ember in the energy body and fanning it, or via the nostrils – generally you'll just notice there's a variation from formal session to formal session of the strength of the *pīti*, of the intensity of the *pīti*, and it doesn't matter. Over much more time, you'll realize that once you've got second, third *jhāna*, fourth *jhāna*, all that, you'll realize that there has been – gradually, in a not very uniformly linear way – a kind of lessening of the intensity of the *pīti* over time. That's just in terms of the strength of it.

But then we can also talk about subtlety and intensity of *attention*. I would even separate: do those even mean the same thing? In other words, what is it to just – this is quite a hard thing to communicate if one hasn't really experienced it – what is it to turn up the intensity of the attention on something? So

as you say, you could have a very subtle object, but you're paying attention to it very intensely, absolutely, and maybe in different ways, you know? Does that make sense?

And then a third word that gets mixed in here is 'refinement.' As we go through the *jhānas*, what happens is, as I said, each *jhāna* is more refined than the other. So subtlety is not quite the same thing as refinement; subtlety of attention certainly isn't. It's almost like there are at least three different words that could get confused there. Does this ...? Subtlety, intensity, and refinement. And then you've got *of the attention* and *of the perceived object*, you know? So we could be talking about quite a few different things here. Are we talking about the attention? Are we talking about the *nimitta*? And are we talking about its subtlety, its refinement, or its intensity, or what? Yeah? Maybe in some circumstances 'subtlety' and 'intensity' will just be flips of each other. But is this not quite hitting the nail on the head?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Well, again, if you come back – so often, okay, come back to the big picture: what am I actually trying to do here? In soulmaking practice, we're not necessarily after more intensity of anything particularly. But what we *are* after is the development of sensitivity. And so part of really opening to an image and working well with it might be just "Do I have right now the art and skill and capacity to notice, do I have enough sensitivity to notice the different soul-resonances and energetic resonances, etc., that are going on?" So all you're really doing, it's part of "Can I tune to it?" And it's just "What's there, and what does it need, and what can I notice?" With the *samādhi* practice, it's more "What does it need in order to get more into this, and for it to either feel better, or for me to just feel like I'm really, really into it now?" You understand? So that's why, for example, the **I** in SASSIE, the **intensity**, it doesn't actually matter. What matters is how I'm relating to it. But if in my mind I know where I'm going, what I want is to really get into an experience that's pleasant, or to help it move to the next level – but that would only be at certain times, once it's really matured and it's ready to ripen. So just as a general thing, if you can get used to this sort of big picture: where am I going in this practice? Do you understand what I'm saying? That helps guide me in the moment, at times when you won't have a teacher to ask. Think about where is this practice going, and the larger hierarchy view informs the middle hierarchy, which informs this moment what I emphasize in my attention, what I attune to, what I amplify through my attunement, etc. Does that make sense?

Yogi: So for a beginner – I'm just getting into working with the *pīti* – rather than sort of worrying about "Is this subtle *pīti*, or is it hindered, or is it blocked in some way?", if I ask the question, "How do I make this feel better? How do I increase the well-being?", going in that way rather than worrying about whether this is subtle or intense or ...

Rob: Yeah, absolutely. Subtle and intense doesn't matter. It's just "Is it definitely pleasant?" And know that it will move across a range. "Is it blocked or hindered?" is a different question. It's not like, "Oh, it's not so strong in this session," and then I start to wonder, "Am I blocking or hindering it?" No. If it's blocked or hindered, you will *feel* that as a block – it will feel uncomfortable. It will feel like it's stuck

somewhere, or it's the pain in the body, or something like that. So I wouldn't worry about that. But what you can always ask is "Can I get into it more? Can I enjoy it more?", which doesn't equate to "Can I make it stronger?"

"Can I get into it more? Can I enjoy it more?" might and should include playing with the intensity of the attention, the delicacy of the attention, different modes of attention – am I opening? Am I going into it? Am I wrapping myself in it? All this stuff. But again, as a general principle, it's really helpful to think backwards. This is oftentimes what's so missing in people's Dharma practice, or it's common for it to be missing, is that one isn't really clear about what the kind of aim is of this or that practice, and then how everything acts to support that aim. We end up actually being quite unsure at any moment what to do, or, unfortunately, because we've heard so-and-so say *that*, and so-and-so say *that*, we end up emphasizing something that doesn't fit into or is a confusing paradigm or whatever. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yeah, thank you.

Rob: So yeah, it's really important. Good.

Q3: connecting *nāda* to a body part, foot/heel lifting up off the ground as *samādhi* increases

Rob: I've got a couple of written ones.

Today I had a very strange meditation experience. I was doing formal sitting practice outdoors on a chair under my favourite tree. [Lovely.] I was aiming at exploring the rooms close to the first and second *jhāna*. I had played with the *nāda* sound [that's that sound that Jason was just talking about] / current, and played with connecting it, connecting the sound and my left foot. I had moved on to *mettā* as a springboard, and felt the warmth and happiness and well-being of giving *mettā*. In the scene, there was also the *nāda* and light.

So even though she was doing *mettā*, there was still the sound, and this light, these secondary *nimittas*. Going back to the *nāda* sound, it can arise for people as a kind of secondary *nimitta*, an indication that their practice is deepening in terms of *samādhi*.

I was working and playing with expanding, and enjoying that too. Then I sensed as though something was moving under my right foot. I had heavy trekking boots on. This felt very surprising and strange, and caught my attention. After a short while, about five or ten seconds (it seemed – I'm not sure), that subsided, and instead I felt something trying to push my left foot up from the ground as if it were in the way. I experienced this as very strange. First I wondered if the hard wind might be moving a branch on which maybe my foot was resting. The sensation continued, and I opened my eyes and saw my left foot almost rhythmically in pace with the sensation from my foot/sole. I lifted my

foot and boot, but there was nothing: no branch that could have been moved by the wind, no animal, no hole in the ground. Only small, small pieces of branches, leaves, and soil and mud. I perceived this as very strange.

I put my foot back and went back to my intended practice, meditating in the playground of foothills of the first *jhāna*. To my surprise, the sensation of something trying to lift my left boot reappeared soon. This was scary. Was an animal trying to break into my boot or wanting to get it out of its way? Again I opened my eyes, lifted my boot, and looked carefully. I even poked around with a stick. Nothing. I'm really puzzled. Can you help me understand what might have been going on? I would really appreciate that.

Okey-doke. So I don't think this is that common. Well, I can say that *I* experience something like that. In certain meditative states – maybe less in the deeper *jhānas*, but certainly around the first, that sort of territory, as you described, the rooms, the foothills around that – the energy, the *pīti* is opening the body, and one of the ways it opens the body for *me* is my heels come off the ground. It's really not a big deal. They just slowly come up off the ground. And I mentioned this thing about the head tilting back. I don't know, does anyone else ...? Has anyone else ...? No? Okay, so maybe it's just me and you, but I'm okay with that. It doesn't bother me at all. I'm experiencing it; I'm pretty sure it's just a movement, an expansion of the *pīti* actually expanding the physical body, in much the same way that the head tilting slightly back is. It disappears as the *samādhi* gets deeper, beyond the first *jhāna* territory. And even in the first *jhāna*, it tends to sort of quieten down, I think.

So that's how I perceive it. I guess it could move the other way. The feet could go to the side, or the toes go up or whatever. But it's really just an energetic phenomenon. It's not at all weird. Nothing at all to worry about. I suppose, probably, if I look back, very, very low down the list of my, "Oh, maybe I should have done something slightly differently," "Maybe I should have tried to keep more still." But it's so not an issue for me. How does that sound? Yeah?

Just a couple of other things. This is for everyone. When you've got a lot of secondary *nimittas* and things going on, again, really make sure what the primary one is, yeah? And then these are all secondary. And to the degree that I can mix them in, that it really feels like they're supportive rather than kind of pulling the attention in different directions, that's good. Yeah, you know, we can do all kinds of things with our sense of body anatomy. You started with connecting the *nāda* sound, "connecting it with my left foot." Yeah, you can do all kinds of things like that. Again, the movement of where we're going is such that, at some point in the *jhānas*, for some people quite early on, the whole body shape kind of dissolves from consciousness. I guess, in a way, we want to make sure that we're not perpetuating that beyond where it's useful, you know? Does that make sense? Yeah? So these are just things to check. But yeah, I think really nothing to worry about, and very normal. Yeah? Good.

Q4: working with feelings of guilt and pain around experiencing *pīti* and happiness while others in the world are suffering

Rob: Okay, I've got another note here, if there's nothing else right now.

Working with pleasure, joy, love, etc., brings up a lot of guilt, and a little sadness, and even pain. Am I allowed to be happy and live my life joyfully if someone is suffering? Does my happiness *cause* suffering in someone else? I can sense the *pīti*, the joy, etc., underneath something that feels like holding back and guilt. I want the joy and happiness so badly, but I also feel very sad that other people suffer, and maybe even suffer because of me, and don't allow themselves to live their life joyfully, or don't have the conditions to do so (race, social status, etc.). I feel I need to suffer with them to show some allegiance and solidarity. Focusing on that guilt and sadness, etc., takes me away from the *pīti* again, a habit that is there for too long now. Not focusing on it seems as no one would hold that pain, and it feels as if the pain wants to be held.

Okay. Yeah. So this is quite important. It's actually quite common, is partly what I wanted to say. So this kind of thing I have heard a lot, or relatively quite a lot, from students over the years. "Does my happiness cause suffering in someone else?" Well, it *might*, but it might in two ways. Obviously if you talk unkindly to someone, then – well, that's not your happiness. Your happiness in *jhāna* doesn't cause suffering to someone else. *They* might, and maybe people experience, "I want to go away on retreat for this long, and my family or friends are saying, 'I'll really miss you,' 'It'll be difficult without you,'" etc. Hard, tricky. Technically speaking, it doesn't *cause* the suffering, that alone. Or if I say, "I really want to do this. X or Y is really important to me. I need to devote myself to this project, and therefore I can't have time for this or that person right now," does that decision *cause* their suffering? Or, if they're suffering over it, is their suffering then dependent on *a lot* of conditions? Partly what their psychological propensity is, what their background is, what the agreement in our relationship is, other conditions, the way they're relating to their suffering.

This is quite important, this word, 'cause.' Sometimes it's much more helpful to think about the coming together of conditions that gives rise to suffering, or the coming together of conditions that gives rise to happiness or whatever. So what happens is very easily a person says, "*You* made me suffer." Now, in some instances, that's actually a really healthy view. If I rob someone, or, as I said, am inappropriately angry at them or whatever, or punch them or whatever, yeah, definitely, we can think very helpfully about a one-to-one causal relationship. But in many situations, what's actually happening is a person is suffering, and that suffering that they're experiencing in *this* moment has all kinds of conditions, often over many years of what's been cultivated as psychological habit, or what's been cultivated in their history, or in the agreements of your relationship, etc., or a non-clarity about relationships, or the absence of a conversation about needs and supporting each other to have different needs, etc. So I don't know exactly what the example is here, but I would caution about that, about one's own happiness causing suffering.

And yes, if I choose X, there are certain things in life that, if I choose them, it effectively means I cannot choose Y, or I have to postpone Y. And we really, really need to understand this. Or if we amplify the whole question to an ethical question, you know – this thing about flying, a lot of people have heard me go on and on and on about that we fly too easily these days, and with the carbon emissions. But maybe someone is making an ethical choice between X and Y, and they're weighing up,

or *trying* to weigh up for themselves: what's the most ethical, virtuous thing to do? But in making *this* choice, I can't do *this*. So either I go and whatever it is – my grandmother is dying, and she needs a nurse, and whatever, and I've got the time, and I'm happy, and we have a good relationship. I go. If I go, I can't not fly. If I don't fly, I can't go.

There are a million examples, every day little examples and, through our life, lots of big examples. You cannot avoid, we cannot, as human beings, avoid those kinds of choices, and with the best conscience, and with the best kind of sensitivity and listening that we can muster, we have to choose. But we will always be choosing, in some ways, what we could call a moral shortcoming, an ethical shortcoming, and some kind of suffering may come out of that. So this is just part of what it means to be a human being, and we have to recognize this, acknowledge it, open to it, and deal with it. Someone, somewhere is going to get disappointed at some point with our choices. The question is, what's navigating me, and how am I relating to that? So that's a whole question.

But there's a lot in this note, you know. Let's say I devote my life to serving others, to alleviating suffering in the world. I still have to make particular choices within that. I cannot possibly address the whole of the suffering in the whole world. So maybe I work in human rights, or maybe I work in racial injustice – whatever it is. In doing that, again, in order to give my energy to that, I'm neglecting something else. And let's say I choose one. But I have to be conscious of this: I cannot possibly help everyone's suffering at the same time.

But even then, let's say I've chosen something. I'm aware of this, "Okay, I have to choose, and that's at the cost of something else, of not doing something else." I give all my dedication. It's my job, whatever, but even my job, half of my money I give back into that organization. I just live on the bare minimum. I'm still going to need to sleep and eat and rest, get nourished. In a way, what we're doing with *jhāna* practice particularly is really taking the time, on a retreat like this, to develop really deep sources of rest and nourishment so that – and I've mentioned this a few times, but not so sort of directly – we can move out into the world, if we want to, and be that much more resourced. One can stay with this service work in hard conditions, in conditions that are not in themselves very supportive or very nourishing, that might be quite difficult. One can stay steady with the flack and the eight worldly conditions – praise/blame, etc. – that are there. One can keep doing that. One has those resources accessible to one. So if you *didn't*, and you said, "I'm going to try and help. I'm going to go somewhere and help in a refugee camp" or whatever, and I decide to do it without sleeping and eating, how sustainable is it going to be?

So it's similar to that. If we want to really kind of make our capacity and the possibility of our service very stable, very far-reaching, it's like, we can stay steady. We have the capacity. We can keep showing up. We have the energy. We have the flexibility. We have the bigness of heart that can be close to really difficult *dukkha*. Something in the heart has grown large, and partly it grows large through *jhāna* practice (partly). So all that. There's still that kind of question, to kind of, again, understand: what are we doing? What's the context of what we're doing here?

Again, I don't know how often, but it is really quite common that I have heard this kind of question quite a lot over the years. Oftentimes, it's just asking for a more thorough and careful, loving psychological inquiry into what's going on, what's going on there for oneself, because it might be we've been educated in a certain way to believe certain things. As I said, around the first and second

jhāna, a lot of this comes up: is it okay to experience this much pleasure? But also, just this – is it okay to feel this happy when other people are not? This is very, very common. And yeah, there might be all kinds of views that have been implanted in there socially, culturally, from the family, whatever.

Just in terms of the last thing in the note, I think it's quite important. So there's already a recognition in this note: "Focusing on that guilt and sadness, etc., takes me away from the *pīti* again." The person who has written this has written, "It's a habit that's been there for too long now." So there's already a recognition, "Oh, there's something else going on here that needs some investigation."

"Not focusing on the sadness and the suffering in the world seems as if no one would hold that pain, and it feels as if the pain wants to be held." So again, if we're talking about world suffering, or social injustice, I think – I don't know – I think we need to be clear that I'm not the only person in the world caring for this issue. And sometimes the mind just gets squeezed into sort of semi-conscious beliefs that obviously don't make sense. There are other people working on this. I can afford to take a rest for a few weeks to do a retreat, or I can afford to sit for half an hour in the morning or two hours a day, whatever. It's not *really* going to mean that that suffering is not attended to or goes unheld in the world. If, for instance, there's one person that I know in my life, and it really seems like they're isolated, and they have no one but me to have a sense of holding with, I think that needs a larger conversation, and a larger look at the situation, and their situation, and our relationship, etc., and what can be brought in there, because that's obviously not that helpful for them, and it may not be that helpful for me. But again, I don't know the details here, and the person hasn't signed it. But I hope that that at least says something to this kind of thing. It's very, very common, so I'm glad of the note. It's really common especially around this territory with the *pīti* and the *sukha*, given, I think, some of how we've been educated in our culture.

Okay. I wanted to just throw a few things out there, and then we'll see if there are any more. Well, are there any more questions, live? Yeah, please.

Q5: the importance of perceiving everything as the *nimitta* or a manifestation of it; applying SASSIE to other qualities

Yogi: I started to practise the walking around *jhāna* thing, and it was really lovely. I was really pleased that it opened up. It was very beautiful. And it got into a space where it was kind of like I've had before when I've done *mettā*, and also in soulmaking practices, where it feels like everything has that quality, where I'm walking around the space like that. And I was just wondering, one, is that what it's supposed to be like? And two, I was also wondering, I guess it feels like focusing on that *nimitta* and then SASSIE'ing it up [Rob laughs], that kind of happens.

Rob: I like that!

Yogi: I wondered, can you do that with any object that is kind of like an open-hearted well-being kind of object? Because I've done it with *mettā*, and yeah, in soulmaking practice, but I've never practised things like *brahmavihāras* or anything else.

Rob: So let's do the first question first. Walking around, and with this primary *nimitta* quality, goes very well, and then you notice that basically everything is perceived almost *as* that *nimitta*, or as if it's a manifestation? Yeah, very normal. Very glad that it happened. It's *extremely* important. I'll come back to it later, but basically it's the dependent arising of perception, and it has everything to do with the emptiness.

We could choose any quality, but let's say I experience it with something like *mettā*. Let's say I experience, at first, I think, "*Mettā* is from me, and I do it, and I sort of crank it round and round, and then at a certain point it begins to come out of me to another person or all beings." Then I begin to experience another sense where the universe *is mettā*, or the universe is *made of mettā*, or everything shines that forth, or that's its real substance or whatever. If I experience that – I don't know – three times or five times, it will be nice, you know? It will be a nice experience. If I experience it – I don't know – 500 times, and I'm really going back and forth between *that* perception of the world and our usual perception of the world in Western culture, which is "Of course the world is not love. Of course this glass is not love. It's made of whatever the chemical composition of glass is, and then there's the water, and *that's* the reality. And of course a being is made up of their molecules, and they're not love, or a form of love, or a spark of love."

But if I really start going in and out, and experiencing a lot, a lot, a lot, the very going in and out of it starts to relativize or dislodge this entrenched view about "That's really reality, and this is just a nice experience that I'm having occasionally." I really start to wonder, well, which is real? Some people then go to, "Okay, the love is real one," yeah? But again, the question is, it's really, really good to live there, and hang out there, and even have that view, perhaps for a long time, but at some point I'm going to want to even go beyond *that*, and realize something about the emptiness of perception, the dependent arising of perception. So we'll get more and more into that. I may even speak about it again tomorrow, but as you get more into the later *jhānas*, this becomes really, really an important element, I would say, of what is significant in *jhāna* practice. Again, we're back to this question: what's actually significant, and what's less significant? This, for me, turns out to be extremely significant, and beautiful, and lovely. So is that enough for now? Yeah? And it's a theme that we'll come back to at least once, I think.

Yogi: There was just a second question ...

Rob: Yeah, okay, so "Can I SASSIE up any quality?" is the question. Well, there may be ones that I could, but I'm not going to *enjoy* it – so the **E** at the end, like hatred – well, actually, hatred, for some people, *can* be enjoyable, to a certain degree, for some time, but there are probably ones ... *self-hatred* is probably not something I can get into and really enjoy, so the **E** at the end won't be possible, for example. But in terms of *skillful* qualities, what the Buddha would call *kusala*, skillful qualities, wholesome qualities, I want to say yeah, probably. One of the things that can happen in soulmaking practice is different kinds of spaces open up, and then one can absorb into them more or less, and there's just an infinite amount. My initial response is yeah, probably. But, in a way, on this retreat – again, what's the primary *nimitta*, what's the primary thing that we're doing that with? Is that okay? Good. Okay.

[52:49, pause in questions]

There were a few little things I wanted to just throw out. They all refer to things I've said before, but I'll maybe just say them slightly differently, and that may help them to land a bit better. One is: with the second *jhāna* – I actually can't remember if I said this when we talked about the second *jhāna* – with the *sukha* (that's the primary *nimitta* of the second *jhāna*), we really want, eventually, to experience that whole range of *sukha*, really the whole range. So it can get very, very sort of ecstatically happy, bubbly, laughing, etc., on one extreme, and on the other extreme, it can get very, very serene – it's nowhere near laughter; there aren't many bubbles in it, etc. – and everything in between. And as I said, maybe even with love, without love – that's a bit secondary. But we want to really know that whole range, that whole territory. That's what I said about getting familiar with a *jhāna*, when we take the time to marinate and master it. I used to say to people it's like knowing the library at Gaia House. I'd use that example because I spent so many hours in there doing interviews. But it's like you can put your head in the room and say, "Yeah, it's a library. It's got books in it," and then close the door, or you can really know every square inch. It's a big room, and it's got lots of complexity, and there's this little bit on the carpet here, and there's this little angle where the windows meet the wall, and there's this bit of the bookcase there that's chipped or whatever. You can really, really *know* a place, a territory, or not.

So we want to know the whole range. We want to be comfortable, actually. This is more what I wanted to say. We want to be *comfortable* with that whole range and *enjoy* that whole range, all of it. So we need to get to a place where the whole range is really comfortable for us, and enjoyable, and we know and feel its value, of the whole range. Every place on that range, we want to feel like, "I love this. I love this." It's like asking a musician, or a chef, or someone who's really into something, "What's your favourite food?", or "What's your favourite piece of music?" Someone who's really into something is not going to give you one answer. They're going to be, "I ca-, I can't!" They're going to give you, like, "Okay, I can narrow it down to ten" or something. It's the same thing with the bandwidth, the bandwidths of happiness. It's like, "I love that, but I also love this. I love the bubbly, but I also love the really serene one, and the bit in the middle is pretty nice too." So we really want to be comfortable with the whole range, enjoy the whole range, know and feel its value.

This is part of letting it do its work on the being – on the heart, on the soul, and also on the body. Marinating with this sense of loving and enjoying and opening, etc., it *does* work. It does work on the being. It does work on the heart. So what's, of course, common for probably any human being is that certain emotions are more frequently gravitated to, or of the whole emotional spectrum that a human being can have, there are certain ones that a certain personality tends to gravitate towards *this* kind of thing, and tends, maybe, relatively speaking, to avoid more of the other ones. So some people, very common, gravitate towards a subtle kind of – well, whatever it is; it could be anything. But oftentimes, for example, one might find they're avoiding the really bubbly happiness.

We're now talking about psychology and energetic make-up – what's my propensity, my habit of my psychology? And part of the power of *jhāna* practice, again, is to open all that up, and really have the whole thing available to us. If you ask me what does it mean to be a free human being, part of it, to me, means having the whole range – having the whole range, the whole playground, the whole

delicious range, including the really difficult. I *can* experience really hard grief, and grieve with the world, and I can experience this incredibly bubbly, giggling laughter-like thing, and there's no either/or. There's an either/or *in the same moment*, but one is free, and one's not scared of any of that, or holding back. One's letting all that range work on the heart, work on the soul, work on the being. It ends up being wide, having that range and that freedom. So that was one thing.

[inaudible question in background] Yeah, so the question is, "Is that also true with *pīti*?" Ah, that's a good question. I don't know. I think, as a teacher, I would be less insistent about that with the *pīti* than with the happiness, because I'm not sure if, you know, experiencing, let's say, the really intense ... Let's turn it around: what I *am* sure about is experiencing subtle *pīti*, going a little back to Nic's question, that that's important for everyone, that one needs to be able to even notice it, and tune to it, and be able to enjoy it. Why? Because I don't want to be always having really super strong, and then not be able to notice something that's more subtle, not be able to tune to it, and kind of turn my nose up at it, because that's that same kind of negative "it's not good enough" thing.

So the subtle end of *pīti*, I would say everyone needs. With the stronger end, I'm just not sure, Lauren. I don't know what the answer is. I feel *less* inclined to insist on that. I don't know. I think it's a personal thing. This is just my opinion now. If I step back from that particular question, and again, I think about human freedom, etc., and what it means to be liberated, I do feel (and I think I've said it in here on this retreat, just very briefly) that sometimes certain people may be holding their energy in or holding it back habitually, so that they're kind of a little bit not allowing things to build up, and oftentimes they don't even know that. It's just so familiar as a kind of psychological energetics – I'm not just talking about in meditation; I'm talking about in the whole life – so that for them to really open and surrender, or really even to have a lot of energy, it's like it's just a territory that they don't go towards, or they don't allow [it to] happen. They don't know that they're not allowing it by this subtle holding. It's very, very subtle, how that can get blocked.

And sometimes, for some people – and again, I mentioned someone – she was convinced that what she needs is to focus more; my opinion is actually what she needs is to learn to let energy build and to open it more. Does that mean that she needs the super-intense *pīti*? I don't know. But it seems to me, psychologically, knowing her over some years, that that's actually something. But I would feel a bit tentative about saying that about the *pīti* in general, like for everyone, or in terms of the *pīti*. Does this make sense? So for me, with the intense end of the *pīti*, I think it would be more an individual question, for me as a teacher, and together we would kind of sense. You know, for these kinds of things, it's also a matter of, like, is it the right time to even bring this up with a student? Or at the moment, is it like, "Well, there's nothing they're going to be able to do with it, anyway, and it's probably only going to bring self-judgment?" There are all kinds of factors involved, and also what *they* want, because at the end of the day, it's what *they* want, and it's also their vision of awakening, you know?

So if a view and vision of awakening is of a sort of, "Actually, what awakened people look like and what they act like is very, very even and equanimous, and they don't show big eruptions of emotion, and they don't experience those. They're sort of more mature," if one has that whole view – and again, it can be semi-conscious; it can be a teaching that's verbally delivered, or just one has "I've just seen that over and over," whoever the 'I' is, "in the Buddhist world, with people who are supposed to be respected, so I assume that's how a seasoned practitioner comports themselves, and that's their range,"

etc. So if a person is actually – *that's* their view of awakening, and “That’s what I want. I want to be like that,” it’s up to them. It’s their life, and their emotions, and their body. It’s not up to me, unless they really say to me (which is *very* rare for a student to say to me), “Tell me everything you think,” or “What do *you* want?” I’ve only had one person who said that to me, I think. It was Robert. It’s very, very rare. [To Robert] Which I hope you still don’t regret. [laughter]

So as a teacher, you have to respect people’s choices and their views, you know? In talks – this is a way longer answer than you wanted, but in Dharma talks, I *do* find myself kind of shaking up those whole views, like, “Is that what awakening is? Are you unconsciously thinking of it like this?” But one-to-one, as a teacher, I tend to be very unpushy, and very much like, “What does this person want? What’s the right timing? What are they asking for?” A talk, to me, is a different thing, especially, as I said, when it goes out on the internet. I feel like I have a different responsibility when something’s being recorded. *You’re* asking the question now, but I’m answering it to, as I said – I’m answering *you*, but I’m answering people I don’t know. So does that make sense, or have I just complicated and sort of made a bomb somewhere? [laughter]

So I think it’s really important. I don’t actually know the answer, or I feel unsure with regard to the *pīti*. But with the happiness, yeah, I think I would a little bit more insist on that, in *this* way of teaching the *jhānas*. Again, if I think of the *jhānas* as just all I’m doing is getting more and more concentrated, more and more able to hold my mind, then none of this matters, you know? It’s just a matter of, like, “Okay, as you do that, you’ll notice that you go through these different stages, but basically what’s most important is are you thinking, are you not thinking, and how steadily can you hold your mind on an object?” But to me, that’s not – again, we’re back to large framework, and the implications that has for what I’m doing. Is that okay? Yeah? Okay. Thank you for asking though.

Okay, so second thing I wanted to say was, back to the effort thing, as we do all this, the effort question never goes away. It only gets more subtle, if anything. But we should never be totally abandoning it, and we need to be willing to overshoot – both overshoot the effort at times, and undershoot, overshoot and undershoot the mark of Right Effort at any moment. I need to be willing to do that, and taste that, and recognize what it feels like: “Oh, when I *really* overshoot, I get a headache in between my eyes, and I ...” whatever it is, “and when I undershoot, I fall asleep.” Those are really extreme, but even with the subtle overshooting and undershooting, I really need to get a sense, recognize, “Oh, that’s what that feels like,” and to do that, I have to be willing. I have to be willing to actually, “Let’s try a bit more,” or “Let’s try a bit less,” whatever my habit is. So we’re back to this question of inertia. Remember we were talking about inertia in the first couple of days? Do I have inertia with effort levels? And the opposite of inertia is what? Fluidity, malleability, ease of movement. Am I willing to just slide that effort up and down and play with it? “Oh, yeah, too much. Oh, yeah, not enough,” whatever, in this moment.

So inertia creeps in certainly to our meditation practice, certainly to our *jhāna* practice, and actually to our lives in all kinds of ways. One ongoing inquiry is, “Where is there inertia? Where might there be inertia for me?” But that’s part of developing the skill and the art with effort levels. And then, as we said, we’re playing with the intensity of the effort, up and down, the intensity, delicacy, all that. Remember – intensity of *probing*, but also intensity of *opening*. We don’t tend to think of opening or abandoning and surrendering as being something that one can do intensely, or maybe *radically* is a

better word. So we really want to get the feel for, again, the whole spectrum on those dimmer switches of intensity, and get the feel for being able to play with – they’re up to *us*; it’s deliberate. We can change that fader switch.

So that was the second thing. The third thing occurred to me. Here’s a question. And again, it’s one of these things that may not apply now, but it may apply now. But the next time that you feel ...

I just want to qualify the thing I said about Robert. [laughs] Many times, people have asked me, in a certain moment, or with regard to a certain issue or a certain thing they’re working on, but my memory is you just said that more universally. But many times people will say, “Well, I’m working with this image. What do *you* see, or what do *you* think is helpful?” Okay. [laughter] Is it teatime? [laughter] No.

So the third thing. This may or may not be relevant now. It doesn’t matter. But it’s something you can play with, a little game that I think might be really, really fruitful, as a kind of mental exercise or a kind of thought experiment or something. Okay, so it’s got a few parts to it. The first part of this game is you entertain the idea that whatever your mind is kind of snagged on, if your mind is snagged on something at a certain time, if it’s circling around something, some issue, or snagged on some issue, or if it feels like it’s being held back by something – either a little bit, like really subtly, or quite a lot – or dragged somewhere by something, little or in a large way, in a kind of less strong way, what if you entertain the idea that actually *that* issue, and its effect on you, has as its real root, its real origin, a hindrance? It’s not about what I think it is. It’s just a game! [woman laughs, then Rob laughs] She knows me too well. [laughter] I actually entertain a concept first, this concept that actually hindrances are more originary, they’re the origins of things that we then later don’t recognize as hindrances. They’re like seedlings that sprout, and then we have a tree, and we see a tree, and we don’t recognize the seed.

So this is related to what I said: if we’re not careful, hindrances become *papañca*. We said *papañca* is the opposite of *samādhi*, like completely, right? Did we all agree on that? Yeah? It’s completely the opposite of *samādhi*. I’m circling around an issue or whatever. Sometimes it can be a very noble issue or whatever, so I’m not insisting every time we’re thinking about something, or every time we’re upset – we’re just playing a game here, like a thought game. No matter how noble the issue, how important it seems, how important to my soul, etc., I just play with that view: maybe the true origin of this thing is a hindrance. And what has happened is that hindrance has not been recognized as a hindrance, and it’s been allowed to grow up and become a poisonous *papañca* tree, because without a lot of care and practice, that’s what happens with hindrances. That’s what they do. It’s part of why I said we get to a place where we don’t believe the hindrances. They can seem so convincing. Even being really upset about this or that political issue, sometimes what’s happening there is aversion. A part of us obviously really cares about this, and sometimes it’s just our aversion is hooking into this particular issue. It can all sound “yeah, yeah, yeah,” but there’s actually a mixed – at times mixed, at times it’s more one or more the other, sometimes.

So we want to encourage the quietening of *papañca*, because *papañca* is the opposite, and the *papañca* prevents *samādhi*. Where there’s *papañca*, there’s no *samādhi*. Where there’s *samādhi*, there’s no *papañca*. They cannot coexist. What we’re doing here is, if we play this little game, we’re kind of tracing back the *papañca*, through the aid of entertaining a certain conceptual possibility, that it *might* have a hindrance as its root, and tracing it back to its hindrance. Then we can work on it *as* a hindrance.

So it may not feel relevant at all now, but it might actually turn out to be really, really helpful as an exercise.

One of the teachers I studied *jhāna* practice with, that was their main teaching on *jhāna* practice: this is really the point of *jhāna* and *samādhi*. Obviously I've talked about it, but I want to kind of emphasize it more now. I don't agree, or it doesn't appeal to me that that would be the main thing, but it's hugely powerful, and there are teachers out there, and you may well encounter them, that this is the main thing that we're doing, so this is the main thing that we want to watch out for – *papañca*, relating that to hindrances, dealing with the hindrances allows the *samādhi*. That's actually the most important thing. (This is *that* person's teaching.) I actually feel it was valuable – it's a very valuable teaching.

So just a game. Just very light. Play with it. You're not signing up to "I believe this idea forever about all emotions, and I can never change my mind" or anything like that. You're just entertaining a certain concept and seeing what happens for five minutes or whatever it is. Kirsten, was that your question? Yeah.

Q6: importance of accurately identifying a particular hindrance

Yogi: I'll keep it very short. I started to do this a little bit, and then sometimes I'm not clear what the hindrance is exactly. It might be a mixture, and then I might get lost a little bit in *this*, so then I might go to restlessness. I just want to know how accurate it is, or how important an accuracy of the hindrance is then, to define the hindrance.

Rob: Thank you. That's really important. I just jotted that very briefly before coming in. What we often get is multiple hindrance attacks, so yeah, it can be – in fact, maybe *usually* hindrances come in gangs, you know? So it's probably more than one, and that's fine. Maybe you can split them or whatever, or maybe even just thinking of that – just see what helps.

Yogi: Sometimes just a notion it's a hindrance, or hindrances, already takes ...

Rob: That's what I mean. Sometimes the precision of the identification is not important. It's just, as I said, playing with a certain framework can actually reframe: "Oh, maybe this is a hindrance, and I don't even know what the hindrance is." It doesn't matter. Just *that* can be enough. Other times, it might be, "No, I need to get clearer what the hindrance is." But I think the power is more in the general conception here, rather than the identifying – or rather, that has a lot of power. You'll have to see in each instance, yeah, but I don't think in every instance it's necessary to identify it, and many times, many instances, there will be multiple hindrances going on, and two ganging up, whatever. Yeah?

Q7: figuring out what helps when working with emotions

Yogi: I've been playing, I think, this game a bit with the whole retreat, and it's been really helpful, until yesterday when I fell down a hindrance cliff, and then I just, when I was in it, got so angry at the question. Ultimately I think it was a self-doubt hindrance cliff that I fell down, but I had to really take

some time before I could play the game without it sort of working myself up even more. So I'm wondering around timing of the game, or in this context, because I know I've worked with you with emotion in very different ways, and I brought in some of that, which helped, but when do you know? I mean, maybe the answer is you know if it's making it worse. When do you go, "Okay, stop playing that game and do something else?"

Rob: Yeah, thank you. That's really important. A few things there, just to draw out what's really in your question anyway. Again, everything, what I just said is – again, what I said in the opening and whenever – how we're working with emotions on *this* retreat is in a much larger context for me of going towards, opening, working in skilful ways, soulmaking with emotions. And that feels really, really important. So partly, for you, or for anyone, just knowing *that*, as well, putting it in that larger context, it reminds something in the being. So just *that* might be enough, because, let's say, if our soul feels like it's getting squashed into a box, it's going to kick up a fuss, and it *should*, you know? It absolutely should. Does that make sense?

So sometimes it might be enough just to remind myself of what bigger vision I have, you have, with regard to human emotional life. And we're not talking about it much at all on this retreat, and I explained all that, but a different retreat, you know – I have done retreats where the primary thing is working with emotions in certain ways. But it's vast, emotions. If I tell my soul, "It's vast. This is just a game we're playing now," *that* might help in itself. But even then, it might be that it's not the right time. So always the question is: what helps? How much time does it take to recognize this is really not – I don't know, you know? But you get a sense. This is a very common sort of discernment that one needs to make around emotions in *any* kind of Dharma practice. It's like I choose a certain way of working with it, and then, after a while, I have to ask myself, "Is this really helping? Or is this not helping?" I don't know how long that while is, but certainly some minutes. But after a while, if it's not [helping], then I have to come out and do something else. If it's just a matter of cooling off, it might then be that the hindrance has just abated, or it might be that in the cooling-off period I've somehow, even sub-consciously, remembered the bigger picture of emotions.

I think the point more, kind of what I want to convey, is are we willing – again, do we have the freedom – to view emotions that way sometimes? Do I have a freedom of a range of view? And I'm not afraid. Because some people get very afraid of certain emotions, and some people get very afraid of letting certain emotions go quiet. Do I have no fear on either side? Do I have freedom and skill on either side? That's kind of where we want to get to eventually. And then, also, a wisdom – just knowing that sometimes an emotion can actually be a hindrance, or it's most helpfully viewed that way in origin, and that's how we need to relate to it.

So the thing I wanted to communicate is sometimes we're so *in* what we're *in* at any time that it just doesn't occur to us to think that this could be a hindrance, and we're so used to looking at emotions another way. So it's more a big-view thing. And then there might be, as I said, periods of time, or periods of practice, where you're much more leaning into a certain relationship with things, like emotions, and then other periods where we're [in a] much different relationship. But if I think back, you know, to long retreat times – this isn't even for *negative* emotions; it's beautiful emotions – I remember two instances at Gaia House. One was a short-lived thing, and the other was a more general

realization. The more short-lived thing was – I can’t even put it in a context, but it was probably that I was doing *samādhi* practice for a stretch, and I just either remembered by heart a Mary Oliver poem about an owl ... I can’t remember the context, but I went for a walk, and I was reciting that to myself, and was really touched, deeply touched by the beauty of it, and had kind of realized, “My soul needs that.” My soul needs, in that moment, that particular poem, but also not *just* – it’s weird – not *just pīti* and *sukha*. It’s strange. We have this banquet here that we’re talking about, but actually, I think the soul is richer than that, you know? So that’s one thing.

It was also, I remember, near the beginning of retreat, so there was still a question for me, like, “Okay, was that restlessness, just settling into this retreat?” I don’t know. Maybe it was. Maybe it wasn’t. But I can also see that more generally, it’s like, if you asked me, “Would you only ever want to experience *pīti*, *sukha*, peacefulness, stillness, and all the eight *jhānas*, and that was your whole emotional range?”, I would say no. I wouldn’t like that. I would like the whole range, please, thank you very much – including, like I said, including the grief, including even anger and all that. This is more a soulmaking thing.

So that was more a moment. It all settled down, but I was still left afterwards wondering, “Hmm, I wonder if that was just not quite settled yet on the retreat?” It was, like, day four of a long retreat or something – I can’t remember. But anyway, that was a question. The other thing – and I haven’t mentioned this yet – is that, for me, I can’t remember exactly, but I was exploring, again, for a long time, really marinating and making my intention very clear on – I can’t remember how many *jhānas*, but let’s say the first four, like that was my territory. I was on a long retreat, and at a certain point I realized, wonderful as they are, *I’m* actually missing something more mystical. So they’re lovely experiences. And we’ll talk tomorrow about the third *jhāna*, hopefully. There is definitely the beginnings of a mystical sense, a sense of sacredness. But you can also very much practise those *jhānas* and not really have much sense at all of a mystical sense, and they’re not, I would say, again, primary. For me, my tendency, my yearning is very much towards the mystical. But they’re not really that primary in them. And I know lots of people that practised those first four *jhānas* without any mystical sense. Again, it’s related to the whole big conceptual framework: what are we doing here? What’s important, etc.?

But I realized, for me, I feel something missing here. Again, it was in the context of a long solo retreat, and I knew that I had to keep my intention steady. We’re back to that question about keeping [the intention steady]. I think recognizing it was very helpful. I didn’t then change what practices were ... I can’t remember what I did. Whatever I did worked, but it wasn’t a kind of radical shift or change of direction. It was maybe just including something at the sides a bit more, or something like that. Again, that’s probably a much longer answer than you wanted, but does that make sense, what I just said? Yeah?

Okay, Marco. This *has* to be the last one. Please. [laughs]

Yogi: [inaudible] ... thumbs up.

Rob: Oh, thumbs up? Good, okay. [laughter]

Yogi: Rob, was a part of you recognizing that retreat in the context of the rest of your life of practice? It helped you drop in ...

Rob: Drop in to?

Yogi: Drop in to focusing on [inaudible].

Rob: Maybe, yeah. Maybe it was recognizing that, you know, I only missed the mystical because I *knew* the mystical. Maybe were it something that I had never experienced outside ... Let's say I was a soul that wanted the mystical, but hadn't experienced the mystical, and then there were the four *jhānas*: "Well, these are great." Maybe I would have a vague sense of "I'm missing something. As wonderful as this is, absolutely wonderful as this is, I'm still missing something." Maybe I would have had that sense, but not quite known what it was I was missing. I don't know. But back then, I'd had quite a lot of different ... all kinds of things, and I think a part of me, yeah, in the context, was ... But recognizing, "Yeah, I can go back to that. I'm not signing up to this forever: 'I will stay in the four *jhānas* as long as I can, and do nothing else.'" I never signed up to that. So maybe, yeah, that larger context, and a larger sense of possibility was helped, maybe. Yeah. I probably did.

Okay, we need to end, so let's have a bit of quiet together, please.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everybody, and time for tea.

The Third Jhāna

Okey-doke. So today I want to talk about the third *jhāna*. And remember what we were saying: the pacing of the teachings will almost certainly not be the pacing of your practice. And if it is, we actually don't want that. You might cross over – your optimal pacing of practice for this retreat may intersect the trajectory of the pacing of the teachings at one point, but it shouldn't more than that, because you're going at your optimum pace for marination, for mastery.

Okay, so the third *jhāna*. What does the Buddha say about the third *jhāna*? If you get a hold of the texts of the Pali Canon (it's about a shelf-load full of volumes), I don't know if anyone's counted how many times he talks about *jhāna* in there, but it's a lot. It's really, really a lot – so much so that they barely print it again. They just say "as before, as before, as before." Just to give you a sense – it suggests, maybe, how much priority he put on the *jhānas* in his way of teaching. That doesn't mean everyone needs to learn the *jhānas*. I mean, some people think that. One of my teachers said, "If there's no *jhāna*, there's no liberation." I'm not sure I agree. I would tend *not* to agree. But it does seem, looking at the Buddha, there are, I think, two suttas where he really talks about mindfulness. So, in I don't know how many suttas in the whole Pali Canon – does anyone know? Roughly? A thousand? I'm not sure. So two of those thousand (let's say it's a thousand) are about mindfulness, one of which you'll be very familiar with, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.¹ And then there's a lot, a lot, a lot of suttas on *jhāna* practice. We've kind of inherited a sense of a norm that probably doesn't actually, historically, reflect the kinds of practice that certainly the monastics were doing.

Anyway, so here he is speaking about the *jhānas* again, speaking to a group of monks. And so he's just gone through the first and second *jhāna*, and then he says:

And furthermore, with the fading of *pīti* [with the fading of rapture], he [the monk practising] remains in equanimity, mindful and alert, and physically sensitive to *sukha*. He enters and remains in the third *jhāna*, and of him, the noble ones [the enlightened ones] declare: "Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding." And the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the *sukha* divested of *pīti* [with the *pīti* removed, filtered out, gone from it, with happiness divested of *pīti*], so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with *sukha* divested of *pīti*.²

And then, a really (to me) very gorgeous, appealing simile:

Just as in a pond of blue, white, and red lotuses, there may be some of the blue, white, or red lotuses which, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips. And nothing of those blue, white, or red lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water. Even so, the monk [or just so, the monk] permeates this very body with the *sukha* divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with *sukha* divested of rapture.

Okay, so when we come to talk about *jhāna* factors, I couldn't find the sutta. It's possible that there are times where the Buddha actually says the first *jhāna* has five factors, the second *jhāna* has three factors, the third *jhāna* has two factors, etc. But I couldn't find it.³ Most people agree that the third *jhāna* has only two *jhāna* factors: *sukha* and *ekaggatā*.⁴ But this text I've just read from the Buddha says all this other business, right? So it says, "With the fading of *pīti*, he remains in equanimity, mindful and alert." 'Mindful' is *sati*. 'Equanimity,' *upekkhā* in Pali – you probably know those words. The 'alert' – the actual word is *sampajāna*, which some people translate as 'clearly comprehending.' It goes a lot with the sort of mindfulness language, and it's very prevalent in the mindfulness sutta. So you've got these other elements or aspects that clearly the Buddha's pointing to, but they don't qualify as *jhāna* factors.

I think, once you practise third *jhāna* (we'll see something similar in the fourth *jhāna*), there's something a little bit misleading about the Buddha's description. So it's not at all the case that there *isn't* mindfulness and alertness and equanimity in the third *jhāna*; there absolutely is. But the primary *nimitta* is *sukha* without *pīti*, or is actually *sukha*, pure *sukha*, if you like. Now, pure *sukha*, *sukha* without *pīti*, is actually quite a rare thing for a human being. Mostly, even in non-*jhānic* states, we experience happiness with a bit of [*pīti*] – certainly when we're laughing or giggling or whatever, it's got that kind of upwell to it. It's got, let's say, proto-*jhānic* factors of *pīti* and *sukha* in it. It's quite rare to have happiness without *pīti*. I use the word, and I think what's more accurate, speaking from an experiential point of view, is that the primary *nimitta* of the third *jhāna* is peacefulness. And that peacefulness is almost unbelievably lovely. It is warm. It's tender. It's very, very refined.

If you're in any doubt – “Have I reached the next *jhāna*?” – wherever you've been, one way of knowing is: is it more refined than the *jhāna* that you've come from? You may have moved from something where the dominant element in the *citta* is happiness, to a state where the dominant element in the *citta* is something like peacefulness. But if that peacefulness is not a total quantum leap in refinement, then it's unlikely that you've moved from the second to the third *jhāna*. That's one thing to look for. And remember what I said: actually, what's happening, the whole spectrum of the *jhānas*, is there's this increasing refinement as we develop through the *jhānas*. That's, in a way – well, let's just say, *one* of the key elements. [8:56]

So there's something very lovely. There's a warmth. There's a real tenderness. It's got heart qualities in it, in a very soft, undramatic way – well, it might be dramatic when you first enter it, in terms of, it *really* is breathtaking. But the way those qualities pervade the space is not dramatic, in terms of the heart qualities. There's an increase in refinement. It's a very refined state. Really, I would say, it's very beautiful. There's something, again, almost breathtakingly beautiful about it. It feels very healing. There's something about that space, and bathing oneself, and dissolving body and heart and mind in that space, that just feels naturally, organically healing, again, in a very sort of undramatic, quiet, but very powerful way, in terms of healing the heart, etc. There's love in it. There's *mettā* in it – let's say that. There's *mettā* in it organically; you don't have to *make* that happen. And all these qualities are just part of the radiant glow of that space, of that *jhānic* territory. So yes, there's mindfulness; yes, there's alertness; and yes, there's equanimity. But we would expect mindfulness and alertness in any *jhāna*. Here they may be upgraded quite a bit to what most people – unless you've really gotten into a momentum on a mindfulness retreat. And really, there's quite a lot of mindfulness and alertness.

And yes, there's equanimity. But let's come back to that one at the end, because most people who haven't experienced, let's say, the third and fourth *jhāna* – what one will understand by the word ‘equanimity,’ based either on one's daily life or on meditation practice, insight meditation practices, we're really talking about a different level here, a different flavour. That's why I said it can be a little misleading if we focus on the other words right now. There *is* equanimity; I'll come back to that.

So in my experience, and part of the way I teach this, that's the third *jhāna*, all that loveliness. I would actually break it down into three levels, so that the third *jhāna* itself has three levels. And I did read a text somewhere (I think it was in the *Visuddhimagga*) a passage saying different *jhānas* break into three levels or two levels or something. But I don't recall it actually describing what those levels are. I don't know whether this division that I'm making now based on experience and teaching experience, whether that corresponds to the *Visuddhimagga* – I don't personally really mind either way. I just find this very helpful, and a lot of other people do. So there are three levels:

(1) The first level (following the Buddha's lovely simile of this gorgeous cool pond in a hot climate), near the ‘top,’ as we say, because there's a descent through the *jhānas*; one feels them that way. **The first level is** characterized, actually – if I had to put an English word to it, it would be like ‘**contentment**’ or ‘**satisfaction**,’ or perhaps something like ‘**fulfilment**,’ but that's a more complicated word, I think. So something like ‘contentment’ and ‘satisfaction.’ But again, the kind, the level of contentment, the fullness, the degree of contentment and satisfaction at the beginning of the third *jhāna* is unlikely to be something that we've experienced in daily life. It's really of a different

order there.

(2) **The second level**, the middle level, **is the peacefulness** comes to dominate. But in a way, it feels like *my* peacefulness. I'm peaceful. This space here is peaceful. It's not that I'm thinking, "Oh, mine, mine," and I'm hanging on to it in any way.

(3) It's just, one partly sees that only in contrast when one's gone to the deeper level, **the third level**, which kind of feels more like **a realm of peacefulness**. One's in a realm. One's in a vast space, or one has a sense (that's a better way to put it) of **a space of peacefulness, a vast space pervaded by peacefulness, a world of peacefulness**. So at this point, it really is (and I'll come back to this) like, "I've entered a different world here," as opposed to first *jhāna*, second *jhāna* – something extraordinary is happening in my body, in my *citta*, in my consciousness, in my energy body. Here, at times it can feel like I've really entered a different world.

So those are the three levels that I would demarcate and encourage people to find. But the order in which they'll be revealed to you may not be one, two, three. In other words, you may find yourself first in the middle one or the third one, or whatever. No rush. In time, they will all become apparent, and we want them to all become familiar. And just as we have mastery with regard to a *jhāna*, I can go there directly or whatever, you can also navigate within a *jhāna*. So if you wanted to, you can go from the fourth *jhāna* to the most superficial level of the third *jhāna*, that contentment, or whatever. You can just jump to wherever. No rush with that. It's part of the mastery. It's part of really knowing them. It will emerge just from everything that we've been doing: sitting with it, walking with it, being in it, but keeping the sensitivity, the antennae tuned, alive, alert, subtly discriminating, noticing, and enjoying. And these things will get revealed.

So how does one access, how does one enter the third *jhāna*?

(1) One way is to **just be in the second *jhāna* with the happiness, but really drink it. Really drink and drink and drink that happiness. Drink and drink and enjoy that drinking**. We have a thirst we don't even recognize, and in a way, we need to slake that thirst. Just drink and drink and enjoy. And at a certain point, one may realize, "Oh, the most prominent emotion has changed. It's actually gone from happiness to this satisfaction, to this contentment." Why? Because I've drunk enough. I've actually satisfied that thirst. And sometimes at first, one may not realize that shift, if it goes to that level. It may, as I said, jump to a deeper level. But one way of moving here from the second to the third *jhāna* is just to really drink that happiness, and really, really enjoy it, and really open to it – all the things we've been saying. I need to really tune to it, really stay with it, and take it in, and bathe in it, and enjoy it or drink it.

(2) A second possibility, though, is that (as we've mentioned a couple of times in here; it's come up in questions) the happiness of the second *jhāna* has a range to it. And at the deep end, it's actually more subtle. Technically speaking, it's got more *pīti* in it, and at the deep end of the second *jhāna*, it's got less *pīti* in it. The *pīti* is drained out. That's why the happiness there is more serene. That corresponds with the Buddha's description. But in a way, there's a way of understanding the second *jhāna* as a kind of transition *jhāna*: *pīti* and *sukha* in the first *jhāna* with a lot of *pīti* dominating, less and less *pīti* all the way through the second *jhāna*, until the *pīti* is drained out, and you're just left with this purified *sukha*. So that's one way of understanding it. There's a kind of spectrum of less and less *pīti*, and correspondingly, there's a spectrum of more and more subtized happiness. So you can either drink

your fill with the happiness, or go with this, **ride the spectrum down into more and more subtlety**. Eventually, like all the other *jhānas*, if we're talking about mastery, you can just summon it. You don't need to go from the second *jhāna*; you don't need to do anything; you just remember the third *jhāna* and call it back by a subtle intention.

If one is going through the letting the happiness get more and more subtle, absolutely, totally crucial that the attention needs to get increasing subtle with it, and that you need to get really into it. Again, if it's like subtle *pīti*, subtle happiness, it doesn't need to be strong for me to totally relish it and totally enjoy it and totally get into it. So if the attention is not fully, maximally subtle, and if I'm not fully, maximally enjoying it, what I will end up with is a state of peacefulness, or what I perhaps will end up with is, either I'll get lost or fall asleep, or a kind of state of peacefulness that is actually slightly dull, slightly insensitive. And the peacefulness will not be so alluring and so magical in that way. But even these words 'dull' and 'insensitive' – again, to most people they mean something quite gross. At *this* level, we're also talking about really subtle dullness, really subtle insensitivity. So compared to our normal state of consciousness, they're not gross, obvious defects. But if I'm taking that second method of going down in terms of the subtlety of the happiness, I absolutely have to really be on my toes with the attention, really subtilizing the attention, really getting into it, really making sure I'm opening, enjoying, penetrating, all the rest of it. So there's a slide, but where that slide takes us to depends very much on how, what the mind is doing and what the relationship with it is.

So what that all implies to me is, the safest best, actually, is the first way: just drink that happiness. Drink it and drink it and drink it and drink it and open to it. Slake your thirst. This kind of – I don't know what we'd call it – a satellite non-*jhānic* state of equanimity or peacefulness, as we've mentioned several times in here, it can be likely that one goes there because of the habitual tracks and momentum of one's previous insight meditation practice. We talked about this, right? If you practise mindfulness, and once that gets going, you're basically practising a kind of 'let go, let go, let go, let go,' and as I'll come back to at the end today, that will take you into some or other state of equanimity. It's a very okay state. Relatively speaking, it's a skilful state. But it's unlikely that it's the third *jhāna*, if that's just, "Oh, I recognize this place from before, a kind of quiet place I've got to sometimes on retreats before," whatever it is, peaceful. It seems to match: "Well, there's peacefulness. There's mindfulness. There's equanimity. There's alertness," etc. But it's unlikely to be that. I mean, it *might* be, but it's unlikely.⁵

So again, what this partly implies to me is, maybe safest to go with the first one: drink, drink, drink, drink the happiness. And see if you can keep it at a certain bandwidth, where it's really, you know, this is *obvious* happiness, and it's something quite strong. It may be possible that that kind of non-*jhānic* equanimity, peacefulness state can get kind of nudged, *manoeuvred* into a *jhānic* state like the third *jhāna*, if you hang out there. So this is the kind of state I remember from my insight retreats, and if I hang out there – but really, the attention has to be really, really alive, really subtle, and really maximizing the enjoyment, really trying to find what's most pleasurable in here – it may be possible for some people that then that sort of more familiar insight state of equanimity, with very careful work/play, becomes the third *jhāna*. But it will likely, it will probably be much more likeable and much clearer – experiences of the third *jhāna* – if they go through the second *jhāna* in either of the ways I was talking about, but more likely that drinking one. So you'll more likely end up in what's definitely *jhāna* territory rather than a sort of relatively skilful, or only a sort of relatively skilful peace or

equanimity.

So like I said, in relation to differentiating this third *jhāna* from those relatively peaceful sort of states that we might know, of equanimity or peace to a certain degree – what we might call sort of ‘satellite states,’ maybe – the third *jhāna*, again, is breathtakingly touching. There’s something that touches the being, impresses on the body, the heart, the soul very, very, profoundly. It’s really very touching. As I said, beautiful, a beauty there – it’s very beautiful, really an extraordinary state. [24:16] And it really does impress on the whole being. So yes, there’s differentiation between states – and remember when I said I’ll contradict myself many times – and sometimes we don’t need to worry so much about “Am I in it? Am I out? Where exactly is the boundary?” Instead, just work and play with this care, which gets very fine now, the work and play. But it’s still SASSIE, still SASSIE at this level. And rather than “Am I in? Am I out?”, just keep playing with the SASSIE, and let your work and play be also quite subtle, and intense, but in this very subtle, very gentle way. So I actually have to learn that about how to work intensely without being too crude and too heavy-handed and too pressured.

I can’t remember – I thought it was in the Pali Canon, something the Buddha said, but it might be in the Visuddhimagga. There’s a simile of a desert traveller, someone who’s been walking for days and days across a desert, going from somewhere to somewhere, and they’re parched with thirst, and they’re weary, and they’re dirty, and sand is everywhere, and staggering along. And then in the distance, they see (or you know, someone tells them) an oasis. And that relief and glee and excitement, even, that they feel – that corresponds to the first *jhāna*. It’s not a mirage; it’s an actual oasis. And the second *jhāna*, in this simile, is they reach the oasis. And they flop down by the side of it on their hands and knees, and they just drink and drink and drink that cool water. And their thirst, which has built up over wandering – the desert is *saṃsāra*, basically⁶ – and their thirst begins to be slaked. They need to drink a lot. They’re pretty dehydrated. They need to drink and drink and drink. And the third *jhāna* – at a certain point, they just decide, “I’m just going to get in.” [laughs] And they just immerse themselves into this beautiful, cool, spring-fed pond, with lotuses there, and they just dunk themselves, and they wash their body, and they submerge themselves, and they drink some more, and all that. And that’s the third *jhāna*.⁷

So like I said, or like I pointed to, the ordinary usage in English of words like ‘happiness’ and ‘peacefulness’ and ‘equanimity’ – it doesn’t really capture the kind of degree, and depth, and beauty, and impact, or the whole other level that we’re talking about here with *jhānic* factors and *jhānic* words, and certainly when you get the third *jhāna*, that’s the case.

Okay, so a little bit about working in the third *jhāna*. As I mentioned, the third level, to me, feels like a sense of a realm, of a much wider, perhaps a vaster space, even. But this is quite important: the focus within that sense of “I’m in a whole other world here,” the primary focus needs to still be the whole body space, the energy body space. So you can still be aware, “I’m really in this other realm,” but the *jhāna* will only stabilize and deepen, and it will only get its maximal fruits, if the primary focus is on the whole body space – actually a bit bigger. So it might be as much as 2 feet in front of you, even, or whatever – that sort of space around the energy body. And you work with the same – you might work with these two modes of attention, the narrow, focused, penetrating, or the wide, open receiving, abandoning, surrendering. Or you might find others: wrapping around, dissolving into, all kinds. But basically, the focus is the energy body, and moving gently in a very unhurried way, playing

with these different modes of attention. That's what's going to consolidate it, allow it to get deeper, etc.

So in the third level, this sense of that realm, that sort of vaster realm is still there, but it's not the primary focus. Yet we can still be touched by it, allow ourselves to have a sense of the appreciation of that lovely space, that larger, lovely space. Appreciate it, be touched by it and its kind of otherworldly sense, and the sense of really visiting another realm, of being admitted into another, more blessed realm, in a way. So if I say the primary focus is with the whole body and the energy body, it doesn't mean that I'm still not aware of this realm, and I can't still feel the beauty of that, and the loveliness of that. And one can kind of invite or imagine bringing in, or just *bring in* that sense of peacefulness from the bigger space, or just allow it in, open the energy body space to it. So in some way or another, all that lovely, lovely peacefulness from that space – you bring it into the energy body if you need to.

Sometimes (and I think this came up; someone asked a question, so it's come up earlier, but I'll say it again), what happens – this should only be the kind of thing that happens, and that you're playing with, *after* you've had quite a lot of experience with the third *jhāna*. Sometimes what happens is, it hasn't quite settled yet. It's not quite consolidated. I'm not quite into it yet, though I've had many experiences before of it. And all I can find, then, is a filament, the barest, subtlest sort of magical thread, very, very faint, very subtle, that has the taste of that peacefulness. And all I can find is one. And maybe it's one place in my body. Now, body might be *body*: say, "Oh, it's in my belly," or whatever. Or remember when I said, when I say 'whole body,' it means the space, right? I said that, defining at the beginning? So again, here, it's not necessarily, I'm not correlating it with any part of my anatomy. It's just somewhere in this space. But it feels like it's connected with my body.

Usually things feel like they start getting lower down. The centre of the attention starts getting lower down. Maybe even the place where initially, in this case, the peacefulness is stronger is lower down the body. That's common, but there are always exceptions. And eventually, obviously, we want the whole space to be filled with that peacefulness. But sometimes what happens, a lot of experience, and this session – it's not quite going so well. But it's fine. I can tell I just need to play a little bit, and all I can find is this one really, really subtle thread. And I start to follow that. I'm tuning to it, and I'm just enjoying that thread and attuning the attention to it, and finding the beauty in it. And just that relationship with that thread, so to speak, that filament of it, starts to allow the whole thing to spread, starts to allow the peacefulness, the fabric of that filament, of that thread to spread throughout the whole space, often by itself. So you know, you can still do the spreading stuff, of course, but often, you'll find it just spreads by itself at this point.

Now, I don't know if I said it in relation to the second *jhāna*, but something similar can happen with the second *jhāna*, if you've had a lot of experience with the second *jhāna*, really clear experience of the second, a lot, in and out, many times. And then sometimes, again, it's sort of, "Oh, today's not quite – kind of got into it or it's there, but it's really not strong. It's kind of in boundary territory, in borderline territory." Again, sometimes it might be a trickle, that I'm drinking from a trickle, just a little trickle from a fountain. But I'm drinking it, and I'm really enjoying it. And again, if I don't get into that, "Oh, it was better yesterday," or whatever, and I'm just really drinking, then that trickle – I follow that trickle, I tune to its qualities, I enjoy it – all the same things – and it can build from there.

[inaudible question from yogi] Well, in a way it's true for the first, because of how we've been talking about the two possibilities of *pīti* arising, that one of them is like the ember, and glowing. So in

a way, it's true. Yeah.

Okay. Sometimes what happens, again, with quite a bit of experience with the third *jhāna* already, one of the things – remember, like I said, when you encounter a new territory, a new *jhānic* territory, or a new level of consciousness, whatever you want to call it, a new state of consciousness, the first few experiences are often like a dam bursting. And it's just like everything is perfect, and “Wow,” and there's no effort involved, or very little effort. After a while, then it's like, “Oh.” Then certain subtle work, subtle play is obviously needed. It's not that one's gone backwards. This is just the natural maturation of things. If one is not noticing subtle work and play, I would say I'm not sure that one is practising what the Buddha would call Right Concentration, because there isn't that degree of sensitive, subtle discernment to actually notice, “Oh, I see. That's different,” or this thing or that thing.

One of the things that one can notice after a while – it can happen *sometimes* – is that it's almost like there's a mental aspect of this lovely peacefulness, this gorgeous peacefulness. And there's, so to speak, a physical aspect of this gorgeous peacefulness – in other words, felt in the energy body. And they can become separated. *Sometimes*, the mental and the physical peacefulness can become separated. We want them integrated. We want the whole thing. The whole, let's say, clearly *jhānic* experience has integrated all these elements. So we want them integrated. It could be that you've practised, really, a fair amount with the third *jhāna*, in and out, and you've really got used to it. And then you start to notice this sometimes; occasionally you start to notice this. It could be, either of those comes first – like I'm experiencing a mental peacefulness that I recognize from the third *jhāna*, but not the bodily. Or the other way around. So it could be either, but they're not integrated. And one is present, one is not – absent.

The breath can really help to integrate them – or I suppose the *mettā*, at that point, but the breath particularly, if you've been doing breath practice especially. There's a way that the mind can follow the breath – not just follow it with attention, but the way the *breath is* tells us how the *mind is*. The way someone's breath is ... you know this at a very gross level. So the mind and breath are quite related. Bringing the breath back in, if you've been working with the breath, can be quite helpful at integrating the mental and the physical.

So that's why this relationship between breath and mind – mostly we're taught *not* to manipulate the breath in meditation, right? You just watch it. But how my breath is at any moment does reflect how my mind is at any moment. So in a way, the mind is shaping the breath. But also, like so many things, if the causality seems to work one way, often it works the other way too. If I shape the breath, I can affect my mind. That's why, when we started with this really longest breath, and with the energy body, and really long breaths, because we often need more energy. And then that's why the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* starts with breathing in long – you know, this turner, whatever that person was doing – and then breathing in short. To me, it's deliberate, because the manipulation of the breath manipulates the mind, which, if you're trying settle the mind, is what you're trying to do anyway. So you actually settle the mind, shape the mind through playing gently, subtly, responsively with the breath. Anyway, breath integrates, or is a bridge, or straddles body and mind. And so at this point, if the mental peacefulness is there, but the bodily peacefulness is not, or vice versa, bringing the breath back in can help. [It's] one of the things that can help integrate that.

But really, with these *rūpa-jhānas*, with these first four *jhānas*, I would say: body, body, body,

body, body. It's maybe more likely for people to feel like they're experiencing a mental peacefulness, and there really isn't the sense of that peacefulness pervading the body, like to that degree. So as I said, there may be a thread or just a place in the energy body. It's just a location in this space of the energy body. It may be very, very subtle, and tuning to that, focusing on it, following it, enjoying it, etc.

Or it may be there's a sense of, "Here's this realm." It may be I've already got a sense of the third level, but it's still not integrated and settled. And I want to kind of immerse the body in that realm, immerse the body in the peacefulness. But I have to get the body involved. So always, you hear in the Buddha's description, in each short paragraph, he says it twice, about the getting the whole body involved: no spot untouched, pervading, suffusing, etc., over and over again: body, body, body, with these form *jhānas*.⁸ So I really have to make sure I work to get the body sense filled like that, and really involved and really pervaded, etc., so I can immerse my body in this space of peacefulness. I can dissolve my body out, so to speak. I dissolve my energy body out into that peacefulness. Or I dissolve the peacefulness into the body – all these things.

But so much has to do with tuning again. It's really, again, what's happening in each *jhāna* is not that we're paying attention to and keeping our mind fixed on one small location in space. We're tuning to a certain frequency, and the frequency that we're tuning to in the third *jhāna* is very, very refined. So it's really about tuning, at this point, tuning to that radio station that has that really otherworldly, transcendently peaceful music. And I just want to learn to tune there, and really that fine-tuning, and then pay attention, attune, and let things amplify from there.

Experientially, the third *jhāna* is – I suppose we could say there's a quantum jump in stillness from the first to the second *jhāna*, and then there's a whole other quantum jump in stillness from the second to the third. So it's a very still state. And sometimes people's initial descriptions when they first enter it, in an interview, they're describing it, and say, "Oh, it was really still." It is very still compared to what most human beings will ever have remotely come near experiencing. Yet there is actually a very subtle, gentle movement in it, or it's possible that there are very, very subtle, gentle movements within it. So if the breath is your base practice, it's almost as if you'd forgotten about the breath, and then it's almost like it can re-emerge at this point, but just really, really faint echoes of the breath. It's like one is almost not sure: "Is that the breath? Or is that me just imagining a very subtle breath?"

In a way, it doesn't matter, but there can be this very gentle breath or very faint echoes of the breath, whatever it is. And they carry this very subtle, gentle movement that's somehow there within the stillness. It doesn't in any way disturb the stillness, this movement. So it's almost like the very gentle movement is somehow integrated into the stillness without disturbing it, it feels. The movement itself, this very gentle *movement*, seems itself to express stillness, which in English is a contradiction in words. But there's something very beautiful about the movement, so it seems to really manifest or express this lovely stillness. The image I have – I think I've shared it with a few of you – one image you might think of for this, and that might even be helpful, a tiny tincture, at certain points: imagine a kind of lagoon or a pond, and under the water – so it's fairly deep water – there are a few long strands of underwater seaweed, or something like that. And they're just – you know how they sway sometimes, really, really gently and slowly? There may be some kind of movement in the experience that's akin to that. And that may be with the breath or something else, but ... I'll just put that out, yeah.

Like I said, if the breath has been your base practice, then it may re-emerge at this point, and be

reincorporated. I've given all my attention to *pīti* and happiness, and now it's almost like, after all that commotion and excitement and bubblyness of all that, the breath starts to, "Oh, I can notice it again, and I can reincorporate it." But it's very subtle, very delicate. And again, the breath *is* peacefulness. It has *become* peacefulness. Just as the body has become peacefulness, the breath has become peacefulness. This movement of the seaweed at that point – I don't know if you can get the sense from the image. It's like the very movement *is* peaceful. It expresses peace, expresses a kind of stillness.

If we think, again, about *jhāna* factors, and think of them as kind of cooking ingredients – cooking or alchemy, dependent on what you prefer as a metaphor. So *jhāna* factors as cooking or alchemy ingredients, and let's think backward from the Buddha's sort of definitions. The first *jhāna* has *pīti* and *sukha*, and *pīti* is the prominent one. The second *jhāna*, as I said, has actually got this range. *Sukha* and *pīti* are both there, but through the range of the second *jhāna*, the *pīti* is getting slowly filtered out. I said that before, but that's a way of understanding what's happening in the second *jhāna*. The third *jhāna* has *sukha* without *pīti*. It's completely filtered out.

But what that also means is that sometimes it's possible – here I am in the third *jhāna*, and if I want to go to the second *jhāna*, I can just take some *pīti* from the shelf, and just pour it in a little bit. And dependent on how much I pour in, stir, I will end up in a different place in the second *jhāna*, right? Does that make sense? So again, to me, this is actually part of the art, part of the possible range of the art involved in this kind of thing. I'm actually titrating *jhāna* factors in ways that can build, and build where I want to go, or open up where I want to go. If I add a little *pīti*, I'm going to end up in the deep end of the second *jhāna*. If I add a lot of *pīti*, I'm going to end up in the shallow end of the second *jhāna*, where things are more bubbly, etc.

I'll repeat this when we talk about the fourth *jhāna*. But similar thing at the fourth *jhāna*: if I'm in the fourth *jhāna* and I add *sukha* – because in the fourth *jhāna*, the *sukha* has gone as well. So third *jhāna*, the *pīti* goes; fourth *jhāna*, the *sukha* goes. We'll come back to this. If I'm in the fourth *jhāna* and I add *sukha*, I will end up in the third *jhāna*. So there's a whole kind of – whatever you call it – alchemy or cooking possibilities, mixing ingredients, etc., that becomes possible.

[48:50] And after a time in the third *jhāna* (you may not notice it quite early on in your openings to the third *jhāna*), if the senses are open in the third *jhāna* – in other words, you're still hearing the birds or whatever it is, or other sounds, or even sounds that we wouldn't usually think of as pleasant, even sounds that we would usually think of as unpleasant – so let's say that the hearing is open. And remember, the Buddha is actually very, very clear in his words that it is not necessary for the senses to close in the first four *jhānas*. So if the senses are open, you're still hearing, which is very normal, then what one notices at a certain point is that all phenomena, all these sounds have (if we're taking sound as an example), they begin to be perceived as if they have one taste. There's something we notice pervading not just the so-called intrapsychic space in the *jhāna*, but also the world outside, so to speak, the world of the senses. So they have this one taste, the sounds. Even an 'ugly' sound, like someone drilling somewhere, or a lawnmower, or whatever it is, begins to have this – everything has this one taste, and the taste is of this beautiful, profound peacefulness. So the taste starts to spread, and basically, a kind of cosmic, deep okayness, like very deep okayness, spreads throughout the cosmos. And everything in the cosmos seems to have that same taste.

So that's an experience one can have, one probably will and should have as part of the ripening of

the third *jhāna*. That's an experience one can have in formal meditation. And then, one gets up out of the meditation, goes to informal practice, goes for a walk, just hangs out, has a cup of tea, and one should begin to notice what I call the 'after-effects' on perception. To me, this is a really, really important concept. It came up – I think Wah asked the other day, and someone else also wrote a report in a note. The after-effects on perception of – in this case we're talking about *jhānas*, but of a particular *jhāna*. I've got up, I'm not practising formally any more; I'm just walking around on the lawn, or gone for a walk or whatever, and I pay attention. If I'm still relatively open, relatively sensitive, relatively present, etc., I will begin to notice. It starts, it probably starts here most clearly – in other words, at the third *jhāna* – and will get more and more obvious, and in a way, more and more significant, and more and more powerful in its effects as we go more and more through the *jhānas*, particularly the formless *jhānas*. But one notices, in the after-effects on perception, that the world, and the nature of things, and the fabric of the cosmos are imbued with that peacefulness, that gorgeous, delicious, almost mystical peacefulness, as if that is the nature of things – peace is the nature of things, peace is the fabric of the cosmos.

This is pointing to what is probably the most significant thing in the Dharma. We have to pick it up though. We have to make the connections, and we have to see it and understand it, and see it many, many times through this kind of experience, through other related kinds of insight experience. But it's pointing to the dependent arising of perception. The world – *how* the world appears to me, the very world that I live in – is dependent on how I look at it. We say everyone's living in the same world. Well, we *are*, but we also *aren't*. Dependent arising – the world is empty of being this way or that way ultimately. Any one thing is empty of being this way or that way ultimately. And one way – and I think one of the most powerful ways, and one of the ways I like to emphasize in teaching – is seeing that, through playing with perception and seeing the effects of *this* way of looking on the perception of self, other, world, time, everything. And then playing with *that* way of looking and seeing the effects on perception of self, other, world, time, phenomena, etc. And then another way of perceiving, another way of perceiving. And actually, one can integrate the whole of the Dharma into that exploration, or even sum up the whole of the Dharma *as* that exploration. It's *the* most significant thing, Dharmically, I would say.

So even something like generosity: we don't tend to think of that as playing with perception. But if you practise generosity and you pay attention, and sometimes you practise a really radical generosity, and see what happens to the perception of self, of other, of world – the whole of the Dharma, all the qualities that the Buddha's pointing to can be seen to be integrated into a certain movement of exploration, which is this exploration of dependent arising through playing with perception. The appearance of the world, the whole world, depends on how I'm looking at any moment.

So we could also say that's a teaching about karma. Where am I reborn? Do you understand that? Do you understand how that makes sense? So another way of saying all this is a teaching on karma. Let's take two things. If I practise – let's take two pairs: kindness or unkindness, and generosity or stinginess. And I practise those things. I practise stinginess to different degrees, and I notice the effect on how my self feels – not that I'm *judging* myself, so much, but just: how does my self feel? How does my energy body feel? How does my self feel more solid, more contracted? How does the world feel? Do I feel connected with the world? Or does the world feel somehow separate? Do I feel a kind of

oneness, or do I feel a separation? All these things.

Same thing with kindness. I practise unkindness or kindness, or I practise generosity. Basically, what you'll realize, what you'll *come* to realize if you pay careful attention to these things, really go for it as a practice, is that the world I actually perceive that I live in can either be – you know, if I practise a lot of unkindness and a lot of stinginess, I will perceive the world as a hostile place, more and more – a cold, barren, hostile place. I have to keep looking over my shoulder. There won't be a sense that the world is a lovely place full of love and warmth, and actually, somehow we're all one despite the appearances of separateness. The energy body will feel brittle, and hard, and separate, and cold, and all the rest of it.

These are just everyday examples outside of meditation. What happens in meditation is, you're taking some of those kinds of things and just cranking them up to a whole other level of power, where the effects on perception of self, other, world, and all that just become way more powerfully obvious. So as I said, one way of understanding it: what actually holds everything in the Dharma together is *that* – that exploration. We will return to this, just because it's so important. And as I said, it's even more important when we get to the formless *jhānas*. But shifts in perception with different ways of looking, what we call the dependent arising of perception, the dependent arising of the world, the dependent arising of the self – I need to see that loads of times, and let it really impress on the *citta*. It's through repetition, but also, again, through extending the degree of range of ways of looking – how many, and also how powerful they are.

So yeah, we can think of that also as a teaching about karma. I practise this, I do this, or I think this repeatedly, or I view the world repeatedly, and I will end up being *reborn* – I don't mean a thousand years from now; I mean *now*, and ten minutes from now, whatever – I will end up being reborn in a world that's coloured a certain way. And if I practise kindness, generosity, and all the other lovely, really good stuff, I'm reborn in a world. And we say, "Well, it's the same world," but actually it's very, very different. I'll talk about it again. We need to see that so many times, and see it over so many different kinds of ways of looking, and really make the connection. I have to *put* this whole idea, I have to, in a way, load it in as a cartridge, as the whole way I'm seeing practice, and then follow through with it, and then see what it does. If I don't do that, it won't impress so deeply. And I have to do that many, many times through a range of different, variously powerful practice, and a range of *kinds* of practice – *until we get it*, and the heart, the *citta* gets something really deeply, and it's profoundly liberating, and there's a mystical beauty and wonder that comes from that, from the kind of insight that comes from that. It's, I would say, an insight of a whole other level.

[59:42] Going back to something I said before, there are three things we can extract out here, and then relate them to insight.

(1) Experientially, I can have – one can have – in the third *jhāna* this sense of 'one taste.'

Either in the meditation, or outside, everything has this one taste. And so, there is actually less duality once one opens repeatedly to that experience. There's less duality between the *jhāna* and a not-*jhāna*, or meditation and the rest of the world, or even the *jhānic* realm and the rest of the world. One sees that actually, that's the nature of the whole world. So there's less duality between a place I need to get to and the rest of the world, because all of it has this one taste of peacefulness. So that's a certain opening and perception that we can have that's very fruitful. **We could call it** (let's just stick the label on it for

now) ‘**non-dualistic**,’ between *jhāna* and the world, let’s say – the *jhānic* realm and the worldly realm.

(2) But sometimes, **we can have a much more dualistic sense of the *jhānas***. They are, and there’s a passage (I think it’s in the *Majjhima Nikāya*; there’s certainly more than one passage) where the Buddha describes each *jhāna* as an ‘escape.’ *Nissaraṇa* is the Pali. So they’re realms of escape. This lovely, gorgeous realm of peacefulness is a realm of *escape* from the world. And he’s actually describing, Sāriputta, and meditating (I think it’s Sāriputta), and he says, “Actually, there’s a better escape than the first *jhāna*: the second *jhāna*. That’s a better escape than the first *jhāna*.” Then in the second *jhāna*, after a certain time, you realize: “Oh, there’s a better escape. The third *jhāna* is a better escape from the world than the second *jhāna*,” etc., all the way through.⁹

Nissaraṇa – now, it’s true that word can mean other things. It can mean things like just a sort of ‘result’ or when something ‘issues’ in something else, like a result. Or it can mean a ‘flowing out.’ But also *nis-* is a prefix that means ‘out’ or ‘outside’ or ‘going out.’ And *saraṇa* is word you may know: *saraṇaṃ. Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*.¹⁰ What does that mean? ‘Refuge’ or ‘shelter.’ So a *jhāna* as a refuge outside, outside of the world. And experientially, again, to me there is very much that thrust in the Buddha’s teachings.

Again, in the context of really looking at the Pali Canon, and noticing how much he talks about *jhāna*, how much he talks about not being reborn, etc. (let’s not go there right now), it can also mean ‘leaving behind,’ but there’s a case for, he’s really saying: there’s this escape from the world. And there are other escapes from the world: the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth *jhānas*, etc. You could say, they’re also an escape, then, from the non-peacefulness that characterizes the world. They’re an escape from the non-*sukha* that characterizes the body as it’s usually experienced, and the mind as it’s usually experienced, and the world as it’s usually experienced. It’s quite a dualistic teaching, and it points the way, or paves the way, even – each *jhāna* is a step of or a further escape – it paves the way for the total escape of the arahant, not to be reborn into this world.

So we’ve got this non-dualistic teaching, or this *kind* of non-dualistic teaching: everything’s all one taste – world and meditation. And then we’ve got this kind of dualistic teaching: meditation or *jhāna* as escape from the world. And what I would like to stress is, actually, that we can have both of those as experiences, and they’re both very valid, and we shouldn’t make a duality between duality and non-duality. [laughter] To me, that’s really, really important, because some of the most entrenched, unbudgeable, dualistic-thinking people I’ve met call themselves ‘non-dualists’! [laughter] To me, that’s actually really, really important. So as experiences, both of these are blessings, that we can enter this realm. You know, I’ve been *very* sick and in a lot of pain, and just to be able to go into a realm where there’s none of that, there’s no discomfort – you know, it’s *really* a blessing, really a gift. But one can also have the other view: *everything* becomes that. So they’re just views. They’re just views that we can move between.

(3) What’s the deeper view? What’s deeper than these two views is this third thing that we were talking about: **dependent arising**. Because dependent arising, when I really understand that, it legitimizes, and it opens the door for all kinds of different views. One can view dualistically, and one can view (so-called) non-dualistically. One understands: this or that perception arises *dependent* – it’s empty, and that gives me freedom. There’s no perception of anything that is not empty. Since all perceptions are empty, in a way, there’s not a hierarchy. There’s not an *intrinsic* hierarchy. There’s a

hierarchy dependent on what I might *want* at any time. I might want to reduce suffering, but then, okay, which way of reducing suffering right now helps the best? The hierarchy is not intrinsic. It's not, so to speak, *ontologically* intrinsic. But it might be *practically*, and one might hierarchize *practically*, so to speak. So a realm of escape, in this case, from the usual realm, which is non-peacefulness and non-*sukha*. That's the world, you know? And that's the world as we know it.

How does this peacefulness arise? How does it arise? Peacefulness arises from the quietening, from the attenuating of the push and pull of the *citta* in relationship to phenomena. We push away what we don't like. I prefer *this* thing to *that* thing, so I push that one away and/or pull this one towards me. Or I prefer this one, and I don't want it to go away, so I keep pulling on it, so it won't go away. Now, we all know that happens at an extremely gross level. We literally – “Don't leave me,” and pulling someone, or whatever it is, or literally pushing someone or something away. But the amazing thing is it happens more subtly as well, and more subtly and more subtly, and we can trace that investigation into more and more subtleness. Peacefulness arises from attenuating the degree of push and pull. And the degree of peacefulness will correspond to just how much push and pull we let go of.

Equanimity also, which is a kind of peacefulness (we'll come back to that), arises from lessening the push and pull, in the moment. I'm talking about meditation now; I'm not talking about ways of living – I'm going to leave that. Equanimity also, which is a kind of peacefulness, arises from an attenuation of the mind's habitual, moment-to-moment push and pull with experience.

So practically speaking, the question arises: how do we attenuate? Does everyone know what 'attenuate' means? Reduce. How do we reduce, how do we dampen the push and pull? If dampening the push and pull gives such profound rewards, then I want to know, how do I dampen the push and pull? Well, in a way, drinking from the second *jhāna*, drinking and drinking and drinking, as I described earlier, until satisfaction arises – in a way, that's dampening the push and pull, because satisfaction implies that I don't need to push and pull. If I'm satisfied, I don't need to change what's there. I don't need to pull this thing towards me. I don't need to push this thing away. I don't need to hang on to it. I'm just satisfied.

So drinking the second *jhāna* is (I don't know if this is official) the proximal cause of the third *jhāna*, of the equanimity that the Buddha's talking about in the third *jhāna*, that degree of equanimity. The equanimity that the Buddha's talking about in the third *jhāna* (this is a little side note now) – it's related to that kind of peacefulness, and the sense of being in a realm that's just free of disturbance and kind of undisturbable, or that the one taste has spread everywhere, and then it's just undisturbable. 'Undisturbable' is another word for equanimity. Or 'imperturbable' – the Buddha sometimes uses that word: 'not perturbable.'

(1) But one way that we might attenuate the push and pull is through just drinking and drinking from the second *jhāna*.

(2) Another way, or actually a whole set of ways, is by deliberately practising attenuating the push and pull. And actually, almost any insight way of looking – what I call 'insight ways of looking' – is basically doing that. And if it doesn't do that, it doesn't qualify for the name 'insight way of looking.' So there are loads of them, and some of them, it's very obvious that's what I'm doing. For instance (some of you will know this), if I'm working with what I call the second *dukkha* method, I'm actually feeling into the sense of pushing away or grabbing on or holding on. I'm feeling in, in the

energy body, in the mind, in the subtle awareness, to any sense of contraction, push and pull, and then I'm relaxing it. And then I'm noticing another one and relaxing it, noticing another one, relaxing it. So it's very obvious that in a deliberate and sustained way, that's exactly what we're doing. And if we just keep doing that, a profound, lovely peacefulness will open up, because the push and pull is being attenuated.

But something else, something like practising the view of *anattā*, of seeing phenomena as not-self, or practising the view of seeing phenomena as impermanent (*anicca*), it's not often immediately obvious to people that that's what we're doing, that when we see things as impermanent – moment to moment, arising and passing – effectively what we're doing (as well as, obviously, seeing impermanence) – the result, in the moment, of seeing the impermanence (not ten years later, but in the moment; not even a month later; in the moment), the result should be that because we see everything's flowing so fast, we just let go. We don't even have to think, "Oh, it's impermanent. Therefore I should let go, because I don't want to suffer a sense of loss." It just happens automatically. It's like if you, I don't know, try and (probably a poor analogy coming up) imagine sand just pouring and pouring. There's loads of the sand, and you just are trying to catch it in a net that's completely the wrong size meshing, and it just falls. It just keeps falling through. If you keep trying to catch it in the net, you haven't realized it's just impossible. So I don't have to think about that: "Oh, maybe it's the holes are too big." It's obvious. Similar thing: when we're practising impermanence, effectively what we're doing, and I really mean in the *effect* of what we're doing, is that we are attenuating the push and pull. And the same with *anattā* practice – actually, the same with any of what I would call insight ways of looking. It's a deliberate, moment-to-moment, sustained attenuating of the push and pull with all phenomena, or just a certain set of phenomena that you've pre-circumscribed. So that's the second way.

(3) A third way is also going back to this other element we've already pinpointed: the 'one taste.' If everything has one taste as its most salient characteristic, I don't need [to push and pull] – it's all the same. It's like, I'm not going to choose *this* molecule of water over *that* molecule of water to drink. It's all just water. And so, what's my reason for push and pull? So I'm not talking about living your life that way. That would be utterly, utterly stupid. But actually, some people then get the idea that Buddhists are supposed to sort of have that attitude to everything. Anyway, I'm talking about a meditation practice that one does for a period of time, for the sake of seeing what the results are, because (A) it's opening up a beautiful resource and space, but (B) it's going to tell me something about emptiness and dependent arising, which is the most liberating insight or range or realm of insight that I can have. But if I, in some way or other, practise perceiving things – in the Mahāyāna, they say 'with equality.' There's equality. Everything is the same somehow. Either everything has the taste of love, or it has the taste of this peacefulness. But everything *is* that. Then just that perception – there's no differentiation. There's nothing to hook, [not] any reason to push this away and pull that. So that's another way. That's what one might practise in meditation.

But in a way, most of that – those second and third, the deliberately practising the attenuation of push and pull, and the sort of 'one taste' – in a way, they're sort of more insight practices. Primarily on this retreat, if we talk about how does the push-pull get attenuated so that the peacefulness can arise, it's primarily through the second *jhāna* and the satisfaction that comes there.

Okay, so same deal with the third *jhāna*, with mastery and everything; we've been talking about

that – the different elements of mastery, which you already know, and the issues of pacing, like: when is it the right time for me to play with trying some of that? When is it premature? Am I being too heavy with it? Or can I keep it very light and very much like a game?

Now, we’ve expanded our possibilities for leapfrog and ping-pong. You can jump, let’s say you’ve been in the third *jhāna*, and you can jump to the first, and then the third, and first – that’s ping-pong: first, third, first, third. But it’s also leapfrog. So it’s a leapfrog ping-pong. Do you see? [laughter] Or you know, three, one, three, one, three, *two*, to ... I don’t know. But you get the idea. You start to move in any permutation and combination, just at the end of sittings, for fun. You’re exercising the malleability of ways of looking, and it’s an element of mastery. So including going out of any *jhāna* at all, and you just, “Let’s just go back to a kind of normal consciousness,” and then jump from there to the second or the third, or whatever it is. So these are little games you can have in the last five or ten minutes, if there are the batteries left, if there’s energy left.

Okay, so let’s stop there and have a bit of quiet together.

¹ Of the two suttas about mindfulness that Rob alludes to, the first is the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* at MN 10. As for the second, it’s not clear which sutta Rob had in mind, but possible candidates include DN 22, MN 118, and MN 119.

² E.g. AN 5:28. The simile of the lotuses below can be found in the same sutta.

³ At MN 43, Ven. Sāriputta describes the first *jhāna* as possessing five factors. He does not, however, offer similar descriptions for the remaining *jhānas*. The idea that the second *jhāna* has three factors while the third factor has two factors is not found in the suttas.

⁴ E.g. in Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Oxford, WA: Pariyatti, 1999), 89.

⁵ This statement is clarified in Rob Burbea, “Q & A, and Short Talk” (29 Dec. 2019), <https://dharmafeed.org/teacher/210/talk/60887/>, accessed 24 Feb. 2020: “I said something like, ‘Experiences of deep equanimity or fairly deep equanimity that come from insight meditation are often not actually the third or fourth *jhāna*, where there’s the equanimity kind of coming in such a strong and beautiful way.’ However, experiences like some of you know, the kind of group of practices that I call the ‘vastness of awareness,’ as you get into that, there *is* a real mystical sense of wonder. It *is* very beautiful. There *is* a sense of sacredness there. It *does* really touch you, etc., and it *is* an experience of deep equanimity. However, those kinds of opening, what I call the practices of vastness of awareness, has a range of depths to it. So it’s something that one can open up just a little bit, and may not yet have that kind of almost divinity to it, and sacredness to it, and sense of almost the ultimate.

For example, one level of depth is just all phenomena seem to emerge out of that vastness and disappear back in it. It’s like the womb or the source of everything. And that very seeing, it’s a bit like when we talked about the *nāda* sound, and how can you use it in an insight way – it’s just a backdrop. Everything comes out of that, fades back into it. That level of seeing is very, very fruitful for the equanimity, etc. It begins to have a kind of mystical flavour to the whole thing and divine flavour to the whole thing. As you practise more with the vastness of awareness, and it goes even deeper, there’s a sense where everything has one substance, and that substance *is* awareness; everything *is* awareness. Now we’re really moving into a mystical sense of things, and that *will* have a lot of beauty. So when I

said people who have just done insight, who have just opened to equanimity through insight practice, I didn't really mean *that*, because, if by insight practice you just mean, 'I'm just watching, just watching, just being mindful, just being mindful,' and kind of letting go with that general encouragement to just watch and let go, that won't take you to these deep ends of vastness of awareness. You actually have to kind of direct it, do something more deliberate, and actually change the practice slightly so that it goes there. Someone just reported they got a bit confused by that, so I hope that helps. In other words, we make the vastness of awareness a practice in itself that's slightly different than regular insight practice. We'd have to change a few things in order for it to really go to these really lovely, deeper levels."

⁶ This statement is clarified in Rob Burbea, "Q & A, and Short Talk" (29 Dec. 2019),

<https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/60887/>, accessed 24 Feb. 2020: "In that simile about the wanderer through the desert, and I said the desert represents *saṃsāra* – actually, that can't be right, because that would imply that the *jhānas* are *nirvāṇa* – or maybe; I don't know, because maybe it's an oasis in a desert. Anyway, maybe the desert represents life run by the hindrances; I don't know. Maybe it represents *saṃsāra*, and the oasis is not the end of the desert, it's just a little, and you've still got to go further. Maybe. So either one."

⁷ Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, 142: "If a man exhausted in a desert saw or heard about a pond on the edge of a wood, he would have [*pīti*]; if he went into the wood's shade and used the water, he would have [*sukha*]." Also, the *Dhammasaṅgani* (another Pali commentarial work) contains an expanded version of the simile; for a translation of the relevant passage, see Henepola Gunaratana, "The Abandoning of the Hindrances," in *The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/gunaratana/wheel351.html#ch3.1>, accessed 20 Feb. 2020.

⁸ E.g. AN 5:28.

⁹ E.g. MN 111.

¹⁰ *Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*: "I go to the Buddha for refuge."

12-29 Q & A, and Short Talk

Okey-doke. So I think we'll have some questions today, if there are any. If not, I've got some that people have left in notes, and also just a few little things that I wanted to put out there. Okay, so, please, anybody. Is that Laurence? Yeah.

Q1: transforming emotions, differentiating between sadness and feeling touched; staying steady with the intention for *jhāna* practice

Yogi: So my question is around emotion and *jhāna*. Yeah, so, emotion's going to come up in practice, and in a retreat, and the first day's instruction to put down the difficult, and to tune into the joy and the beauty and the appreciation, there's a certain point where it feels like they're not mutually exclusive. So noticing sadness coming up, and noticing the beauty of the sadness, for example. So in the body, rather than necessarily getting into a story and a self-view around some sadness, actually noticing the warmth in the heart around sadness, and the beauty of it; noticing the sensations of the eyes watering up, and *that* being seen as deeply beautiful; and a couple of times, noticing how actually those sensations can

become *pīti*. It's like, "Oh, this is interesting. This could actually become a springboard into *jhāna*, from the sense of appreciation of the emotional spectrum." And also noticing, actually, that the quieter the mind becomes, and the more the sense of the body and the mind become collected, that when there *are* thoughts around the emotions, that actually there's a much deeper sense of kind of personal insight around what can be revealed from those emotions, and how to work with them in the life, or in the imagination, or on the cushion.

So I want to ask you, in relation to this – and similar things with anger kind of having flavours of less ill-will and *papañca*, and becoming more a sense of power, personal power and conflict resolution – that sense in the body of, "Actually, this could be really quite a skilful place to be in." So I wanted to ask you, specifically in terms of this retreat, what would be your guidance on working with emotions when they come up – whether to hang out with them, listen to them, explore them, cultivate them in a quasi-*jhānic* state, or whether to notice them, steer into the joy, and lessen the fabrication of the emotion.

Rob: Okay. Thank you. Let's see if I get all that. So, yeah: context, context, context. The context of this retreat, and that retreat, or each person's version of this retreat, is in the context of each person's life of practice, larger practice, and each person's life, okay? So if, for example, this thing about anger, actually being able to transform it, kind of filter out the poisonous elements and transform it into something that's just power – not power *over*, but just power: the ability not to shrink, not to go crazy, not to spit poison everywhere, but just to be powerful and upright and do what needs to be done – that's a really skilful thing. It's not the primary objective and intention of this retreat. It may be that, in practising *jhānas*, as you say, there's just more clarity, there's more sensitivity, there's more energy body awareness, because of the way we're practising the *jhānas*, or primarily, because I'm emphasizing a lot about sensitivity and attunement and all that. It could be that the possibility to make those kinds of transformations – I want to ask you about the other one, the other example you gave, but the possibility of making those kinds of transformations is actually increased on this retreat, and a person sees, maybe for the first times, these kinds of possibilities.

So that's great, and it's something to note. And on the course of this retreat, it still takes very much second place, so that when there's a choice, it's go towards the joy, go towards the *pīti*, etc. In the context of one's life, I will always say "both/and." We want everything, and we want to not be afraid of doing *this* because when I'm doing *this* I'm not doing *that*, or doing *that* because then I'm not doing *this* – not be afraid of the territory there, be able to do both, have accessible both, and really just left with, "What would be skilful right now?"

The kind of overriding, determinative factor of *this* retreat is that if we want to do *jhānas*, like I said right from the beginning, the intention has to stay really steady. Otherwise, very easily, it gets into all these other explorations – wonderful as they are, and really important as they are in the larger context, but for a *jhāna* retreat (and this goes for a solitary *jhāna* retreat or whatever it is), the intention needs to stay steady.

I don't think I said "put down the difficult" in the opening, so much as this thing about context, and let it take second place, and what are we trying to do, and can I see the context and see this retreat *in* that larger context, that larger freedom and range of possibility which I want, and recognize, "Okay, but

just for now, I'm going to do this"? So you could, for example, just bookmark those two possibilities that you mentioned – well, they're slightly different. Let's say the second one, the transformation of anger – I'll come back to the first one, because I was a little unclear about it. You could bookmark that, and say, "I'm going to practise that later," you know? I mean, that would be the absolutely strict way of doing it, but, you know, of course you can have a little wiggle room at the sides of things. It's just if that gets too much, the whole kind of current of intention starts to fray. We really have to take care of the intention to cohere it. But it sounds like it would be a really good idea for you to explore that thing with anger and transforming it. It's a really, really good thing to be able to do. Most people are just kind of victims of their own anger when it comes up, don't have the skill to transform it in that kind of way. So to be able to do that is great.

It might be that it feels a little bit easier when you're – you're not actually even on retreat; you're kind of half on retreat, so that's encouraging. Remember, you and I talked about the grey area being important – not off retreat, not on retreat, but this kind of grey area – to be able to kind of be clear, "What am I doing in practice?", to pick up things in practice, to notice things. So this is really encouraging. It's not saying, "I need to be on retreat fully to notice these kinds of things and be able to transform them." It's telling you something about the grey area. Is there really so much duality between being on retreat and not retreat? What I really meant by 'grey area' is get to see it *all* as grey, really. Even on retreat, I'm not *really* on retreat. I'm just living in a sort of hotel in Devon where there's nothing much to do but meditate. [laughter] It can be a much more skilful way of thinking about it, because "retreat," and it's all like, "Oh, my God, retreat. Okay. Get to work," and it all becomes so tight, or retreat is where I behave really, really well, and then out there, I get into a really bad habit. [laughter] This is really, really important. So when you and I had that conversation about the grey area, I really meant "just see everything as grey." Everything is just a different shade of grey, or different shade of purple – whatever you like, you know?

So that's really important, but yeah, primarily we bookmark it for later. The fact that you're noticing it, the fact that it feels possible, that's great. It may be just as noticeable, just as possible outside of retreat (and I hope it is), or just fractionally less. But that 'fractionally less,' you just need to, "Okay." If you *want* to learn that, you can learn it, and it's really priceless, this transformation of anger that way (also the larger view about purple).

In terms of the first thing, the first example you gave, you used the word 'sadness,' and I'm just wondering whether it was more just that sometimes the heart is in a state of being touched, and tears come, and strictly speaking, it's not sadness. I'm not sad that X or Y happened, or that I've lost A or B, or whatever. This is actually quite important, a distinction to make. I would say as we develop as human beings, but certainly as we develop as meditators, we should be moving more and more into that territory where the heart is very easily touched, and tears are not strangers – but not tears where we're just kind of sinking and collapsing, and we just end up being a puddle, with no power or no clarity or anything. So that kind of heart opening, or capacity to be touched, is a really, really important, I think, element or strand of the path, by all kinds of things – beauty, nature, companionship, all kinds of things. Sometimes the touching feels with a smile and joy, and sometimes the touching feels with tears, but it doesn't actually equate to sadness. So just from what you said, I wonder what distinction you would make now between the two.

Yogi: Looking back on it, actually, I was maybe a little quick to use the word ‘sadness.’ The example that I’m thinking of was quite a few days ago. It was more, actually, a beauty that was so touching it brought sadness.

Rob: Brought sadness, or brought tears?

Yogi: Yeah, sorry – I did it twice now! Yeah, it brought tears.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: Looking at it now, I was exploring some of that kind of secondary intention of being with the emotion, rather than the primary intention of the *jhāna* practice. There was a kind of capacity, a sense of a capacity, to be with it a lot more in times where tears would really come practising here, and sensing beauty. Here was a sense of, “I wonder, what’s the capacity, what’s the stamina, for perceiving beauty? Can I play with that a little? Where do the tears come, if I extend that range?” So yeah, I guess it was just things to note, and also to then notice what’s going on in the body, and can that be perceived as pleasurable: “Oh, look, *pīti*.”

Rob: Yeah, great. So that’s all really wonderful. Let me just pick out a few things there. This distinction that I’ve been trying to make between sadness and being touched, or touchable, or moved – to me, that’s a really important distinction. I encounter it a lot in yogis. It hasn’t actually occurred to them – there are tears or something, or there’s a quivering in the heart: “I must be sad,” or “I must be upset.” And *hmm*, you know, not necessarily. So that’s actually a really important distinction. When we talk about emotions generally, I would say, and I *have* said, that I don’t think we’re ever going to exhaust what there is to explore about emotions as human beings. So you just rattled off, “Oh, I could do *this*. Where is the boundary? How much can I tolerate? What if I see it *this* way? Can it turn into *this*?” These are just one, two, three right there, and there’s so much more – in terms of experience, but also in terms of just how we’re conceiving emotions. To me, the exploration of emotion, along with several other explorations of a human being, or areas or aspects of our existence, is endless – endlessly fertile, endlessly rich, you know?

The fact that you’re moving into different intentions, it’s not right or wrong, but there is something, as I said, really important about being clear and staying with a central intention, *if* you want to do *jhāna* practice, if you want that to develop. But that’s great. That’s really great, Laurence. Well done. And yeah, so definitely that being touched, or being touchable, because it relates to – it’s a kind of open-heartedness, or openness of being, which I said actually that’s more primary than *anything* else in the arising of *pīti* – more primary than sticking your mind, nailing your mind to the breath or whatever it is. So you can understand how that fits together. And then to be able to kind of ride that and help it go to *pīti* – that’s wonderful, all of that. There was another question woven in there, right? I’ve forgotten what it was.

Yogi: Yeah, I think it was around whether or not emotion can be another springboard to *jhāna*, and I think you've kind of [?] that with the openness of heart.

Rob: Yeah, we said that. I think there was another one hidden in the middle. But it doesn't matter. We can do it another time. Okay, great. Very good.

Q2: different meanings of the word 'radical'; indicators that one is spending too much time in one *jhāna*

Yogi: My question is around the word 'radical,' which you use a lot. You've been using [it] more over the years. You've used it in other contexts, in relationship to ethics, insight, and you've also used it now in relationship to *jhāna* practice. What does that mean, or why is that so important? I think about the Middle Way. It's like, well, it doesn't fit, in a way. Of course, the Buddha was radical in many ways. I'm wondering if you could just elaborate a bit more. Why is that so important? Why has that seemingly become *more* important over the years now that you're teaching?

Rob: I feel like the word 'radical' gets used in at least three ways in English. One is kind of just 'crazily extreme,' like a radical fundamentalist terrorist or something like that. One is just as a kind of euphemism for something unusual: "It's radical. Wow, what a radical idea! It's unusual." There are others, but the third way is the way I usually mean it more. 'Radical,' the word in English, comes from *radix* in Latin, which means 'root,' so to go to the root of something. To me, if we say 'radical emptiness,' for example, as an example I might use, [it] would be an understanding of emptiness that goes to the root of absolutely everything. In other words, you can't even go beyond it. If my understanding of emptiness just pertains to selves, for example – "The self is empty. What there really is is aggregates," for example – then, to me, that's not a radical [teaching], or one could have a more radical teaching, because the aggregates *themselves* might be empty. And then the time in which the aggregates exist is also empty, etc. So I *tend* to use it that way.

When I used it the other way, I think I was talking about practising exchanging self and other radically. I think, yeah, it was a mixture in terms of what I meant, so 'radically' as sort of something like 'more extremely than you might think of,' you know? So we can do a lot of practices a little bit, sort of just dipping our toes in a little bit, or a little bit half-heartedly. What would it be to really, "I'm sitting here, with this pain, and this" whatever it is – say I'm dying of cancer, you know? It's like, what would it be to practise exchanging self and other, with all that, and I really mean it? "I came to this meditation retreat, and I wanted it to go well, and it doesn't feel like it's going well," and just to completely – 'completely' is, there, a synonym for 'radically' – just turn it round: "In this moment, I give up my desire for that, because I'm taking on this frustration, this misery, this failure, these hindrances, this not going well, in the hope that there's some kind of reciprocal gift for someone else that I may never even meet." So, in that sense, and to really do that, and do that full-heartedly, with the totality of one's being. And if you know that practice, you can get down to things like my very body, my atoms, my mind, this thought, that thought – so there's a radicality in the sense of completeness, to the fundamentals of one's being.

So I tend to use it that way, and sometimes it's a bit more just like a sloppy word for 'more than you might usually think' sort of thing. Do I use it more over the years? Maybe. I don't know. It's a commonly used word now in the Dharma, so maybe I'm just kind of upping the ante a little bit on what I mean by it; I'm not sure. I'm not sure what you're asking. Are you just wondering about my teaching, or are you wondering about that word, or why are you asking?

Yogi: I think that answers the question, just those two meanings. I had another question. You've spoken about the levels of mastery, which would indicate that the next *jhāna*'s sort of on its way, if not there already. On the other end, I'm wondering, you know, what would be some of the conditions, or factors, or indicators whereby we'd be spending *too* much time in a particular *jhāna*.

Rob: Yeah. Maybe one might have very strong experiences of the next *jhāna* that just happen to one over and over again, and that might indicate. It's not just, for example, in the second *jhāna*, happiness once in a while and a little bit; it just *keeps going* into the second *jhāna*. It's a very clear, very vivid experience where you can kind of tick a lot of boxes. And maybe, if I've already got a lot of the elements of mastery of the first *jhāna*, and I can already sit in there a lot, for hours, etc., then am I learning anything new at that point *in* the first, *about* the first *jhāna*? So that's another question: am I learning anything new here? Of course, I may not be learning anything new because I'm not paying attention enough and I'm not playing enough, but I may not be learning anything new because I actually know that territory. So that would be another criterion. Is that okay?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Okay. Good.

[talk begins]

Okay. Shall I throw out a few things I was wanting to say? [22:42] Some of them are quite little. Oh, I made a couple of mistakes in, I think, yesterday's talk. The first is really not that significant, but just in case someone gets wondering and [it] gives them the wrong sense. In that simile about the wanderer through the desert, and I said the desert represents *saṃsāra* – actually, that can't be right, because that would imply that the *jhānas* are *nirvāṇa* – or maybe; I don't know, because maybe it's an oasis in a desert. Anyway, maybe the desert represents life run by the hindrances; I don't know. Maybe it represents *saṃsāra*, and the oasis is not the end of the desert, it's just a little, and you've still got to go further. Maybe. So either one. It doesn't really matter. [laughter]

[23:36] Second mistake, slightly more significant. I don't know if it was a mistake or I just wasn't clear enough. I said something like, "Experiences of deep equanimity or fairly deep equanimity that come from insight meditation are often not actually the third or fourth *jhāna*, where there's the equanimity kind of coming in such a strong and beautiful way." However, experiences like some of you know, the kind of group of practices that I call the 'vastness of awareness,' as you get into that, there is a real mystical sense of wonder. It is very beautiful. There is a sense of sacredness there. It *does* really

touch you, etc., and it is an experience of deep equanimity. However, those kinds of opening, what I call the practices of vastness of awareness, has a range of depths to it. So it's something that one can open up just a little bit, and may not yet have that kind of almost divinity to it, and sacredness to it, and sense of almost the ultimate.

For example, one level of depth is just all phenomena seem to emerge out of that vastness and disappear back in it. It's like the womb or the source of everything. And that very seeing, it's a bit like when we talked about the *nāda* sound, and how can you use it in an insight way – it's just a backdrop. Everything comes out of that, fades back into it. That level of seeing is very, very fruitful for the equanimity, etc. It begins to have a kind of mystical flavour to the whole thing and divine flavour to the whole thing. As you practise more with the vastness of awareness, and it goes even deeper, there's a sense where everything has one substance, and that substance is awareness; everything is awareness. Now we're really moving into a mystical sense of things, and that will have a lot of beauty. So when I said people who have just done insight, who have just opened to equanimity through insight practice, I didn't really mean *that*, because, if by insight practice you just mean, "I'm just watching, just watching, just being mindful, just being mindful," and kind of letting go with that general encouragement to just watch and let go, that won't take you to these deep ends of vastness of awareness. You actually have to kind of direct it, do something more deliberate, and actually change the practice slightly so that it goes there. Someone just reported they got a bit confused by that, so I hope that helps. In other words, we make the vastness of awareness a practice in itself that's slightly different than regular insight practice. We'd have to change a few things in order for it to really go to these really lovely, deeper levels.

And then two or three people are struggling with, or have been struggling with, kind of **working backwards** – not being able to get the first *jhāna*; not even being able to get *pīti* or sustain *pīti*, but being able to, for instance, get the happiness or something deeper. So I want to throw this out in case that's common to anyone, or common at any point later for anyone. A few different things you can try if that's the case. Let's say you can get the happiness, and you're getting more and more fine with that, you're learning the happiness, but *pīti* just won't happen. If we think about the *jhāna* factors and everything we've said so far, we should be able to kind of almost surmise these things ourselves. So *pīti* is, for instance, coarser. *Pīti* and *sukha* are both energy body experiences. So I said at first we think of *sukha*, the happiness, as a mental experience. But that's just at first, once a person has had the *pīti* and they want to make the distinction between *pīti* and *sukha*. Eventually one sees, "Actually, they're both just frequencies of vibration of the energy body, and yes, they have mental components too." But really, one could see the *sukha* as just a more refined energy body vibration than the *pīti*.

(1) So what that means, if I want to work backwards, what it means, what it implies, is here I am in the happiness, and it's going well, and I'm kind of in it, and I'm stewing in it, and I'm drinking it in. Then, **listening to the mix of frequencies in the energy body, in the happiness, can I notice the coarser ones – not the more subtle ones, but the coarser ones – and actually tune to them, and find the enjoyment to them?** Because what I attune to is what gets amplified, right? We said that much earlier. So that might be a way of working backwards.

(2) It might also be that, you know, oftentimes, probably most people – not everyone, but most people – notice the *pīti* tends to have an upward current to it. It tends to move *up* the body, and in a way, when I say "opening, and surrendering, abandoning to the *pīti*," in a way, you're really opening

the body to that upward current, and that's what all this head tilting back business is, if any of you get that a little bit. The body is naturally being opened, or like we said with the question about the feet, it's naturally being opened like that, and it's opening to what, for most people, primarily feels like it's got an upward current in it. It can be really strong. It can be really, really subtle. It can feel like the *pīti*'s actually pretty stable, but within that stability, it's got slight waves, upward waves.

Here's a side point I've just remembered that might be important to say, and I'll come back to what I'm saying, and enumerate it so we won't get lost. Sometimes people say, "Well, I thought you said the *pīti* had to be steady before we work on it, but I feel these waves, like it comes in waves." So then I ask them, okay, think about the sea. Think about the ocean. If you think about a wave in the ocean, if you think about a wave near the shore, near the sand or whatever it is there, that wave, or that portion of sand, let's say, has times when it has water over it – a wave breaks over it. And it has times when the water recedes before the next wave comes, and it's bare sand or rock or whatever it is. If you go to a wave 100 metres out, and the sea is deeper there, then I still see, "Oh, there's a wave. There's a wave." It doesn't *break*, necessarily, out there, but there's a wave, right? There's that undulating motion of the water. But out far to sea there, you're never going to get – unless there's a tsunami or something – bare sand to see, or bare rock. You're never going to see the bottom. In other words, out there, the *pīti*, the water, is actually steady enough. In other words, it never disappears. Within that steadiness, there are waves. So it's not that it has to be totally still; *pīti*, by its nature, is almost ... well, it *might* be, but it tends to have currents in it. What we *don't* want, though, in order to be able to work with *pīti*, we want to make sure it's not a wave, and then nothing, bare sand, and then a wave, and then nothing, bare sand. So that was a side point.

But generally *pīti* has these up currents. So if I'm in the second *jhāna*, it's going well, or I've learnt how to make it go well, and I'm enjoying it, and I'm digging it, but I can't get the *pīti*, or I can't get the first *jhāna*, then what I can do is **see if I can just notice any upward currents in the energy body experience** – maybe in the happiness or whatever. They might be, at that point, really quite subtle, so again, I have to get my antennae out, and I have to maybe have that delicacy of listening, of receptivity. And within that, I start to notice, "Oh, yeah. There *are* some upward currents." Again, attuning to them, they amplify, and maybe that takes me to the *pīti* or amplifies the *pīti*. That's the second option.

(3) The third option is **just imagine upward currents**. Don't be afraid to use your imagination in these kinds of practices. I imagine them for a little while, and lo and behold, the next thing: I feel them, and then I can enjoy them, get into them, and the whole experience changes.

(4) Fourth possibility is, okay, here I am in the happiness. It's going well. I still can't get the *pīti*. Here I am in the happiness, though – I'm enjoying it, I'm getting into it, all that stuff. I've been in there for a while – 'a while' meaning really some minutes and minutes and minutes – and then I just **drop a little magic formula in, a little tincture: maybe the word *pīti*, maybe the word 'rapture,' maybe the word 'ecstasy' or 'bliss,' whatever your word is, and whatever your language is**. Again, the mind at these levels with *samādhi* becomes so malleable, so sensitive, so receptive, that just dropping something like a word in can have a lot of effect. It's a really skilful thing to be able to do in lots of different ways in *jhāna* practice.

(5) The fifth thing to say is, generally, probably, if that's the problem – I'm getting okay with the *sukha* and the second *jhāna*, but really not so okay with the *pīti* and the first *jhāna* – then you'd want to

be **hanging out much more in the really bubbly happiness**, rather than (if that's my goal, to work backwards that way) too much time in the more serene happiness, because the bubbly one, from our cooking ingredient thing yesterday, has more *pīti* in it. So there are five things you could try.

Yogi: Rob, can I just ask a follow-up question?

Rob: Oh, sure. Please. Yeah.

Yogi: If you're feeling this *pīti* as water crashing on the sand, and the sand being bare, can you nudge it sort of further out to sea?

Rob: If your experience is you're feeling the *pīti* with these breaks, that there's sand there, can you nudge it out further? More often, it's a question of just letting it ripen until that is the case. But, having said that, like everything, it's not so black and white. There's a kind of intermediate possibility. That's naturally where it wants to go, okay? Oftentimes, at first, the first experiences of *pīti* someone has are more like the waves near the shore, where you get these kind of – it just comes and then it goes, comes and goes. I'm not even sure how it's coming or what the hell it is or anything. In time, it wants to go there. We can do things – let's put it in the negative – we can do things to slow that down, that whole maturing process, and we can do things to just kind of ease its passage, put it that way. The best thing to ease its passage is to make sure when these waves come, I'm somehow neither snatching at them, as the Buddha says – so I don't snatch at them – but I'm really making sure I'm *open* to them. If a wave comes, maybe it has a little after-echo, and then I really want to open to that, you know? So if I'm *not* fully opening to them, that might be one of the things that actually is just slowing down this maturation process for your *jhāna* boat to be out there. So that's one thing.

And then another possibility, as well, again, without too much pressure, is even if it feels like it goes badly, and I'm believing the mind that's saying "I can't do this," and whatever it was, or "I've lost it," you know, sometimes it's just worth saying, "What the hell? Let's just play with imagining my body full of *pīti*," and just a few moments of trying that, even though it feels like it's going to be a pointless thing to do. So there's always that possibility as well. You've got a kind of range of possibilities and answers there, yeah? Okay.

How are your hindrances doing today? Actually, how is your *papañca* today? How is your *papañca* doing today compared with yesterday? How is the suffering from your *papañca* doing compared to two days ago? You know, it's going to be up and down. Wherever you are at the moment, it's going to move. We're so, so interested in that movement, over time, from this high-amplitude, up-and-down business where we're really believing something, and everything's grumpy, and we hate Gaia House, and all that stuff, with applying the antidotes, but even more importantly, with the wisdom: "Am I believing? Am I just a sucker for this thing?", with this kind of questioning of "What am I believing here?" This high amplitude wave, over time – and it may take weeks or whatever, but this is where we want to get to, that this high amplitude wave becomes just a little sort of, you know, placid caterpillar wiggle. It's really just a sort of energetic "nyeh," you know?

And so much rests on the belief. So much rests on "What am I believing here?" Without care, there's a hindrance, I believe the colouring of perception and the thoughts that the hindrance stimulates, the colouring of perception and the thoughts are believed, and then it becomes *papañca*, and then that just snowballs. So doubt and aversion, for example – I was talking with someone yesterday – even subtle doubt, and even more powerfully, subtle aversion, will colour the memory of, for example,

yesterday's wonderfulness, or the joy that you experienced two days ago or three days ago. Aversion – like craving, like grasping – is *incredibly* powerful. It cannot be there without shaping, fabricating, and colouring whatever phenomenon is in consciousness at the same time. Whatever phenomenon – whether that's a memory, a sight, a sound, a smell, taste, touch, *blah blah blah blah blah*, the sense of self, whatever – any degree of aversion is going to colour that. So yesterday it was just whatever it was, three days ago it was wonderful, and now there's a little bit of aversion in the mind, and I look back, and "Eh, it wasn't *that* good," or whatever it is.

This is what I mean by developing some insight and wisdom in relation to the hindrances, and *papañca*, and what the Buddha calls the defilements, the *kilesas* (greed, hatred, delusion – greed, *aversion*, I think, is a much better word). And the same thing with the rest of the hindrances – subtle doubt, etc. I remember – I can't remember what stage it was; probably sounds like it was getting into the first *jhāna*, and really doing that over and over – and at some point, doubt comes. And it wasn't even a really strong doubt. I was sitting cross-legged a lot, and I thought, "I'm probably just sitting on a nerve." I was sitting with my heel in my perineum. "This can't be *pīti*. It's just I'm pressing on my perineal..." Is there a perineal nerve? [laughter] It's probably a group of nerves. Whatever. And then the mind starts – just these little things. But aversion is a killer. It's a killer. It kills joy. And connecting again to what we were talking about yesterday with dependent arising and the teaching about karma: a little bit of aversion – what kind of world do I live in? What does my self feel like? What does my practice feel like? What's my view of things? What's my sense of where I am, who I am?

So for me, the second hindrance – I can't remember; I should look it up. Maybe later. So they're usually in the order (1) sense desire, (2) ill-will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness, (5) doubt. The second one, ill-will, means I wish someone harm. To me, that's a really extreme form of the hindrance. The killer at this point for you will be aversion in a much more subtle way. It's not even *towards* anyone. It might get towards *yourself*. But it's aversion. Aversion will be the killer. And aversion can be to any phenomenon whatsoever, *any* phenomenon – any sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought, memory, any phenomenon of experience, a situation, sensations, a state itself – we have aversion to a state. So this ends up being really like, "Oh, watch that seed." Watch that seed, because it's extremely powerful, and that seed, like I said, will sprout, and grow, and it will be a whole damn forest if I'm not careful, or even in very subtle seed form, it already is sending out its toxins, colouring the perception. And even if there's not a lot of thinking, we start believing what we're seeing, smelling, tasting, touching. We start believing what we're sensing, coloured through the lens of aversion. So there's something, again, so much of the gift of this practice is in relationship to hindrances, and getting wise in relationship to hindrances. But this is a long-term lesson. It's not something we *get* [snaps fingers] like that necessarily.

Okay, a couple more little things. I don't know if everyone needs this, but do we need to very briefly review SASSIE, not to get hung up on the wrong things? SASSIE: first **S**, **suffused**. I *do* want it to move towards suffusion – the whole body saturated and suffused, pervaded and permeated, steeped and drenched, and the whole body involved. Once I've got that, I tick it, and I don't have to bother about it again, okay? It's done. For that sitting, it's done. So there is a goal there, and I try and move towards that goal. Occasionally, depending on where you are in your evolution of practice, it *won't* spread everywhere. I've tried all my little tricks, *da-da-da*. It won't spread. Don't worry about it.

Eventually it will spread. But there is a goal, and then I'm done with that job, whereas, for example, the **A** and the two middle **S's** – **ASS** – are ... [laughter] Actually you spell it differently in the US. But anyway. **ASS**. It's a little kind of donkey. Where was I? [laughter] These are *infinite*. I will never come to a point where there's no more possibility. There will never be a moment in any meditation I ever do in my life where I cannot improve whatever degree of absorption I've had, where the object cannot sustain either longer in time (the *pīti* or the *sukha* longer in time) or with less nano-, micro-, pico-interruptions, and the same goes with the mind, that the mind can't sustain either longer in time or with less kind of nano-, micro-, pico-interruptions.

So they're infinite. Now, what does that mean about how I relate to them, if they're infinite? It does something to the goal-oriented mind and the judgmental and the measuring mind. Wherever I am, the direction is *that* way. And if I feel like, "Wow, I'm so far gone *that* way! I've never gone this far before. This is amazing!", great. That's wonderful. And the direction is still *that* way. And if it's not going so well, the direction is still *that* way. There's nothing to judge here. These things will vary from time to time. I'm gradually working at my skill. But because they're infinite, it releases me from any kind of success/failure notion. This is really, really important. Don't get hung up on the wrong things. This is why I give the SASSIE, partly – what do I do now, but also what's important, and what is *not* so important? What do I need to complete (like the suffusion), and what do I just need to ...? It just tells me what direction to go in.

When we come to the **I**, the **intensity** of, let's say, the *pīti* or whatever it is, it doesn't matter. As long as it's strong enough – meaning it's pleasant; it's obviously pleasant – it doesn't matter. I'm not trying to make it more intense. It will get more intense or less intense. It's irrelevant. That completely lets me off the hook of having to worry about it. And however much I'm **enjoying**, the **E**, I can enjoy more. So in a way, that's infinite. But part of the art of enjoying is going to be not to pressure myself to do that. But it's a direction, yeah? So these are important in terms of our kind of micro-psychological well-being, which, if we're not careful, can actually, unfortunately, like a poisonous fungus, blossom into our macro-psychological well-being, because we've got hung up on the wrong things, and we just keep judging ourselves for what's actually not the right thing to judge ourselves by.

A little bit related: this business where I keep saying 'marinate' and 'mastery,' 'marination' and 'mastery,' and how, for me, those are really important orientations and aspirations for the way we're practising and the way I would like to communicate all this. 'Mastery' includes trying to sustain it longer, to sit longer, let's say, with the *pīti*, so I can sit an hour or more, etc., whatever it is, with whichever *jhāna*. I'm marinating with the elements of SASSIE, and playing with that. All this business – marinating and mastery – also includes, sometimes it's not going so well today. Okay. Now I'm going to kind of emphasize, in this sitting, or for the next twenty minutes, I'm just going to emphasize my steadiness of focus – in a way, partly what I've been a little bit trying to *de-emphasize*. There are times when it's like, "Okay, that's what I'm going to do." Maybe I can do that with the *pīti*, which is quite a refined object, and I feel like I need to understand: "Oh, I'm learning to pay attention to a more refined object." It's actually hard. Most people would not be able to do that. So I need to train myself to be able to stay with a more refined object. And that's the micro-view, the kind of subtle view that I have of what I'm doing and what my emphasis is in the next twenty minutes sometimes.

And other times, it's like, "Yeah, I'm working on the eighth *jhāna*, generally, but actually, right now, what I need to do is go back to my base practice, and work on my focus and steadiness there." All that's normal and available for someone who's just got the view of "mastery is what I'm doing." In other words, it's wide, and there's a range, and we're responsive to shifting the emphasis at different times. It includes quite a lot. So flexibility, responsivity, and inclusiveness.

And in relation to mastery, someone wrote a question, which I have here. Let me read the question, and then maybe say also a couple of things.

We say that the arising of *jhāna* depends on causes and conditions. We also say that mastery of a *jhāna* includes being able to enter it at will, which could perhaps be understood as implying a certain independence of at least some causes and conditions. [So there's an apparent contradiction there.] Could you please elaborate on how to relate to the two statements, and how to skilfully relate to the notion of entering at will?

Yeah. Very good. This is exactly one of those things when I said I will contradict myself, but also, more importantly than that, it's an instance of things where, again, we want a range of views, and we don't want to get locked into this view or that view, okay? I would say, for anyone at all, give them the right medical drugs, and their ability to enter a *jhāna* at will will be severely compromised, I would say [laughs], if you've had enough general anaesthetics or something, you know. Anyone is going to have *some* limits on their 'enter at will.' It's never going to be 100 per cent of the time, never. You can have illness, be low energy. You could be tired. You could be a million different things. Digestion upset. A lot of different things that will, at times, mean that even someone who's a master, etc., will not, on those occasions, be able to enter at will.

But still, it's good to aspire to. In a way, it relates to the whole teachings about self and the emptiness of self. In a way, to see it as "a *jhāna* depends on causes and conditions" is a way to conceive of *jhāna* just without self, without the self coming in and getting all tight about "Can I do this? Can I not? Am I failing? Am I not? What badge do I get? Have I achieved?", etc. It's just causes and conditions. And yet, there is the development of ... From the point of view of the emptiness of self, seeing in terms of causes and conditions is seeing *not* in terms of self, yeah? But we can also, and we need to in life, and in the Dharma, see in terms of self: "I do this. I choose this ethically. I make this choice. I cultivate this. I cultivate *mettā*, etc. I choose to cultivate *mettā*," all that. It's normal and healthy and skilful kind of view or conception of what's happening. Mastery won't – in other words, setting it up as a goal actually, again, gives us a direction. If I never mentioned it, then people might be just sliding around all over the place, and not getting as much fruit out of the whole practice, because it wouldn't occur to them to try for certain things that just go under this umbrella of 'mastery.' It wouldn't occur to you to try this or that. But if you say, "Oh, there's this thing called mastery. See if you can do it." And it depends on intention. So you can say intention is one of the causes and conditions. Going back to what I said earlier, is intention ever a completely sufficient cause and condition? It's necessary, but not sufficient. Intention, by itself – give me enough drugs, give me enough this or that, starve me, whatever, too tired, etc. – intention itself is not sufficient. But I need to mention it because it actually is a very powerful ingredient of the causes and conditions, but it's never sufficient.

The larger point here has to do with teachings about emptiness. And again, I want the range of views. I want to be able to drop. Here's a situation; here's something I have to do; here's something that happened to me; here's something that I did wrong; here's something that I succeeded at; here's something I'm doing great; here's something that people are praising me for; here's something that people are blaming me for. At times, I want to have available to me a way of viewing all that that deconstructs the self out of it. I see in terms of causes and conditions. And that can be extremely liberating and healing, and take the pressure off the self, the self and measuring the self and blaming the self, at times.

But if I get stuck there, and I say, "Well, that must be the right way to view things, because that's Buddhist, right? Not-self, no-self, there is no self, and all that – emptiness." I think one's stuck in a partial and incomplete view of emptiness. Again, the radical emptiness of self means actually that *any* view of self, even the view of "there is no self," is eradicated, ripped up from its root. And what that means is all views become available to us, including the view of self. So someone who's really understood the emptiness of things and the emptiness of self can move easily between views that kind of look in a way *not* in terms of self, and views that look in a way in terms of self. This is really, really, really important. Really important.

To *my* way of understanding, if one hasn't seen that, one hasn't really gone deep enough. It also just won't make sense in one's life: here, this collection of aggregates wants to marry that collection of aggregates. [laughter] This collection of aggregates would like to have sex with that collection of aggregates. [laughter] This collection of aggregates would like to compose this piece of music in praise for the collection of aggregates that is the universe or whatever. It doesn't ... If we *just* look that way, there are going to be enormous areas and dimensions of our being, of our lives, of our souls, of our existence that are not supported, and that's going to be a real problem. It'll be a real problem for ourselves. It'll be a real problem for our relationships. It'll be a real problem for the society and the planet. So sometimes you get this shadow side of Buddhism that always wants to deconstruct things and see things that way, when actually I *do* need to be not just able to comfortably move into a self-view, but able to move into a self-view that's actually beautiful, and soulful, and enriching, and gives meaning and all of that. I want both of those. So these two contradictory teachings – mastery and at will, and dependent on causes and conditions – yes, contradictory, complementary, but we want them both, and they're helpful at different times. In a way, they're not completely contradictory. I suppose the truest one is 'dependent on causes and conditions,' of which intention is one, but never completely a sufficient one just by itself. Does that make sense? Is that okay?

Yogi: Yes. [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. Thank you. It's a shame you didn't have the microphone there. Let me see if I can just ... So Marco's saying, in a way, grateful to the *jhāna* practice for enabling him to see that there was a hierarchy of views happening here, and the sort of "This is really just causes and conditions" was trumping the view that "Oh, I can do this with my intention." Really, really important, yeah. If we come back: if all these different views are available, the question is, why do I choose *this* one over *that* one at any time? If actually they're all legitimate, and I'm given permission, as you say, and "I hereby give you permission," it's like, how am I going to choose between these different views? That becomes the criterion, and that's a really interesting question. Now, classical Dharma, it's very simple: what

reduces the suffering here? So we can get attached, like I said, to a view of “It’s really just causes and conditions and things like that, and there is no self,” and there’s a kind of attachment there, but if it comes in too soon, too quickly, and too pervasively, it kind of prevents a lot of other really good stuff opening in our life, and the views, other views, that might, in certain situations, deliver much more relevant fruit.

And like I said, if someone is practising the *jhānas* and they’re starting to get grandiose, “Look what I can do!”, as I pointed out when we talked about that, it’s very rare. If they’re real *jhānas*, and they’re going in and out enough, it’s very rare, I think. What’s much more [common] is the opposite view: I’m failing at something, and *da-da-da*. And then this view of, “It’s just something that’s coming out of causes and conditions. When the causes and conditions are not there, it’s not there,” you know? So that view, again, it’s helpful for the relieving of that suffering of the contraction of a certain self-view, which is judging myself, or ... So I’m using it for that purpose.

But there might be times where someone’s adopting the other view: “I can do this.” And it *feels* like that’s actually releasing some suffering or counterbalancing some history of suffering that I can’t do something – could be anything. But in classical Dharma, the framework is: “Yeah, there are all these views. Which one do I pick up now to look through, to perceive this situation, in order to reduce whatever suffering is there, in order to heal whatever suffering is there?” That’s the criterion for adopting this view or that view. So that’s really important. We can add to that, and enrich it, and make it more complex, but I’m not going to do that now.

But this thing about mastery is also quite interesting, because it may well be that – and this is something to check, I think, in the larger scheme of things, each person to check: do I have somewhere, maybe consciously, maybe really semi-consciously, a kind of philosophy, or a kind of psychology, or a mixture of the two, that, for example, doesn’t like the idea of mastery, or doesn’t like the idea even of the self’s autonomy, as if I much prefer the view of things ‘just happening,’ and “This thing opened up, so I kind of flowed with that, and then conditions were such that *this* thing opened up, and I flowed with that”? There can be a lot of beauty in that, a lot of really lovely flow, and a lot of even creativity and all kinds of things, but behind it – and usually kind of semi-consciously – is a little bit of an entrenchment in a view that doesn’t allow a notion of the autonomous self deciding and acting and choosing X or Y, and perhaps even gaining mastery. Of course, one can be locked in the *other* view as well.

But this is something, again, in spiritual circles, quite interesting to check out. And again, my opinion is, why can’t we have both? Why can’t we have both, and have the whole range, and explore what it might be that – “I don’t like that view so much.” What’s preventing us from seeing the beauty in the view of the self’s autonomy, and the self’s power to choose, and the self’s decision to do something, and work at something, and get something? Or vice versa, but that’s much more rare in spiritual circles. So explore that, what’s holding us back, what we don’t like about it, and actually liberate it so both become available to us. Why not, you know? These are kind of subtle imprisonments that we can hopefully begin to see as we do more practice, whether it’s *jhāna* practice or whatever.

Jhāna practice, as I mentioned a couple of times, it kind of ramps up our ability to see all kinds of really subtle locked places or defilements. So people generally would have no idea that such a practice would do such a thing. You tend to think, “Well, insight practice, when I’m just opening, or

mindfulness, where I'm just opening, and kind of being with whatever comes up, and giving everything kind of equal interest, *that's* where I'm going to notice these things," but actually, there are a lot of hidden things that one can *not* notice unless you actually try working in certain ways (for instance, with a goal, with the idea of, let's say, mastery, or this or that), and that starts illuminating things, hidden corners, shining lights into hidden corners that we wouldn't otherwise have even realized were there. So to me, there are all kinds of secondary gifts to *jhāna* practice, which I think each of them are immense, and we don't tend to think that way or realize that at first.

Are there any other questions? Yes. Is that Sabra at the back? Oh, yeah. Please, with the mic. Thank you. Can I just, before you start, say one more thing about that?

A very common experience as you do more *jhāna* practice – it will be that you almost feel like the mind has a momentum to go, let's say, to the third *jhāna*: "I was intending to go to the first *jhāna*, and it just goes to the third *jhāna*." As you do more and more, that kind of thing becomes very common. I could just sit here and wait, and the mind will just go somewhere, when you've done a lot of *jhāna* practice or if there's that propensity. It could be any *jhāna*. It just wants to go, or I've aimed it *there*, and it goes over *there*, or whatever. This gets more and more common, so that a lot of people actually end up practising – that's how they practise, if they've done a lot of dedicated *jhāna* practice. They just sit down, and see where it goes. And there's not much intention at all; it's just, "Let's see where I slide on the ice today." And I used to say it's as if the mind has a mind of its own. It's really got this kind of other intention.

So when you've done a lot of *jhāna* practice, that can be fine, because they're all good places. But I would still balance it with, "Even if it wants to go there, can I still choose to go somewhere else at times?" So really, again, there's this range. Sometimes it might be you need to let it go where it wants for a little bit. The horse wants to go to the carrot shop for a little bit, and *then* you go to bingo – whatever. But I think this idea of keeping open the range of freedom, the range of possibilities, to me, is something really, really important. Okay, anyway. Sabra, please.

[questions resume]

Q3: working with locked places in the body, in view, and in mental territory

Yogi: It's just a question a little bit about what you just pointed to about freeze-up, locked places, and really seeing that process over the last couple days, both psychological, but also in the body, places of deep, old, subtle holding and tightness, kind of like just beginning to move open, you know? And there's so much beauty in that, and also it feels like it takes time. I'm curious about how to relate to that, because I see how my mind can kind of like keep sticking, going back to something I'm calling 'locked,' and really it's opening, but ... yeah.

Rob: Yeah, thank you. This, to me, is a really important question. Let's say two kinds of locks (to oversimplify right now): there's a kind of mental lock. Actually, three kinds of locks: **(1)** there's a **locking in view**, which is usually the hardest to even identify. Unless someone says something or you read something that kind of, "Whoa, hold on!", we don't even realize what views we're locked in. So

there's *that* kind of locking, and I've said a little bit about that, but generally, over the years, I've said a lot about that kind of thing. (2) Then there's a **locking in a kind of mental territory**. So I was, for instance, saying – was it yesterday or sometime? – about the second *jhāna*, for instance: “Hey, don't neglect the really bubbly happiness,” especially if that's a little bit alien to your personality – it's like that's not kind of congruent with your usual shapes your self takes. We can get locked into certain emotional bandwidths or territories, so a person has certain – whatever it is. But that would be one example.

The **locking in views**, there are times one has to actually be really ... not *aggressive*, but *vigorous* and kind of *alert*, and really I'm trying to look; I'm really trying to question things, and where I might be locked, and open things up that way. So there's a real sense of “I'm trying to do this.” One will never come to the end of that, but the intention can be quite strong, and the action can be quite strong: “Well, I'm going to start reading stuff about this,” or whatever it is. The first [looking at/questioning locks in view] can be quite vigorous at times. There will be times when actually that's the most important thing in practice; it's actually the most important thing in one's *life*. It's this looking at the views I have of all kinds of things – about what the Dharma is, about what awakening is, about all kinds of things – that one needs to actually be active and vigorous in one's questioning and exploration. And that might mean a wide exploration. But the intention and the action can be quite strong.

In the second one, what I'm calling a **lock into mental territory** – let's say, this example I gave: it's like, “Well, I'm very used to being quite peaceful and equanimous, but the real sort of bubbly happiness is kind of alien to me.” Then I would say the middle version there is gentle unlocking. But the unlocking happens just by hanging out in that kind of happiness, for example. I don't need to put too much pressure on the whole situation, or too much pressure on that pattern, on that lock. If something is opening that is expanding my heart-range, and effectively my soul-range, then I want to linger there and let it do its work, rather than just say, “Yep, tasted that one. Tick,” because I've experienced it once, and then go back to a kind of equanimity which is supposedly deeper, so it can kind of go under the mask of ‘a deepening of practice.’

(3) But the third one, the **locks in the body**, this is, in a way, a little bit more delicate. So yes, as we practise *jhāna*, and to the degree, in any formal session, that there's a real kind of absorption and suffusion, etc., those physical locks tend to dissolve. And that dissolution may last after the session. If it's non-habitual – it was just locked; I've never had that particular lock before – then it can just go. That was it, and it doesn't come back. If it's a habitual lock, something gets unlocked when there's the *jhāna* or whatever, and that unlocking can last *some* degree of time afterwards. I would just be careful not to put a pressure on it, because it may well come back. There's a kind of body karmic knot there that is just a tendency to create that kind of lock, okay?

[1:14:21] We can play with this playing of perception, and see the knot as *pīti*, and see the knot as happiness. All that's going to help. But I would be really, really careful about two things: one is making too much of a project of unlocking the body. A lot of people get into this. It's really a big deal. If I see that as a long-term project, that's not Dharma to me. I may unlock this or that, or this or that may unlock at different times, through different practices, through different playing with perception, through different states, and that's wonderful, and that's great. But if I kind of get a bit obsessed with that, then that's something else. It's not Dharma any more. (I'm not saying this is what you're doing, Sabra; I'm

just giving a general teaching now.) I've shrunken my view of what the Dharma could be into something much smaller, and gotten a bit obsessed about something, and using something as a kind of measuring stick for how I'm doing.

So sometimes, with a lot of practice or a little practice, things that have been habitual may go forever. It's just gone. And sometimes they may go for a little while, and come back. Sometimes they may go for a long while, and come back. But I really have to have my view there quite right. You know, the Dharma offers us much, much, much more than just that kind of unlocking of energy patterns. There was something else I was going to say, but I've forgotten it. Another way of saying all that is just to be very, very light when you're playing with that, and kind of hold it, make sure it's held in a much larger context, and even the way you're playing with it, and playing with perception that way, or the state, to be really quite light about it. How does that sound?

Yogi: Yeah, so helpful. Thank you.

Rob: Okay, good. There was another piece with that. I feel this is really important.

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, it was something about how to view all that. It's not coming. Sorry. You know, if we go back to this thing we said about playing with perception – and you *can*. You get into this enough, and you *can*. Here's a lock, here's a contraction, here's a pain, whatever it is – and pain, in energetic terms, is just a contraction of energy – and you can play with perception, and see it as *pīti*, and it unlocks, etc. But what's most significant about that is even if it is [that] I look at it and it never comes back, and it's been kind of mildly bugging me for the last ten years, or twenty years, to me, what's more significant about that shift is the dependent arising of perception. And for *that* coin to drop – it may well come back; it doesn't take anything away from the insight if it comes back an hour later, ten minutes later. In the long run of things, the fruit of seeing that through playing with perception what I perceive as a lock actually is liberated, is unlocked, understanding then the dependent arising of perception, and therefore the implication for emptiness, that is way more significant than "I've got rid of a discomfort that has been kind of bugging me for twenty years." Do you want to say something, Sabra?

Yogi: Yeah, I think that's kind of the power of what I've been playing with, is really seeing this tendency to look at the problem, and the training in widening back out again, and coming back to the fuller fabric of the energy body, whether or not the lock is unlocking.

Rob: Yeah. So thank you. That's a middle ground as well. If I had to hierarchize these three things, you've got this knot, this lock that has been with me for twenty years, on and off, and I kind of just wish it would go away, and it does – it goes away forever – versus what you just said: I've trained the attention and the *citta* so that when there is some discomfort in the body, I don't *have* to go there. I can actually put my attention elsewhere and be pretty happy, *and* there's this lock there. And then the third one, where one actually sees that the lock itself is empty, because when I look at it in a certain way, it

dissolves. If I had to put that in hierarchy of order of importance, I would put the disappearing of this bugging thing at the bottom, and then what you said, and then the emptiness one at the top. Just this training – thank you for saying that – it’s so important. It’s really understanding, again: what’s the relative significance of different experiences that we have?

But this has everything to do – and I’ll maybe come back to this – with, why are we practising? What are we practising for? I’ll say this again: it’s up to us why we practise, you know? It’s up to you. You can have any reason why you practise. It’s not for me to tell you why to practise. That’s for you to find out: why do I want to practise? But the range of possibilities of what we’re looking for when we practise is huge. And sometimes what can happen is, a person very consciously just chooses something quite small in terms of the reason they’re practising. What also happens, though, is over time, the reasons for practice shrink somehow or other. That’s quite interesting as well. Or we’ve just not been told what fruit there is on offer, and so we’re kind of operating under a limited menu of potential. All this is actually really, really key. Does that make sense? I’m going to stop trying to remember what the other thing I was going to say was. [laughs] Does that feel okay for now, Sabra?

Yogi: Definitely.

Rob: Yeah? Okay, good. Is there anyone who hasn’t ...? Mikael, yeah. Just to give more people a chance. Yeah, Mikael, please.

Q4: practising changing the perception of unpleasant to pleasant to understand something about emptiness, not just to alleviate this or that pain

Yogi: Thank you. I would like to ask, in relation to this discussion, about the malleability of perception in regards to pain. As you mentioned in some talk before, one can, through this practice, start to slowly notice that actually any *vedanā*, any experience, can be seen as pleasant – any *vedanā* can be seen as pleasant. If there is pain, one can sort of see and – what’s the word you used – filter out the pleasant out of a mix, and just take that in. Once that really gets going, at least *I* got really excited about that. It was exhilarating, and “Wow! This is meaningful. This is really deep.” [laughs] And some intuition in me says that, well, it’s possible to go wrong, or it’s possible to overdo this. If one sort of gets first contact with such a malleability of perception in regards to pain, one could get an impression that this is what freedom from suffering is all about, and then starts to apply this with almost any experience, any pain, all the time – like “Bliss, bliss, bliss, bliss! Yeah! Give me that!” And it’s wonderful for a time, for sure, but then an intuition in me says that that is not completely healthy in the long run, and there might be a sort of mistake or a risk of mistake in view. What would you comment on this?

Rob: Yeah, trust your intuition, absolutely, because, to me, if someone hears this idea – it came up recently on a seminar I did – someone can hear this idea, and almost get the idea that, “Oh, if I just get really good at that, then I can have a pain-free life,” and then they just start trying to do this everywhere. And that would be missing the point. The point is this ability to play with perception, to the degree that something painful becomes something pleasant, for example (or becomes just an empty

space, or lots of other possibilities, or becomes the face of the Buddha-nature, or the face of God, or whatever), this ability to play with perception, if I limit it to this pain-to-pleasure thing, and then I think, “Oh, great. What a useful thing!”, and then I’m trying to live without pain, that’s just – there are two gifts on offer, and one takes the much, much poorer one, which is freedom from pain.

Now, that *sounds* like it’s Dharma, because Dharma is about reducing suffering and all that. No. The lesson from it, the potential lesson from it – and it will have to sit within a context of other teachings on emptiness, and other kinds of playing with perception, and all that stuff – is that perception is malleable, and is that nothing exists as anything in particular. A thing is not this or that or any thing independent of the way of looking. Eventually, I see that in lots of different ways, to lots of different depths and degrees, through lots of different directions, and that starts telling me about the emptiness of all phenomena. No phenomenon whatsoever is fundamentally existent as any thing in itself. It is *this* or *that* dependent on the way of looking.

That is a knowledge, and a knowledge that can come in not just intellectually – into the heart. And then the knowledge that everything is radically empty like that, to me, liberates in a much grander way. It liberates independent of this pain or that pain. It liberates in relation to the whole of existence and all phenomena. I’d say even *more* important, it brings a kind of unspeakable joy, and wonder, and sense of mystery and grace into the whole fabric of existence at a very deep level. To me, *that’s* the point, rather than, “Now I’m just really good at – hopefully I can get to the end of my life without any pain.” [laughter] It just seems a little narrow to me. Yeah, you can use that occasionally when things are rough, but that’s not the point. The point is more, what’s it telling me? If I just experience it once or twice, it will be like, “Woo, okay.” But as I said, if I start to experience it lots of different ways, at some point, or to some degree, the coin drops about the nature of existence itself, about the nature of things, the way things are, the true nature of things, the emptiness, the suchness of phenomena. And knowing that liberates in a much broader and deeper way, rather than this or that instance. I can still have this pain or that whatever, but it liberates in relation to life and death, and it brings, I would say, a wonder and a sense of sacredness that’s almost difficult to put into words, the level at which one ... And to me, *that’s* the point.

Anyway, just like the mastery thing, no one’s going to be able to do that all the time. The Buddha was in plenty of pain in his old age, and it was only a certain kind of meditation that would release him from the perceptions of pain, etc. I can say I’m struggling with pain quite a lot at times. So again, it’s like, what’s significant? What’s not? So your intuition is spot on there. What’s the *real* gift here? It’s much vaster in scale, you know, than just that kind of neat trick that we can do that helps us feel better. Yeah?

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Yeah, okay. Maybe one more. Did you have something, Jason? Oh, is there anyone else? Jason is happy to give up his ... Anyone else?

Q5: whether some locks in the body might benefit from lifestyle changes; working with locks that may or may not express themselves physically

Yogi: Okay. So on the issue of locks in the body, I think for better and worse, I've been exposed to some teaching that has really emphasized that, and maybe overemphasized that, and for periods of my practice I have overemphasized that – unlocking things, and opening somatic blocks. It's gotten much gentler, and it has been a concept that's been present here a lot, but only insofar as it prevents the flow of energy that would allow *pīti* and *jhāna* states. So I'm glad about that. The thing I was curious to ask you about is related to something I talked to Robert about earlier today, which was, in the long-term big picture, do you see those as things that could suggest certain, like, life changes, or lifestyle changes, outside of practice, in order to work with or relieve one of them?

Rob: Do the locks suggest that it might be a good idea to do certain lifestyle changes?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Some of them might, yeah. I used to have, for many years, a kind of cramping of the lower intestine, and it was just a very common, uncomfortable sensation. It felt like something was locking there. You know, very, very regular visitor in my meditation practice, for years and years and years. I learnt a lot about that, about clinging, and perception, and letting go and everything, for which I'm really, really grateful. It became – what was, you know, not *terrible*, but an ongoing sort of difficulty, was something that I learnt a lot from. In hindsight, it was also, you know, I found that when I eventually found – because I had ulcerative colitis and Crohn's – when I found a certain kind of probiotic and started taking that, that eased a lot. So, yes.

Yogi: I think I was speaking more about, like – well, what we talked about was kind of suppressed desire, or things that I might want that I'm not seeing through, or things that I might say that I'm not saying – that kind of stuff.

Rob: Okay. But something like that may or may not express itself as a lock in the body. In other words, what often happens is someone suppresses their desire, or doesn't see a project through that they want, and there's no sense of anything being particularly locked in the body. What's actually happening in the body is they're not allowing energy to build up in the body. So they don't particularly experience a sort of great holding/contraction thing. I don't know about using that as an indicator of something psychological necessarily. At a very subtle level – and we'll come back to this; we've already touched on it – the presence of the perception of a lock in any moment, or a contraction in the body, is an indicator, at a very subtle level, that there's aversion present in the mind (*subtle* aversion). But that's more to do, again, with dependent arising and insight practices that can then, when I release that aversion, lo and behold, the sense of the lock dissolves.

[1:32:57] So some of these more – let's say, I don't know what you'd call them – personality locks or stuff like that, they may or may not express themselves in long-term physical stuff. And sometimes with people, they *do*, very clearly, and it may or may not be related to these larger issues. And sometimes they don't really express at all, or in any noticeable way. And sometimes they express, but

in a way that's not obvious to that person, even when they've practised a lot with the energy body, but may be obvious to someone else who's a bit more sensitive to that. A person doesn't realize they hold in a certain way, and that may be to do with – yeah, so more psychological: they hold in relation to life, or in relationship with someone. Or in relation to their self-expression, they're just holding back. And sometimes it's sensible to someone else, but they have no notion of it at all, because it's actually quite subtle, and there's no discomfort with it. Sometimes the thing about these more severe locks, there's discomfort, and discomfort is like waving a red flag, saying, "Something's wrong here!" So there can be the whole range there, really.

I think what's *more* important here is that if you look at your life and you feel like, "*Ungh. I am* kind of squashing my libido" – in the larger sense of libido – "in a certain way, or I'm dampening my desire, or I'm in some way inhibiting either my desire to accumulate and burn, or my desire to follow through, or whatever," that's extremely significant, I would say. Massively significant. All that can hide under a nice Buddhist facade of well-behaved equanimous yogi who lets go a lot very well, you know? "Maybe you should be a teacher." [laughter] So this is a really, really important point, I would say, and to take that up as an investigation. Then you can see, "Okay, how much are these physical locks really trustworthy as indicators of the relationship where that is?"

But probably, if that's the kind of thing you're talking about, long-term projects and stuff, my guess is that the physical manifestations will only be partially helpful as indicators. There's a bigger thing going on, and your job will be to investigate that. Going back to what we said, in terms of the views as well – what views are operating? In terms of those one, two, three that I said earlier, what views am I locked into? Maybe a view about desire. Maybe a view about self. Maybe a view about Buddhist practice. It could be all kinds of things; nothing to do with Buddhism, but the views. The other thing might be, the second one, it might be an emotional lock – that this territory of actually sitting with a really strong desire, and everything I talked about the other day, if it's really strong, it will burn, and a lot of people say, "I don't like burning. There's a danger that I won't get that. I'll be frustrated. I'll fail. People will think this, or I'll think this," or whatever it is, "or I just cannot tolerate that burning. I cannot tolerate that much desire." It's uncomfortable, or it *can* be uncomfortable sometimes.

So it might be I just have kind of shut the door on that emotional territory. And again, the boundary between what's emotional and what's physical, what's emotional and what's energetic, there's not a clear boundary there. But again, it might be that a person just, "I cannot tolerate that much energy in my being." So there are a lot of things here. I think it's immensely important. And what does it mean to be a liberated human being? What does it mean in relation to *this*? Am I really liberated if I can't actually feel any desire, or I can't follow through on a desire? If my only option is to let go, is that really liberation? (You're not saying that, but it's a larger question.) So to me, it's really, really important. The investigation of all that is probably not something that's – it depends how long this has been around, but it's probably not something that happens, "Ah! I've got it now!" There may be long-term habits here of thinking, of view, of energetics, of emotional territory – all kinds of things, you know? So it may take a while. It may involve all kinds of explorations, from all different angles and levels and all that. But I think it's hugely important. I don't know, does that ...?

Yogi: Yeah, totally.

Rob: And again, you could decide to see that as an investigation that's *outside* of Dharma, or you can expand your view of what Dharma is, and that becomes an investigation that's really at the core of Dharma. In a way, that's up to you; it doesn't really matter. There are certainly ways of doing it both ways, in or out. Yeah? So I think it's very important.

Yogi: Thanks.

Q6: happiness and other *jhāna* factors coming up outside of formal sessions

Rob: Okay. I'm not sure whether to read these notes. Someone's written – it's anonymous. I don't know if that was intentional or not, but it says: "You don't even need the *jhāna* to be happy. I realized this today, and it totally blew my mind. Just wanted to share that." Yeah! That's totally right. [laughter] I'm just wondering if I've missed something here, or if the person wants to say a bit more. Yeah, please.

Yogi: I was in a very happy mode when I wrote it. [laughter]

Rob: Yeah! Great. Two things... Go ahead. Yeah, thanks, with the mic.

Yogi: I was in a very happy mode when I wrote it, and there was a relief coming from it.

Rob: Yeah, good. So this is what I wondered. This is really important. So two things here. One is that as we practise the *jhānas* more, the *jhāna* factors – like *pīti* and *sukha*, happiness – can come up outside of a formal session very, very strongly. And sometimes it's very obvious to see the connection with, for example, a sitting we've just had: we get up, and we're in the lunch queue, and we're just overflowing with happiness. But sometimes it seems almost a bit random. It's just like, "It wasn't going so well, and then suddenly there's this eruption of happiness." So that's all very normal. Yeah, the *jhāna* factor of *sukha* can come up, even very strongly, outside of an actual *jhāna*, outside of the total absorption in it.

There is still an important difference between absorbing into a *jhāna*, and everything really collected, and the happiness. But the happiness itself is also really a treasure, yeah? To gather it more, we marinate in it, and sit in it, but this is really great. But then, also, as you said, it was a relief, because sometimes, again, so much can happen. We say, "This is the goal, and there are these stages, and there are eight of them, and then there's this idea of mastery," and it's so easy for the self-measuring and the critic and all that to come in, and then it's all very tight. Then we realize, "Oh, actually, it doesn't need to be so black and white, 'Have I got it? Have I not?'" It can come up anywhere." And that takes some pressure off. So that's great.

And then, thirdly – which isn't what you were saying, but – yeah, it should be obvious: there are plenty of people who experience happiness in the world who have never heard the word *jhāna* and never had *jhāna*. So happiness is just – it wasn't what you were saying, Hannah, but we should realize that, too, that we're not saying here that, "No one who hasn't experienced a *jhāna* can ever experience happiness." No. But there is something about the degree of *jhānic* happiness that is sometimes there

that is pretty extraordinary. But that, as you've found, can come off the cushion. We say, "I've never been *this* sort of happy!" So all that is great.

And on that note, I'll just read this. I don't know, again. Depending on how your hindrances are doing, and how your *papañca* is doing and all that, right now ... Should I read this? Leave it? I'll leave it. No? Did someone say no? Okay. [laughter] Can you sign something that you take responsibility for your ...? [laughter]

"Dear Rob, in second, I heard the central heating as happiness, and that pretty much blew the roof off." Again, it's playing with perception, or a perception was played with just by being in the *jhāna*. "More joy than I have ever felt, ever. Then I came out of third *jhāna*" – this is someone who's spent a lot of time working on this stuff in the past, so it's not their first *jhāna* retreat – "to walk, and everyone seemed like these radiant, translucent Buddhas." Which is what you are, by the way. [laughter] "Wow!" So it doesn't sound like there's a question there, but there's some sharing.

Okay. We should probably end, because my interviews are at seven. Let's just have a bit of quiet together.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everybody, and time for tea.

12-30 Q & A

Before we start today, a request, actually. So you may or may not have realized, but we're not alone at Gaia House, in terms of there are other retreatants here. There are people on personal retreat and people on work retreat. There's been a request to please not talk outside of the Q & A period and interviews – I don't know what exactly is happening – or in your work periods or something. So for their sake, who naturally expected to come on a silent retreat, but also for *your* sake, this idea of actually letting things build, letting the energies build. When there's happiness, and of course, appreciation, very natural, human, you want to share that or talk. And that's important, of course. It's an important part of being human. But in this practice, we're also wanting to let the energies build, and not squander them so much. There will be a chance to talk at the end, share time together verbally at the end of the retreat. But unless it's talking with each other about the work, and what needs doing right then, about whatever yogi job you're doing, just to repeat the initial agreement to sustain silence together.

And can you feel *together* in that silence? Do I need to speak and be heard and exchange that to feel connected? One of the opportunities, as I think already somehow came up in a Q & A, as a retreat gets longer, we get more sensitive, and part of the gift of that sensitivity is that we can feel each other more deeply, more widely, more completely, more openly and sensitively, and we don't need to talk, necessarily. Don't even need to talk to someone, or hear their story, or hear whatever to sense how they're doing, and their personhood, and the particular flavours of their being, and to sense that connection, and the way one can feel very connected across space without all that. So I don't know the details, but the other resident teacher has obviously heard from some yogis or encountered something, so there's a request to all of us to uphold, revisit that commitment together, and keep that. And if it feels like, "Oh, but it's such a nice connection," then I invite you to see, to remind yourself that you can have

that verbal connection at the end of the retreat with each other, and to see: how connected can you feel without words?

And it's to do with the same qualities, really, that we're bringing – if you *want* to feel connected – that we're bringing to this kind of practice anyway, and to me, that are part of what we bring to any practice: sensitivity, openness, receptivity, attunement, etc. It's all the same thing. And if a certain period is a time when you *don't* want to do that, then you just shift the balance of the attention. So if you *are* feeling like, yeah, you're really enjoying and appreciating each other and the connection, let that be more prominent: I'm washing dishes and whatever, and there can be the eye contact and smiling, if you want, without the expectation that it comes back. But the emphasis on the attention is more on that sense of connection, and appreciating it, and feeling it with the whole body, and resonating with it. You can get exquisitely sensitive. Some of you know this on long retreat. You might be sitting right here at the front, and – I don't know how many yards it is to the back of the hall – someone comes in quietly, and you know who it is. How does that happen? If I'm just yap, yap, yapping all the time, I won't develop that kind of sensitivity.

So you can play with the balance of attention, in terms of, if I want that connection, then I can be a little more open. If I'm more inner, maybe I'm working with my primary *nimitta*, maybe I'm processing something inside, maybe I just need to collect my mind and be mindful, whatever it is, then the balance is more inside. Again, it's just context. It's never the case that we want never to talk to anyone, although the Buddha seemed to recommend that almost as a preference for his monks and nuns. But we want to have this freedom and this capacity to do things differently at different times. Really, really important – part of expanding our range and expanding our freedom. Yeah? So we can just revisit that together. Okay? Good.

Okay, so I've got just a few questions from people, and we can take some verbal ones, live ones. [to someone nearby] I have a question. Is this from you? [laughs] Okay. Is there anything anyone would like to ask?

Q1: working with self-doubt around desire

Yogi: So last night before sleeping, I had a *vitakka* and *vicāra* attack, which is a great time to have right before you go to sleep. [laughs] But really appreciating the whole *jhāna* system – kind of a bunch of things you said all came into order, and just really feeling like, “This thing is really brilliant.” Particularly I've been struck by when you said the most important thing about the *jhānas* is working towards a goal, and “Who actually believes me?” And I raised my hand, and then as soon as I raised my hand, I was like, “If Rob asked me why, I would have no idea.” [Rob and yogi laugh] It was just this instinctual hand-raising. As it all came together last night – it was long and extended, but the short of it is, basically, the Buddha setting up “work towards a goal, but the goal necessitates that you let go of clinging and aversion, and even delusion, and get more and more and more subtle,” so all the ways that you would naturally go towards a goal, you're asked to let go of in order to complete that goal. And then along the way, you make the world over and over and over again through dependent origination, and you see that, either through hindrances, or you create a hell realm, or through beauty. And I was like ... *mind blown*.

But the thing that I'm grappling with, after you gave that talk about desire, it struck me so deep, I actually went to my room, and I just wept for an hour. I haven't ever had that kind of response on retreat. I was, like, disturbed – not in necessarily a bad way, but in this deep in my belly kind of way, and went through a whole process. And then, from one way of looking, I can see it as a sort of self-doubt hindrance attack, but this other way of looking, it's like, I felt how important intention and desire is. I mean, I've been listening to you say it for years, like "Desire is a maker of worlds," and I'm like, "Yeah!" But then I got it, and I was like, "Oh." [Rob and yogi laugh] And that's really where I'm struggling, with, like, I can see if I looked at it one way, it's amazing – like, what can I do? But I'm actually just having this response of the gravity of, like, can I live up to my desire, and stick with that intention? Being on this retreat, it's been so beautiful to have the intentions so strongly held, and then I leave, and it's a world where literally your attention and your desire is being grabbed at everywhere. So yeah, I'm just really wondering if there are words around the gravity of intention and grappling with that.

Rob: Thank you, Nicole. I just want to try and make sure I understand. So you mean in your life. The question is really about: now that I've seen how important it is to kind of honour my desire, in the deepest sense of the word 'honour,' and to deeply honour my deepest desires, and I see how difficult that is to do in the world with different things pulling, what would support that? Is that what you're asking?

Yogi: Yeah. I think there's just a lot of self-doubt coming, deep-rooted. My desire is strong, and deep, and it's fast. It's like, yes, I desire the *jhānas*, but way more than the *jhānas*, and it's from mystery and beauty and these things that – do I even know the definition or the depth of which they go? No, I don't. And yet, seeing how intention is going to make my life, I'm just feeling like ... I want it, and can I *do* that? And there's just pain around that.

Rob: So the pain is around not knowing whether you can, and the self-doubt with it?

Yogi: Yeah, feeling the desire and not knowing.

Rob: I don't know you *that* well, but to the degree that I know you, it seems like you *have* done that pretty well in your life so far. But I don't know if you would agree with that. Like I said, I don't know you *that* well yet.

Yogi: Yeah, I guess I can see both. There are times that I've done it very well, and times that I've failed, and I think the times when it fails are very painful. And not so much the not getting the thing, but seeing how I've let intentions fray.

Rob: Yeah, yeah. Okay. There's so much to say about this, but I think what you just said is maybe the key thing: rather than get into "I failed" or "I didn't fail," it's like, "What just happened there?" And "what just happened there" might be over the last ten years with a certain desire, or it might be in one

interaction: “I had a certain desire in a certain situation. Whoa. I just got completely sidetracked, or blocked, or afraid, or inhibited, or lost my risk-taking capability.” So to me, I wonder, from what you’re saying, whether the most important thing – *one* of the most important things – is learning from when you feel like you haven’t lived up to that.

Maybe one of the most important things is actually learning from when something feels like you haven’t lived up to that, you know? What exactly just happened? Was it fear? Was it ...? And then fear of what, you know? What kind of thoughts? What was I believing? Inhibition? Desire has a lot to do with risk-taking as well. How willing am I to feel a fear, and just to take a risk? And that could be a long-term vision risk, or it could be something in the moment, depending on the whole setup of the situation, you know?

So on a big scale, I can think of several junctures in my life where things were – I mean, I shared one about going to do music. Things were really looking very promising from a certain social perspective, in a certain realm, and just went to do something where it was like, “What are you doing?” That’s a kind of long-term risk thing. Or it could be very much in the moment that one’s afraid of taking certain risks. But to identify what just happened, if you really feel like, “Oh, I got lost there. Something happened, and I didn’t live up to my intentions.”

So that’s one thing. Another thing to pull out from what you said is this business of “I don’t quite know even what I’m desiring.” To me, that’s okay. And you’re familiar with the soulmaking teachings. That would actually go with the eros. Eros will create and discover beyonds, some of which are completely nebulous, in terms of I just have a sense of gorgeous, luminous divinities that I don’t quite – I couldn’t articulate them; I can’t even differentiate them in my sense of them, and that’s pulling me, and that’s completely okay. But on the way to that, it wants to translate into actual, practical action. In other words, a full spectrum of desire, a full spectrum of eros, has both very clear choices that it’s asking me to make – here and now, perhaps, or later – *and* kind of more nebulous ones later on. Does that make sense? And that whole thing is part of the fullness of it.

There’s also such a thing as – it’s, to me, worth desiring, and worth longing for, and worth risking something that may well not pay off, that you may well not ever get. So one checks. That’s part of the whole mix as well: “Is it okay not to get this thing, and yet still to give myself completely to it?” Again, if we think imaginally, then if there’s desire and eros for something, there will be, in that whole constellation, an image or images associated with that very desire – the angel who wants that, the self that’s desiring. Out of the very fire of the desire and the eros, there should constellate other images which want you to move towards that, or something that beckons you from what it is that you love and long for. Does that make sense? And they can take very potent imaginal forms, so let them do that as well.

And then it relates to someone else’s question as well: if you really want certain things in life, you’re going to piss some people off, and disappoint some people, and people will consider you selfish or this or that, or people will consider you maybe – depending on what you want, some people will consider you, “Why is she less available? Why is she this or that for me, for them?”, whatever. And that’s also part of what you have to deal with. You can’t satisfy everyone. So depending on your kind of – I don’t know what to call it – relational empathic sensitivity, which you may have to quite a degree, you’re actually going to feel the pain of that quite a lot, and very easy for you to feel guilty and feel

like you have to take care of this person or that person, or why you're not available, or why you're choosing to do *this* rather than *that*. So that's a way, often, that deep, strong desires get sidetracked, that we feel beholden, in a way, to explain ourselves, or to give people, or this or that, something else, what they want. So it's hard. It's hard to be in the world, and it's even harder when people don't really understand what it is you're desiring, or they don't value it, or they think it's not that worthwhile or whatever, or they don't think you'll be able to get it – lots of things, you know?

So that's quite hard. Someone who's more kind of – I don't know what the word is – emotionally less sensitive, emotionally less pulled on in relationship by others' needs and wishes and pain, actually has an easier time with that. I don't know – is any of this addressing what you're ...?

Yogi: Yeah, it is.

Rob: We could probably talk all day and night about it because it's a huge subject. Is there any more you want to say?

Yogi: No, I think that's it.

Rob: Okay. Then one more thing. So it sounds like what happened was potent, and in that potency, again, there are lots of different things going on. So one of the things that was going on was this self-doubt, you know? But I would wager there were lots of other things going on, and some of them were probably very beautiful, and probably very empowering. This ability – again, same deal – it's like, okay, all this is going on; you could actually visit every frequency and emotion that had been going on in there. But some of them, when you get to them, will be very potentially empowering, like I said. So here's a self-doubt. Obviously that's potentially *disempowering*. It needs attention, partly for that very reason. I need to understand it.

But there might be within it, just for example: here's this thing I really, really want, and I feel that wanting, and in that wanting – another way of saying it is, here's this thing I'm *devoted to*, and that devotion, or this devotion and this longing, I can feel energetically. I can feel it emotionally and energetically. And that's something that I can really sit with – even if what I want is actually vague, I'm not yet clear, but the fire of it is clear, and the energy of it is clear, and the devotion in it is clear. So rather than worrying too much about getting the clarity right now about what the object is, I can come back and be with my sense of devotion, which I might even get – at first it feels like it's somewhere in the mass of burning and confused, you know; somewhere in there is my devotion. And when I sit with my devotion, it naturally *samādhifies* the being around it. It harmonizes and energizes, and I can feel that uprightness. The longer I sit with that, with that uprightness and that sense of devotion, and I let it shape my energy body – and that's a kind of prayer, even though I'm not clear exactly what I'm praying to – it *does* something to the body and the psyche, regularly sitting in that and feeling one's alignment. So you can do that for a long time. You can do that for a short time. But it will do something.

Yogi: Yeah, that's a bit what happened. It was useful to look for the hindrance in it, and then sort of tend to that, which I did by devoting this retreat to a teacher that I mentor who suffers from self-doubt a lot, and so I sort of bring her into the sits, especially when that comes up, and for that part of it, use that, and then a kind of fire of devotion. I was aware that, once that was taken care of, there was actually – it was vague, but a sense of what I was longing for, at least just in kind of the energy body, and that really kicked the practice into another gear the next day after that.

Rob: Good.

Yogi: But it kind of came back last night as the sort of system of *jhānas*, and what we're doing, and maybe why you said that thing about why working towards a goal is so important. So it wobbles.

Rob: What's wobbling?

Yogi: Going between kind of feeling overwhelmed by the power of that desire, and “Can I meet it?”, and just feeling the power of the desire. It kind of wobbles back and forth.

Rob: Yeah. And, you know, again, if we just talk about imaginal practice, the very doubt, and wobble, and fear, and whatever it is, if I let myself go into that, out of *that* will come an image, potentially: the one who, in relation to what they love most deeply and long for, feels very unsure of themselves. The *dukkha* of that can – you have to go into it, though; you're not trying to pacify it, or talk your way, or reassure it. You're actually letting that constellate as an image, yeah? So it might get clear *what* I'm desiring, but it also gets clear just the desire itself, and I begin to trust that more and more, let that empower the whole being, yeah? Okay. Great. Yeah, we could talk a lot more, but that's good.

Some other people had their hands up earlier. Victor, yeah, please.

Q2: different meanings and levels of equanimity

Yogi: I wanted to tease out the term ‘equanimity.’ I mean, you've mentioned it a few times, and I think you said the ordinary use in English of ‘equanimity’ doesn't quite cover what happens in *jhāna* states. I was struck by how, from what I gather, Bhikkhu Anālayo uses the term ‘equipoise’ as the translation of *upekkhā*, and I think because he says equanimity, as a term, can have a dampening effect. Thoughts?

Rob: Yeah, thank you. I'm going to talk more about equanimity tomorrow, but we can say a few things now. Equanimity, as a term in English – I'm not sure if I even *heard* it before Buddhist sort of speak. But what's called the ‘near enemy’ in Dharma of equanimity is indifference. So that may be what Anālayo is pointing to – something that can look like equanimity, but actually it's a little bit ...

Yogi: Actually, I think he said it in the context that pleasure could be seen in the context of, “Well, there's pleasure here, but *dukkha* somewhere else,” so it takes the brightness off, the term ‘equanimity,’ compared to ‘equipoise,’ which is sort of like a balanced stance.

Rob: Yeah, okay. I'm really happy with the word equipoise. I'm not sure about the word equanimity. *Anima* is – equal soul, equal animation is probably what it comes from, so 'equal' what – passion? Does that take the brightness off, or does it not take the brightness off? Equanimity is actually – we can talk about it very briefly, or we can talk really, really a lot about it, and once we start inquiring into it, it's actually quite complex. I was trying to remember ... I think *upekkhā*, I think there's somewhere or other where I trace the word. Now I can't remember. I think, in Sanskrit, *upekṣā*, and the *īkṣā*, *upa* + *īkṣā*, and I think that's to do – 'equal seeing,' so 'seeing things equally.' You could say it's equally poised in the sense that there's a balance between this and that, and even between pain and pleasure. So at one level, yeah, that would be a good translation. Here I perceive pleasure, here I perceive *dukkha* or whatever, and the being is equipoised – it's not leaning towards the pleasure, or away from the *dukkha*. At one level, yeah, that would be a good word – balance of mind, something like that. And that's good at a certain level. That's really fine at a certain level.

I'm just wondering whether I should talk about it now, or wait till tomorrow.

Yogi: Oh, I'm happy for you to wait.

Rob: Yeah? Let's see.

Yogi: I mean, for me, the bigger picture is the effect of the term 'equanimity' in Buddhist communities in relation to the climate issues. That's the background.

Rob: Yeah, thank you. Yeah. I don't actually use the term much. I actually think equanimity is a bit of a – it doesn't really exist, which I'll explain, I hope. But the other thing is exactly because of that – because it very easily becomes a shadow for Buddhists, so that equanimity in relation to something like climate change very easily goes to a kind of indifference, or to whatever – whatever social injustice, racial injustice. Could be anything. So we have to be really careful. Now, of course we all teach that, that the near enemy of equanimity is indifference. It's still there as a really dangerous edge.

Maybe say this for now: there's one *level* of equanimity, as I said, which is a kind of important but more superficial level. So when the Buddha talks about equanimity in terms of the eight worldly conditions – have you heard that? There's praise/blame, success/failure, gain/loss, and pleasure/pain. And then we could put this other translation, equipoise. And so, at this superficial level of understanding, a good practitioner views those things, is kind of indifferent (in the best sense of the word) between [them] – doesn't mind if it's success or failure; doesn't mind if it's gain or loss; doesn't mind if it's praise or blame, at one level. Of course, we can refine that a little bit and say, even with relation to climate change, "Yes, I care," and this is how it *should* be, equanimity in the context of the *brahmavihāras*, equanimity in the context of really caring, passionately, really with a lot of *mettā*, with a lot of compassion for what's happening in the world, and the suffering that something like climate change is already delivering for so many people. There is the compassion, ideally. There is the *mettā*. There should also be the engagement as well. *And* it might be that the ship is sinking, and *that's* where the equanimity comes in, that one isn't going to be incapacitated in one's efforts, or totally

incapacitated by grief, and disempowered by grief or worry or fear. That's the best sense of equanimity at that level. Does that make sense?

Then there's a whole other level of equanimity, which I think maybe I'll speak about tomorrow, and that has more to do with this other possible etymology, *upa* + *īkṣā* in Sanskrit, and the *īkṣā* is 'seeing things equally.' But we're getting into equanimity as we get into the third *jhāna*, which we already talked about, and then more in the fourth *jhāna*, and then as we relate to insight. I'll say it very briefly. Let's take this polarity, pleasure and pain, or pleasant and unpleasant. In a way, I've already said this. So the usual reaction to the pleasant is to want it, and to try and hold it, and to try and grasp it, and try and bring it towards me, and the usual reaction to the unpleasant is to try and push it away, right? That push and pull of grasping and aversion, to the degree that they are present in the consciousness at any moment is the degree to which equanimity is *not* present. You could define it that way. Does that make sense?

So as I practise, in one way or another, letting go in the moment – this is not a way to live one's life; it's *completely* not a way to live one's life. It's a practice in the moment of letting go of any pushing away of anything that I notice, at any level, in the moment, and letting go or calming any pulling towards me or hanging on, at any level, in the moment. If I just practise that (and there are lots of different ways of doing that), then I notice there's a calming in the being, and that calming is part of what equanimity is and looks like. But it doesn't *stop* there. If I keep doing it, I will then begin to notice that the very perception – which may be the *īkṣā*, the eyes – the seeing of the pleasant and unpleasant begins to change. The very sense of them begins to change, and what's unpleasant becomes less unpleasant, and what's pleasant may, for a little while, get *more* pleasant, and then it goes towards more neutral until, in the end, everything becomes a kind of neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant *vedanā*. But it doesn't stop there either. It goes even deeper, and if I keep doing this and keep doing this, the actual sensation begins to disappear. So you're letting go – at really, really, more and more deep and subtle levels, we're letting go of push-pull, letting go of push-pull, letting go of push-pull. So it's gone way beyond a state of calmness in response to, or a state of okayness in response to pleasure and pain. It's actually effecting or fabricating the very perceptions of pleasure and pain. Is this making sense?

Yogi: Yeah.

Yogi 2: Theoretically.

Rob: Vaguely? Theoretically? Yeah. These are practices. And I can say this a thousand times: until you actually know how to practise this, put it into practice, and see it for yourself – and there's a whole range here. So eventually what happens is not just pleasure and pain disappear, but the very sensations disappear, and then actually the very world disappears. Self disappears, world disappears, *da-da-da-da*. Time disappears. In that state, we're not talking about equanimity in relation to anything that's pleasant or unpleasant, but it's a deep level of equanimity. That's partly why I think equanimity is actually a thing that doesn't exist, because by the time you've got real equanimity, there's nothing to be equanimous *about*.

But anyway. Equanimity is a big subject, it's complex, and it's very much interwoven with the territory we'll get on to as we go on to the fourth *jhāna* and the other *jhānas*, and how that meets with insight. But in terms of what you're saying about climate change – and I know what a concern that is for you, and how passionate and dedicated you are, and also living in Australia, where there's really not that much consciousness, it seems, about it at the moment – it's really, really important that we don't use (and it could be in any spiritual tradition) certain teachings to brush over or hide our noblest responses, etc.

Yogi: Good. Thanks.

Rob: Okay? Yeah. Is that Monica at the back? Please, yeah.

Q3: the relationship of seclusion from the hindrances and the quietening of pushing and pulling; the fabricated nature of desire

Yogi: Thank you, Rob, for mentioning the push and pull, which you also spoke about when you described the third *jhāna*. When you mentioned in the third *jhāna*, you mentioned something like a peacefulness that arises from quietening the push and pull. And I have a question regarding that, because if I remember correctly, when you read the description of the first *jhāna*, it was something in the lines of “secluded from the hindrances.” So I was under the impression that we were done with the push and pull in the first *jhāna* already, because greed and aversion weren't present any more, which are the push and pull. So if we're already secluded from the hindrances, where is this push and pull coming from? I'm confused.

Rob: Yeah, thank you. It's really important. Yeah, it depends. I use the word ‘clinging,’ and ‘push and pull’ is just another word for clinging, for me. But I use that word in a very elastic way, so that there are very obvious manifestations of clinging – very obvious manifestations, like the hindrances, for instance – but that's really just one level, okay? And as you say, when we let go of the hindrances, a certain amount of clinging, a certain amount of push-pull, has gone from our experience, but it's enough that then the being, the energy body and the being, feel *really* good. First *jhāna* kind of arises.

But as I said, I use that word as having a range of depths and subtlety that ... I don't know, maybe in the Dharma world, there are a lot of teachings that don't use that word so much, so it stays like quite a gross thing: either there is clinging, or there isn't, and then that often goes with teachings like “either there is a self, the self was there, or it's not.” But I view all these words – self, and clinging, and all of that – as spectra, and they go really, really, really subtle, so that by the time we get to the third or fourth *jhāna*, the amount of push and pull is way less, you know? So let's say that. But even there – and I'll repeat this as we get into more territory – it doesn't stop there. There's really, really subtle clinging and push-pull even in the fourth *jhāna*. Now, I'm sure a lot of people wouldn't agree, but that's how I use those words. How does that sound for now?

Yogi: Yeah, I understand. So it's really the degree of push and pull, where in the spectrum we are in the push and pull that goes [to] more and more subtle levels.

Rob: Yeah, yeah. And in a way, you could say, one way of understanding what's happening in the *jhānas* is that we're just letting go of clinging at a deeper level or to more refined things that we hadn't even [considered]: "How do you cling to consciousness, or ...?" So we tend to think of clinging, as I said, in English, and in a lot of Dharma, it refers to something that's actually quite gross: clinging, craving, and all that. But I really mean them as open-ended terms. Let's just see where the limit is. And it's the very (A) stillness and subtlety of the attention that allows us to see where that clinging is more subtly, but (B) it's also framing the teachings, from the beginning, in a way that doesn't define things in a limited way. So if I define clinging as something gross, then I'm not going to look for any more subtle clinging. But if I define it in this more open way, right from the beginning, then it's a question of, "Oh, maybe there's more. I have to get still and sensitive." So I have to get down to a certain level of very little clinging to see when there's even less. Does that make sense?

So that's the kind of way I like to present things. That whole process, that whole investigation of letting go of more and more clinging, is what I would call an insight investigation. Like I said, any insight way of looking, which means any insight practice as I would frame it and teach it, is doing just that. In one way or another, that's the primary thing it's doing. It may *look* like it's doing something very different, but that's primarily what it's doing. And then, at certain points, you may just be able to follow the same practice into deeper and deeper or more and more subtle levels of clinging, deeper and deeper letting go, or you may need to kind of tweak the practice a little bit so that you can get into the subtler and subtler levels of letting go. The way we're practising *jhāna* at the moment is we're not really thinking so much about letting go of clinging and "Where's the clinging?" There is a way – and I hope to get to it on this retreat – there is a way of practising *jhāna* where that's actually how you move from one *jhāna* to another: you identify the clinging and you let go, and let go, and that takes you to another level. But at the moment, that's not really how we're approaching things. We're approaching more through just getting into it, letting it ripen, enjoying it, opening to it. So in a way, we're approaching more just trusting the *samādhi* intention of enjoying and getting into something, and trusting that will naturally ripen in this process.

So when I mentioned the other day that the equanimity of the third *jhāna* arises from attenuating the push-pull, in a way, that's more just a, "Let's understand kind of technically what's really happening here." For most of you at this point, the methodology to get to the third *jhāna* is actually more through just get into the second *jhāna* and really get satisfied. Now, we could see that satisfaction as "Because I'm satisfied, I don't need to push-pull so much any more." So it's a deep level of letting go of push-pull, but it's not the end. There's more. It gets subtler than that. So that point was more just a kind of, yeah, wanting to be really precise about understanding things, and trying to weave things together in terms of the understanding; less about the practice. Does that make sense? Okay. Good.

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Yes, you're welcome. Oh, is there more?

Yogi: Since I have the microphone ...

Rob: [laughs] Okay, yeah, sure.

Yogi: I don't know if it's really a question or a comment, but I benefit from having the microphone, because I already had this in my mind to ask. It's following up from what Nicole was commenting on – desire. I have been reflecting on this over the years. In some of your talks, where you ask, “What do you *really* want? What do you want?” And the other day, “What's your deepest desire? What's your calling?” And the question that came to my mind was about the fabricated nature of desire, because as I reflect on my own desire, it has evolved over time, since I first started to practise, over the years, to a large degree influenced by what I've been exposed to, and accounts of great enlightened beings, and great masters, and your own accounts. And you said something to that yesterday when you said something like, “It depends what you've been exposed to.” I don't see my notes right now, but I'm paraphrasing. So when I ask myself that question, “What am I desiring?”, it's not like there is something there that is my desire, that I'm trying to discover or get to, but that it is fabricated, that I am creating my desire. I don't know if it's so much of a question, but is there anything you would say to that?

Rob: I would, and in fact, somehow you've brought it up with me before, and so in the last series of talks that I recorded at home, I spent about half an hour answering that. It's there somewhere. Don't ask me which talk it's in – somewhere in forty-five hours of ... [laughter] You'll find it at some point, I guess! But just to say something quickly now. Yeah, so, again, it a little bit relates to what Marco was asking yesterday. We *could* say desire is fabricated. But if our understanding of that (or if we're holding that as a view) ends up disempowering our desire – I say, “Well, it's all fabricated, so I'll just throw it ...” – that's not a very helpful view. At other times, regarding my desire for this or that as fabricated is really skilful, because it helps me let go of what's probably a desire that's just going to maybe give me a little sugar hit, but is actually miserable. So are many of our desires, or all desires – what desires are fabricated? Yeah. Gosh, can you get through a day out there without being assaulted by a million advertisements? And then whatever culture you move in tells you – as you said, you get exposed to not even stories; it's just like how people walk, or how people talk, or how people present their emotional range. We're barraged by that all through.

So just to say for now: yeah, that's absolutely true. I would turn the question around and say, okay, of all these different desires and these moving desires that I notice in myself – you know, they change over time; they change in where I am and whatever. Two things. This goes back to Nicole's question. When they move, can I notice what was significant in moving them? So for example, I might have this great desire, and someone or a couple of people just say something, and it's a little bit ridiculing, and then I find that my desire is gone. It could be a million different things. Or I have this desire, and I'm just relaxing, watching TV, and I have a beer or whatever it is, and then the desire has gone, and somehow it wasn't there the next day, or it isn't there the next day. One's investigating the conditions. It's a hard thing, if we go back to what we said with Nicole. It's a hard thing. If desire is a flame, it's a

hard thing to not get blown out, you know? And then all kinds of other flames are ignited by things – advertisements, and peer pressure, and who knows what, and indoctrination from cultures and sub-cultures we’re in. But that’s one thing: to actually investigate what moves it, what blows it out.

But the second thing, with that, I think, is investigating the sense of a desire, okay? And I think if you compare your desire for two different things – an obviously ridiculous example would be your desire to eat a certain food or whatever, versus something else – you can actually feel when a desire is deeper in you. There’s a qualitative and quantitative difference. But we need to really begin sensing into the differences there, and learning to kind of notice, tune into, and take care of the deeper desires. But introspectively, there should be differences that you can tell. That’s a short answer for now, and there is really – and I was thinking very much, because somehow it had come up between us at some point, and I devoted a chunk of time to it on those recordings.

The other thing with all this is, some people have patterns – in fact, it’s quite common to have patterns that ... This is a *jhāna* retreat, not a desire retreat! [laughter] But anyway. I have talked about it a lot, and I think it’s important, but I don’t want to spend the whole time talking about it. It’s good to know oneself in relation to desire. What I see is that that’s quite rare, as well, that a person really knows: “I know my patterns with desire.” It’s not “I know what I want,” but “I actually know what happens in me with desires.” So some people, the flame can’t get going. Some people, the flame goes, and they can’t tolerate it. Some people get confused or distracted by other ignitions that get thrown from all kinds of other ... Some people, the flame bursts up, and then somehow they don’t really follow through, or they say, “I’m going to do this, and I’m going to do that,” and it doesn’t really follow through. What’s happened? What happened over those months or whatever it is, that one isn’t a person of one’s word? So it’s really good to know oneself in relation to these things. I think it’s really, really important. And I really meant it the other day when I said, in terms of significance of teachings, this is a much more significant teaching than anything I might tell you about how to move from one *jhāna* to another – maybe even than the *jhānas* themselves. In fact, I would say that. It’s like, really understanding ourselves, and really becoming mature in relation to desire. And it’s huge. But there are a lot of aspects to that – a lot, lot, lot of aspects to it, and I’ve spoken about it a lot on recordings and things. Is that okay for now? Yeah?

Yogi: Thank you.

Q4: difference between mental and physical feelings, reifying the energy body vs seeing it as not a real thing

Rob: Okay. I’ve got a couple of written ones. Should I do that, or someone else right now? I’ve got a couple from *you* here! [laughs] Let me do someone else’s one, and then we’ll come back. So,

I’m exploring *sukha* and its different nuances – the buoyant and bubbly, and more recently, its soft, gentle aspect. I’m enjoying it. I feel absorbed into it. But a question keeps arising for me, again and again, about the difference between a mental feeling and a physical one. What is a mental feeling or an emotion exactly? What *isn’t* a mental

feeling or an emotion exactly? I thought that all feelings could only actually be felt in the body. I do have a sense of feeling the mental aspect/emotion, but it's not really clear where in the body I'm feeling it. It just feels all over, so it's harder to probe than with the *pīti*. Yesterday, you spoke about tuning into a frequency in the energy body, which I do, but isn't the energy body just imaginary? Maybe I'm just experiencing the hindrance of doubt. If you can distil this somewhat lengthy question and offer any answers, that would be much appreciated.

Yeah, this is important. Thank you. So there are a few things, a few questions sort of woven in there. "What is a mental feeling or an emotion exactly?" It's a really complex thing, is what it is. Usually, I would say an emotion has several aspects to it. It usually has some kind of thought content, or a *type* of thought content associated with it. Of course, once you get into the *jhāna*, then it's like emotions free of thoughts. It also usually has a kind of texture of the mind. It's like the mind feels like it has a certain texture to it – agitated, or spacious, or calm, or whatever, but even more subtle than that. But it also has a bodily aspect to it. So at least those three aspects, plus probably beliefs and a whole network of other things, are part of the complexes that we call 'emotions.' This business about "Oh, *sukha* is an emotional thing, and *pīti* ...", two things about that. One is it's a thing from Abhidhamma. I don't necessarily subscribe to that. Abhidhamma is Buddhist psychology, and it tends to have a certain way of framing things that, you know, sometimes it's useful, I find, and sometimes really not useful. So it's classified that when *sukha* or something like that, "This is a mental feeling. This is a *this*. This is a *that*." They like putting things in categories, and it's all very sort of black and white, and very simple-sounding, but there are lots and lots of categories of different things.

So an emotion, to me, is actually a complex thing. When we get down to *jhānic* emotion – like, let's say, the *sukha* – in a way, you're talking about a simpler thing, but I would still say it's felt two ways. It's felt in the body, and again, in *jhānic* terms, that's the primary thing, because every time the Buddha says, with the first four *jhānas*, "The practitioner pervades and permeates, suffuses and saturates, drenches and steeps, etc., their whole body with that quality." So most people, I think, who haven't practised meditation or energy body awareness would just be a bit baffled by that. What does it mean to have, let's say, happiness in one's whole body? I mean, some people might get it, but generally ... and then to *focus* on that. But this is really the primary thing in *jhāna* practice. It's the energetic vibration, the energy body vibration, so to speak, or frequency, which *is* an aspect of an emotion. Now, there's a mental one as well. Where is that mental one? Well, it's in the mind. But where's the mind? I don't know. It doesn't really matter. What matters in terms of practice is the primary thing is body, body, body, energy body, energy body, energy body.

Let me backtrack and say one more thing about this *pīti* and *sukha* business. I've said it already. At first, when people are opening to all this, I will say something like "*Pīti* is a physical feeling, and then *sukha* is an emotional one." It's a white lie, okay? It's just something that helps people differentiate those two at first. But after a while, it should be like, "Well, actually, they're both kind of physical. They're just different vibrations physically, or different ranges of vibrations physically." So it was just a little piggyback idea, but basically, they're vibrations in the body.

And then this second sort of piece of question here. “I do have a sense of feeling the mental aspect or emotion, but it’s not really clear where in the body I’m feeling it. It just feels all over.” So that’s perfect. That’s what we want: “Permeates and pervades the whole body.” That’s exactly what we want. I feel it all over, even homogeneously all over. “So it’s harder to probe than with the *pīti*.” Not necessarily. Sometimes, say, when the *pīti* or the *sukha* feels stronger in some place – so you’ve got three scenarios. **(1)** You’ve got a scenario that it hasn’t spread yet, and it *won’t* spread this session, and then, okay, that’s where I do my probing, obviously. I stop trying to spread it, but that’s where I do my probing. **(2)** You’ve got a second scenario where it’s spread, but it’s not 100 per cent homogenous, and then I take the strongest area, and that’s where I do my probing. **(3)** The third scenario is, it’s completely spread, and it’s completely homogenous, and then I just choose a random place. It doesn’t matter, if it’s homogenous, and I just go into it at one point. It’s like a person diving into a swimming pool. They’re diving in at one point, but once they dive in – or a lake – that very diving, that very penetrating, might make them feel like they’re in a different terrain. It might take them to another level at that process. So you can just choose any place and do that.

“Yesterday, you spoke about tuning into a frequency in the energy body, which I do, but isn’t the energy body just imaginary?” Well, the energy body is no more imaginary than anything else is imaginary. So, again, it’s one of those things – it’s like, sometimes it’s really helpful for me, I feel, or I sense, for a particular person at a particular time, to take the energy body as a real thing. And of course, there are loads of schools of yoga and healing and all kinds of things, shamanistic healing, that take the energy body as a real thing. That’s fine. I’m a little – *ngh*; talk about subtle body or energy body, and it’s reified. It’s fine, but I really think that has limits. The thing about the energy body, or one of the things about the energy body that’s really important to understand, is that it’s very amenable to our imagination. So that’s not quite the same thing as saying it’s totally imaginary, because when we say something’s imaginary, we tend to then pooh-pooh it relative to something else. That’s why I said it’s as imaginary as anything else, maybe. But the energy body, as *we’re* playing with it, is very sensitive and susceptible and responsive to our imagination, so that *if* I imagine the energy moving in a certain way from my energy body, lo and behold, that’s what I will experience in the energy body if I keep doing that. Make sense?

And then with other people, or the same person at a different time, it’s like, “Okay, enough now with this kind of reifying of the energy body. You’ve been doing that for years.” And again, it’s a bit like what Jason was asking yesterday, or someone else, about locks and unblocking things. One can get kind of obsessed about this, as if the whole of practice is sort of getting my energy body to feel a certain way. For those people, I might say, “You know, it’s not a real thing. Actually what’s more deeply real, or more usefully seen as real, is just the idea that we’re playing with perception.” So I don’t think it’s doubt, so much as some clarity was needed there. Does that sound okay? I can’t see back there. Can you just ...? Yes? Okay, good. Thank you.

Okay. Very good.

Q5: bright light *nimitta*

Rob: I think these are useful, anyway, for other people, so I’m going to say them.

Which *jhāna* does that second bright light *nimitta* appear in?

So the bright light – this is quite common for some people – can appear in any *jhāna*, or even before a *jhāna*. It's what I call a secondary *nimitta*. It's just an indication that the *samādhi* is going well. Some people get it, very associated with the first *jhāna*. Some people, it only comes in the fourth *jhāna*. Some people, it never comes. Some people, it's just their access concentration or whatever. So it's not particular to a *jhāna*. It's just a secondary *nimitta*. In other words, it's not of primary importance, unless we really mix it with the primary *nimitta*, and get into it that way.

Q6: spectrum of equanimity in *jhāna*

Rob: And second question,

Did you say that *jhānas* one to four had equanimity in them?

No, I didn't say that, but the Buddha said *jhānas* three and four had equanimity in them. I was saying, "Hold on, that's a little misleading." We really need to unpack what's primary in *jhānas* three and four (it's the peacefulness – and I'll explain that *jhāna* four tomorrow), and unpack this whole idea of equanimity, because as we've been talking about a little bit today, it's actually quite a complex idea. We need to kind of go a little more carefully. From another point of view, and relating to Monica's question, yeah, you could say each *jhāna* has some degree of equanimity to it, because equanimity – most things are not on/off switches, either you have equanimity or you don't. You have some *degree* of equanimity. So the first *jhāna*, even when it's, you know, you have to peel me off the ceiling because it's just ecstasy like that, it's actually got *some* degree of equanimity in it, in relation to other things, you know?

So a lot of these things, a lot of Dharma concepts, are really not on/off, black or white. They're really spectra. And if we think of them as on/off, we're actually – a bit like what I said about clinging, or self, a lot of people report, "I was meditating, and then there was no self," or *da-da-da*, and it's like, "No. Think about it more as a spectrum, because what you're calling 'no self' at the moment is actually just a much less fabricated sense of self. It's just lower down on the spectrum." And if I have that idea of spectra – I'm repeating what I said before – in relation to equanimity, in relation to self, in relation to clinging, all these other words, then actually that's going to enable me to notice way more than I would have noticed if I just had a view of "Either there is self, or there isn't self in a moment. Either self is being fabricated, or it isn't. Either there's equanimity, or there isn't." So this idea of a spectrum which just goes subtler and subtler, and it's part of the beauty and the art to trace it and understand it – that's really, really important. Okay. Is there something else? Oh, I thought you had another question. [inaudible response from yogi] Is she allowed another one? Shall we vote? [laughter] Yeah, go for it. Go for it.

Q7: flavours of contentment in third *jhāna*

Yogi: Okay. I think this question is about, like, territories, territory and responsiveness. I think a lot of this retreat I've been trying to figure out how to stay in one territory. I'm working in the third *jhāna* space, and I'm wondering about when you talked about contentment being one of the things, one of the levels. I've noticed that there are edges that I drop out into another space, and one of them is with the contentment. I'm really trying to figure out the edge of where that is, of how far down to go in my experience of what's coming up in terms of contentment there. I notice in the middle range there's a very kind of – like the way you very much described the atmosphere of that space of the third *jhāna*, like with contentment. And then when I go lower ... So there was a kind of sense of, like, perfect contentment, like a kind of quite light feeling of it. But then I notice I can go really very, very low with the contentment, and still have the qualities of *sukha* and peacefulness, but the contentment is quite a lot bigger. It's more a kind of deep well of rich contentment feeling, rather than, like, perfect contentment kind of feeling. I'm just wondering how – is that still within the range?

Rob: So when you go deeper, the contentment is not perfect? Is that what you're saying?

Yogi: No, it gets more kind of – rather than quite light and gentle, not quite uplifting but more like light and gentle, it becomes more rich and deeper, in my experience.

Rob: But it still feels like perfect contentment?

Yogi: Yeah, yeah.

Rob: That's fine. Yeah, the contentment thing, it's not the *primary* thing. It's just kind of me pointing out a bandwidth, that if you really want to get into all this stuff and develop the kind of sensitivity to all these different levels, then it's a good thing to know, and it's a good thing to hang out with. Might it take different kind of flavours and colours at different times? Yeah. But the primary thing is the contentment, and it really feels like it's really, really satisfying – I mean, extremely satisfying. Then you're still in the contentment. Does that ...? Okay, good.

[pause questions]

I want to just say a couple more little things. Again, just the real encouragement to marinate, yeah? Especially if different things are opening, it can be very tempting to want to just slide around everywhere and check out, “Oh, what's this? What's that?” But as we've been emphasizing right from the beginning, the fruits of this particular set of practices, what we call *jhāna* practice, will come from marinating, which means many, many times, over and over, just putting yourself, submerging yourself, and holding, sustaining something for as long as you can – hour, two hours, longer, three, whatever, four. Just sit in something, over and over and over. That's going to be doing something to mind, heart, and body, that just won't get the chance to happen if we're sliding around too much.

If you've done a lot of soulmaking and imaginal practice, oftentimes one doesn't actually ... One of the amazing things about soulmaking practice is just a couple of minutes sometimes with an image can be incredibly potent. It's also true that a couple of minutes with a *jhāna* can be incredibly potent, but it's much more the case that if we really marinate for much longer in a *jhāna*, it's going to do something that it won't do in just a couple of minutes. So it's actually quite rare for a soulmaking practitioner or an imaginal practitioner to really just spend hours and hours and hours revisiting the same image, and just really, really being with that. At least *I* haven't kind of put that out as an offering, and I haven't heard anyone really do that. That's not really what we're doing so much with imaginal practices.

There's a difference here. I'm just going to say this very briefly, because I know some of you don't know this territory at all about Soulmaking Dharma. I'll just say this very briefly for those of you that do. In case you *are* a soulmaker, and you find yourself actually taking the same kind of rhythms into *jhāna* practice, which is just moving quite quickly, and all these lovely, amazing things opening up, when we're with an image, when we're with an erotic-imaginal image, when there's eros for an image (and I don't mean by that *sexual* eros, necessarily; it *could* mean that, but more than that), we're doing something different. We're resonating and being with it, but we want to maintain the twoness. Remember this from soulmaking teachings? *Why*? Because eros needs twoness. Eros needs the polarity, and the imaginal needs the eros. Without the eros, the imaginal folds, and without the twoness, the eros folds, and therefore the imaginal folds.

In *jhāna* practice, actually what we're doing is, as much as we can, that's the **A** of SASSIE – can I dissolve into this? Can I kind of dissolve my body into the peacefulness or whatever? So in imaginal practice, the duality is maintained, and self doesn't dissolve into its object. There's not that in even intentional direction. We maintain this polarity, this erotic tension between self and imaginal object, lovely as that is. We're not letting it collapse into oneness.

In *jhāna* practice, the movement is actually to let it dissolve. In imaginal practice, the self also might start to become imaginal: here's this wonderful imaginal object, and the self also starts to become imaginal. In *jhāna* practice, the self should become less and less of a sense of self. Back to the spectrum of self, there's actually less and less of a self. It's more and more dissolved. So these are really, really important differences. The movement is towards less, we could say, less polarity, less duality in *jhāna* practice, whereas in imaginal practice, you're actually sustaining – not *always*, but for the most part, you want to sustain some sense of duality and polarity. Sometimes you can let yourself dissolve that way a little bit, merge, union and all that, but if you do too much of that, it will just dissolve the whole thing.

Do we ever reach a state of complete non-duality in *jhāna* practice? No, no matter what it might feel like, etc. Again, here's one of those spectra. It's a spectrum of less and less separation – not necessarily as you go more and more from one to eight, but your experience of, say, *jhāna* number four at different times might be more or less separate, dualistic, etc., because duality is also a word that I consider a spectrum. It's very easy to say, "Oh, that was a completely non-dualistic experience, and the self was gone, and *blah blah blah*." It's probably not. In fact, it's *definitely* not. If there's a *jhāna*, in *my* way of understanding this, there's still some duality. But still, because the **A** is open-ended in SASSIE, the movement is towards less duality. Does this make sense for the soulmakers? So there's a difference

there. Just check if you're skidding around too much, and "Oh, that's a different modality. That's a different rhythm." And in the *jhāna*, it's really towards dissolving – *towards* dissolving; you will never completely dissolve. However absorbed you are, however great the **A** is of SASSIE, there can be more. Yeah? So just to delineate between those two.

Yeah? Just give me a second here, because I need to say a couple of things. Okay, yeah, let's try.

Q8: eros in relationship to the *jhānas*

Yogi: I feel like I have a strong erotic relationship to the *jhānas*, and I've had since *pīti* began to arise. So the way I experience absorption in the *jhāna* is kind of – yeah, it's a temporary absorption, but I also have like this long-term relationship with a *jhāna*, which is soulful and erotic in a sense, and it's very central in my experience of them. So would you think it's ...?

Rob: Yeah, so I mentioned this very briefly one time; there's so much information. I'll say it again, if I understand what you're saying, Keren. Again, it's not a soulmaking retreat, but just very briefly. So in Soulmaking Dharma, we talk about eros, and we define eros as this wanting or movement towards more intimacy, more closeness, more touching, more penetration, more opening, etc., with whatever it is – and that could be a *jhāna*; it could be an imaginal person or whatever. But that definition is, if you like, the seed definition. The larger definition of eros is, okay, it does that, there's that movement, but in doing that, it ignites and stimulates the whole soulmaking dynamic, which involves psyche and logos as well. And when psyche and logos get expanded, the object becomes bigger, and richer, and more multifaceted, and more complex, has more beyonds, and then the self becomes image as well.

So *outside* of meditation, outside of *jhāna* meditation, one might have – and ideally, to get the engines really going, and the whole relationship with it – one does have an erotic relationship, there is eros in relation to the *jhānas* in the bigger sense, in the wider sense. There's a whole image. There's a self-image – me on the path, me and the history, me and the teacher, me and the *jhānas*, that territory, their mystical sense. But that's *outside* of meditation. *In* the meditation, it's eros in the smaller sense. We're not letting it go to psyche and logos, because that's a kind of proliferation, and we want it simple: "It's *this* thing, and I'm just dissolving into it." We don't let the self become image. We don't let the thing become more complex, in a way. We actually want to get more into it like that. So it's different – there's eros, but it's the small version, the seed definition. Does that make sense? Okay. We can talk about it another time, but that's, I think, yeah, quite an important distinction.

[pause questions]

There are just a couple of other things, if it's okay, because then we need to end. Yes, again, a context thing. So right now we've been talking about soulmaking practice, and then we were talking about desire, and we were talking about equanimity, and yesterday or whenever we were talking about emotions. Sometimes – maybe less so these days – but you often hear something like, "Oh, *jhānas* are dangerous because what you're doing then is suppressing some emotion. You could be bypassing. You could be engaging in spiritual bypassing, or just suppressing emotions or traumas that are really

important,” etc. I think probably as you do more and more *jhāna* practice, you’ll realize more and more, actually, that there isn’t really suppression going on, or the whole idea of it, it will become obvious that – at least the way *we’re* practising it – this is not what’s happening here.

But the wider point I wanted to make was there’s no single practice that’s a complete and perfect practice. So we really have to have this sense of a larger context. When we’re doing *jhāna* practice, yeah, we do have a certain leaning or preference in relation to, as I said right on the opening talk, how I’m going to relate to difficult emotions when they arise. But then I have a second-order, a second-tier preference, and a third, and a fourth, you know? But there’s a certain leaning that way. When we do other practices, we’ll reverse that order or whatever.

Is there a danger of spiritual bypassing? Yeah, there is a danger of spiritual bypassing. Does everyone know that word? Like avoiding some issue by – well, by avoiding it; by hanging out in a nice space, in this case. But we can spiritual bypass through *any* practice, in fact. And there are other dangers. So what I’m trying to say is no single practice avoids all the dangers or is without pitfalls. If I never relate to emotions in the way that we’re exploring on this retreat – for instance, this thing, “Well, might it be a hindrance at its root?” And what happens if I *don’t* give my attention there, and I just let the mind really develop its loveliness? And sometimes let it develop its loveliness, and then put – I’m not even suggesting you do this; sometimes it arises – a difficult memory comes up within that loveliness? Or, sometimes, very occasionally, you can put that difficult memory in the loveliness, and see what happens. It’s very clear: I’m not suppressing anything. I’m actually putting it there, or it’s coming up. There’s no sense of I’m blocking it or inhibiting my emotional responses. And see what happens. There’s something we can learn about emotions through *jhāna* practice that it’s actually much, much more difficult to learn through other modalities, other modes of practice.

[1:20:18] So the danger of not doing *jhāna* practice is that we don’t learn those particular things about emotions. Are they the complete and final truth about emotions? No, they’re not. They’re just one perspective, one aspect. But to have, again, this range of both understanding and possibility, and the freedom and the skill with emotions – that’s really, really precious. So we’re just in a certain context here. Of course, I could be in psychotherapy, or working in some other with my emotions, and then at some point, someone points out, “Oh, might you be ... is there a word for it? Socio-politically-ecologically bypassing?”, a little bit akin to what Victor was saying. There’s every possibility of that as well. And there have been critiques of all kinds of spiritual practices and psychological practices that, “Oh, I’m getting so into this thing, and believing in the reality of this, that I’ve neglected *this*.”

So there’s no one practice that’s going to take care of everything. It really is important: what’s the bigger picture? What’s the context? How am I seeing this in a bigger *maṇḍala* of collections of practices that will do their best to kind of cover the whole terrain of what it is to be a human being, and see things from different angles and perspectives, and work with things in different ways? That’s really, really important. That was one thing.

And just finally, before we end. How long have we been here? I know it probably feels like decades for some people, but how long? [yogis in background] What’s it? Thirteen days? Is that scratched on some people’s ...? [laughter] So usually, probably about the third evening, or maybe the fourth evening of a week retreat, insight retreat, I would probably say something, as I ring the bell for the final sitting, I would probably say something like, “So check in how you’re feeling right now. It’s the end of the

daily schedule, but maybe there's actually energy there, and you're just going to bed out of habit. Or maybe you feel a bit tired, but actually, if I look into it, it's actually aversion that's making me tired, and maybe I want to sit up and explore that a little bit." But there would be the encouragement to just see what's possible in terms of extending the effort on a macro-level.

So it's thirteen days now, apparently, and I'm saying it now. I don't know where you are with it; you're probably all in a different place, but I'll say it to everyone. Again, it's one of those things that I should have said at the beginning. I kind of thought that it was obvious, just the way the schedule looked, but in a way, the schedule does not end at 9:30. It's just that there's a group sitting that we like everyone to be here for between 9 and 9:30. But the hall is open. And especially as retreats get longer, people get all kinds of different rhythms, and a lot more energy available. Sometimes one just gets up or goes to bed at the same time out of habit. Just check – how much is it habit? Sometimes it's fear: I'm afraid that I'll be tired tomorrow or whatever it is. And sometimes it's, again, aversion. Tiredness can come from aversion. It's not actually that I need sleep; it's actually that I'm just pushing things away very subtly, and the mind closes in, and that makes me just want to go to bed, and going to bed is a kind of "Let's push things away."

And similarly, the day doesn't begin at 6:45, the meditative day. I mean, it *can*, if that's your rhythm. But again, this invitation to listen in, and feel what feels possible, and what feels right, and what your energy capacities are. And if you're not sure, let's play with it a little bit. So some retreats you might hear – it's kind of gone out of fashion, but some retreats, it's like, "Less sleep, less sleep, less sleep" as the days go on. I don't think that's wise. But there is something about listening and finding out, and if I don't know, experimenting, really experimenting. Lunchtime, breakfast time – depends when your work period is, but basically all the places are open to practise during the morning work period, after lunch, etc. We've been talking a lot about effort levels, and there's the micro-level, this kind of, "Okay, can I really just lean back a little bit, metaphorically, perhaps into more of the receiving, moment to moment? Can I make the attention a bit more intense right now, in this moment?"

That's really important, but there's also the macro-level, which we mentioned as well. And that has to do with the rhythm of the day. And so the day can very much breathe, but you also want to be listening. We want to be listening, and responsive, and stretching things, and experimenting. Sometimes we feel like, "Okay, I know I'm an over-striver, and therefore I should not stay up late, or not get up early," or whatever it is, "or not sit so much." And then on this retreat, we've been putting a lot of emphasis on how important the opening of the heart is, and the nourishing of the heart. But opening the heart is not mutually incompatible with spending more time in formal meditation, or extending or playing with one's effort. They're not like, if you do one, the other isn't happening.

So the time is precious. I mean, I did say – and I really mean it – don't put too much pressure on these three weeks. But at the same time – and hopefully you have a sense of this – the time is precious. We're already thirteen days [in], and time flies, and things change, and some opportunities won't come again. So it's more about, rather than 'should,' it's more about questions of sensitivity, attunement, responsiveness, experimentation, with the whole "How much am I sitting? How much am I playing my edges? What are my habitual kind of habit patterns? Or what creeps in around things like how much to practise formally, when to go to bed, when to get up, etc.? How much is habit? How much is a little bit of fear? How much is even a little bit of aversion?" But rather than any 'should,' or any formula –

“Everyone should sleep X hours” – or anything like that, it’s really this invitation to extend the sensitivity, attunement, responsiveness, and experimentation – extend it to *that* domain as well. And play, and see, without any sense of ‘should.’ But we have to experiment to find certain things out and see what’s possible. So I wanted to say that.

Okay. Very good. Let’s have a bit of quiet together.

[silence]

Okay. Thank you, everybody. Time for tea.

The Fourth Jhāna

So we talked about the third *jhāna*, and what characterizes its primary *nimitta* is that very exquisite, tender, and lovely peacefulness. That’s what’s really characterizing it. And we pointed out, at several stages now, and I’m pointing it out again, that *that* tender and lovely peacefulness, the exquisiteness of it is a very refined place. It’s a very refined realm. It’s a very refined state. It’s a very refined texture. And again, if you’re not sure, if it’s definitely peaceful – maybe you’ve been there before; maybe it feels like this is peaceful, this is equanimous; it might feel very deep – the refinement is one of the things that tells you you’ve moved deeper.

Now, ‘refinement’ means more than just ‘calmer.’ So certainly, when you move from *pīti* (which can have a lot of waves in it) to something like that, there’s a calming (that’s for sure) and a peacefulness. But by ‘refinement,’ again, I would use more the analogy of the different kinds of cloth. One cloth can be quite coarse – my jeans here, the cloth is quite coarse there. A refined cloth – it’s got less fibres in it. It’s got less material in it. There’s less substance to it. So this is trying to articulate or pinpoint what we mean by ‘refined.’ It’s almost gossamer-like in its refinedness at this level. Things are getting really, really refined.

To say it’s more refined is more than to say just that it’s calmer. It *is* calmer, but its texture is very, very refined in that sense, like a refined material. And so, there can be states of very deep relaxation. Some of you may even have experimented a little bit with sleep yoga practices, dream and in-between dream states. And they’re states that are very peaceful. There’s really not much happening. The mind is not moving anywhere. But compared to something like the third *jhāna*, they don’t have that refinement. They’re thicker. They’re more velvety. So [that] can be helpful, etc., but when we talk about the peacefulness of the third *jhāna*, we’re really talking about a very refined quality, and so that’s part of also what helps with the discernment.

But today, I’d like to go on and talk about the fourth *jhāna*. And again, every time we move in the teachings or progress in the teachings, just a reminder about pacing. So we’re going on in the teachings to the fourth *jhāna*, but what’s *your* pacing? That’s the more important question. Where’s your playground right now – the playground of your learning edge, the playground where you’re spending most of your time, marinating, exploring the elements of mastery? That’s what will really help – certainly not zipping through at the pace that *I’m* going through at, which will even get faster in the coming days, because I’ve got some medical appointments, etc. So really the encouragement to, again, discern and attune your whole being, and your practice, and with us in dialogue, to your sense of your

playground, of your learning edge. And that's where you hang out. That's where you have your fun. That's where you work and play and marinate, etc.

Okay, but the fourth *jhāna*. Let's go back to the Buddha. He's gone through *jhānas* one, two, three, with both their more technical descriptions, and then each one with their simile, with the lotus ponds, etc. We've been through that. And after the third *jhāna*, then he says:

And furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, as with the earlier disappearance of elation and distress, he enters [he's describing a monk here] and remains in the fourth *jhāna*, which is purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. He sits [the monk sits] permeating the body [again, permeating] with a pure, bright awareness, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.¹

And then his simile is:

Just as if a person were sitting wrapped from head to foot with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of their body to which the white cloth did not extend, even so, the practitioner sits permeating their body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of their entire body unpervaded by pure bright awareness.

That's his description of the fourth *jhāna*. Technically, the *jhāna* factors are just two now – *ekaggatā*, which we've had in every one [*jhāna*], this 'with one thing prominent' – that's how I'm translating it. One thing is prominent. The mind is gathered around, and in, and with one thing prominent. And that one thing prominent is the primary *nimitta*, which is – technically it's *upekkhā*, and *upekkhā*, as we've been talking about in the last few days, is equanimity. So technically, at least in the commentaries, etc., the two *jhāna* factors here are *ekaggatā* and *upekkhā*: 'one thing prominent' and equanimity. We talked about equanimity a little bit already. We'll talk about it a little bit more today, and then also perhaps even a little bit more as the retreat goes on. But if I had to find what I think is the most helpful and accurate English word that encompasses the experience here and points us in the right direction, I would say 'stillness.' There is equanimity, and that's important, etc., but I would say 'stillness.' So that's what strikes one almost overwhelmingly. One is almost transfixed in and by an extremely refined, translucent stillness. That's the texture and the experience.

So we talked about refinement with the third *jhāna* – it's *even more* refined, and again, that's a really important discerning factor of "Am I moving in the right direction here, or do I need to shape this a little more, or have I kind of gone off on a little bit of a sidetrack?" So it's really, really refined, and it's so refined – like this cloth now is translucent. It's so subtle, so refined in its texture that the substance of the space that one's in, it's as if it's translucent. And actually, it's also a very bright space – not for everyone, not always, but very common at this point to have a white light. And that white light is the stillness. The stillness is the white light. Technically, I would call it a secondary *nimitta*, like we've talked about before, and this white light can come up earlier. But that white light, this almost breathtaking white light of stillness, usually. It's a secondary *nimitta*. Sometimes, some people can have

it very pitch black, but I think more common is to have the bright white light there as the stillness, mixed with the stillness. Technically, it's a secondary *nimitta*, but probably, by this point, organically, it's quite mixed, so that it *is* the stillness. The light is the stillness. The stillness is the light.

This light – again, I think we touched on it before. I'll say it again: there's a brightness in the mind, and in a way, that brightness is just a kind of sign, signal, manifestation, reflection of the kind of brightness of presence at that point, the aliveness of the mind. That's one way of understanding what's actually happening there: it's a reflection of the energy in the mind of being present, of being conscious.

I don't know – how did it sound to read the Buddha's description? Does it sound maybe *less* appealing than the other ones? [inaudible response from yogis] Yeah? It's a little less? More what? Yeah, I will come back to the confusing bit, because I think it's actually a bit confusing. But I think a lot of people might hear it and say, "I don't know, I like the lotus pond business and this upwelling of happiness." [laughter] So again, I want to translate it into experiential terms – there's something almost stunning here, breathtaking. It feels like this still light, this very, very refined, still light – it's almost as if one is, again, in another realm, "breathing the air of another world," to quote an old poet.² In fact, somewhere or other, a few times in the Pali Canon, the Buddha gives it the synonym, the nickname 'the beautiful.'³ It's called 'the beautiful.' So hopefully this helps, at least, to give a bit more sense than something that maybe sounds a bit disappointing.

And again, as on other occasions, like all the other *jhānas*, he refers to it as an 'escape,' *nissaraṇaṃ*, that we talked about the other day.⁴ The Buddha talks that way about the *jhānas* at times, and this is also a sense we can have in it. Once you're in this space, it really can feel at times like one is in another world. I'm in another world here, and that world is an escape from all the pleasure and pain, and all the shakiness, and all the complexity and difficulty of the world of the senses. [12:00]

So there is this one way the Buddha taught it, and one way of experiencing it is as an escape from this world, in a dualistic kind of relationship or comparison: this is a better place, escape, escape. And we can have that sense, this other realm. And like with the third *jhāna*, when we talked about it, there's this possibility for the after-effect of that experience to spill, after-effect on perception to spill out onto the world and colour our sense of the world, so that the essential nature of things, the essential nature of this world that we all agree on and feel that we inhabit, is perceived to be essentially stillness. So it's the same process: what was perceived to be essentially peacefulness is now essentially stillness. And so there's the dualistic conception, a dualism with the world, a duality with the world. It's an escape, and it's a much better place to be. There's that kind of thrust, both in teaching and experience. Then there's the thrust of: here's an experience, and it opens my eyes, opens my senses and my felt sense of what this world really is, and what the nature of this world really is. So it's much less dualistic, because then the world *becomes*, can be seen as being truly, in essence, this luminous transcendent stillness – much less dualistic.

And as we talked with the third *jhāna*, there's a third possibility, taking from the Buddha's teaching where he emphasized all the *jhānas* as 'perception attainments,'⁵ on the way to pointing something out about the nature of perception, about the malleability of perception, about the dependent arising and thus the emptiness of all things. So you could see it seemingly dualistically, seemingly non-dualistically, and in a way that transcends both, because it understands the dependent arising of the

perception of duality or non-duality, the dependent arising of this or that. So all this is really, really important when we come to not just understanding insight, but also understanding: where are we going with the path? What are we aiming for? What is liberation? And what does our path suggest to us about our relationship with the world? And what kind of relationship and stance and view of the world does an awakened being have, a liberated being? Do they see it as something to escape from, never to be reborn again into this world, and there's a kind of dualistic conception? Or other possibilities. So it might sound like a bit of a technical point at this stage, but a lot ends up hinging on this, about how we want to live, about how we treat the planet, about our sense of awakening – all of that. We'll come back to that.

In the fourth *jhāna*, the breath stops. One is no longer actually, as far as one can tell, breathing. So if you stay, if the breath is your primary object, and you're actually staying with that all the way through, this will become very, very clear: the breath gets more and more subtle, and subtler and subtler, until eventually there is no breath. Or you might notice it, so to speak, out of the corner of your eye, if you're doing another practice. How is it that we don't die then? I don't know the answer to this. I mean, I assume we're just breathing very, very subtly, and there's such a stillness in the being at that point that we don't need to move barely any oxygen. But maybe other people who know more about biology have better – I don't know ... [inaudible response from yogi]

One does continue to breathe, but technically, the suttas say the breath stops, and most teachers would say the breath stops. And I think you would be hard-pushed – even if breath was your main object – to actually find a perception of the breath there. So technically speaking, the perception of the breath stops there. My assumption is, you're basically somehow still breathing, but at that point, because of the stillness and whatever is happening, the amount of actual oxygen that's moving and okay to sustain the organism, for sometimes what can be quite long periods, is very small. So I don't actually know what's going on. It's not that important, actually. It's neither here nor there. I just thought I'd mention it.

The *citta* is really captivated and transfixed by this translucent, very, very refined stillness, this sense of this beautiful, beautiful realm of stillness. And again, it's still a *rūpa-jhāna*, which means it's still, as the Buddha says, pervading the whole body. This luminous stillness is pervading the whole body. The body has *become* that. So the *citta* is captivated and transfixed, *and* again, like the other *jhānas* we were talking about, once you've got quite a bit of experience with it, in and out of that *jhāna*, then you might begin to feel like, “Oh, now I actually have to learn how to develop the steadiness of my focus, to stay steady on this really, really, refined frequency, this really, really refined, luminous texture.” So as always, sometimes at first it feels effortless, and then afterwards, you start to realize, “Oh, there's subtle work and play to be done here.” And one of them is just (maybe, maybe for some people): can I just learn to stay with this very, very refined stillness? Another thing that can happen experientially at this stage is the felt centre of the *citta*, the felt centre of awareness, can drop. And it might have dropped already in the second *jhāna* and third *jhāna*. So some people experience the centre of the *pīti* often around their face or throat, and sometimes, some people experience the centre of the happiness around the heart chakra, around there. Sometimes, when you get into the peacefulness, it's sort of lower in the belly. And sometimes, with the stillness, it can feel like it's even lower than the

bum. It's down. If I'm sitting on a chair, somehow under *here* is the centre of my awareness, it can feel like.

This is a completely secondary phenomenon, so don't latch onto that. For some people this is what they notice: "Oh, there's this thing," and then they use that as a kind of indicator, barometer of which *jhāna* they're in. Not a very good idea, because it's a secondary phenomenon. It's not reliable. We want to be really clear, as always: what's the primary *nimitta* here? *This* is what's telling me where I am, if I'm wanting to map it. *This* is what's discerning between *jhānas*. So that's actually quite important. I'm mentioning it as a thing you might notice in your experience. If you don't notice it, no problem at all. It really doesn't matter at all. But if you do notice it, careful that you're not then latching onto that as your primary indicator.

So I don't know what Jason was referring to, but I also find the Buddha's descriptions a bit confusing and puzzling. He said something like:

With the abandoning of [now, I said "pleasure and pain"; you could also say "*sukha* and *dukkha*"], as with the earlier disappearance of elation and distress [that's this particular English translation; the Pali is *somanassa* and *domanassa*; so with the abandoning of all that, but also with the earlier disappearance, so something had been abandoned earlier] the monk enters and remains in the fourth *jhāna*.

I wouldn't spend too long on this, but I will spend a little bit on it. "The earlier disappearance of elation and distress" – what could that be? And why is it coming up now anyway? Something has disappeared earlier. It *could* be the earlier disappearance of *pīti* and the hindrances: *pīti* as 'elation' and the hindrances as 'distress.' The hindrances disappeared in the first *jhāna*; the *pīti* disappeared in the third *jhāna*. So it could be related to that. Or – and probably more accurately with these Pali words, *somanassa* and *domanassa* – it's a bit complicated, but they may more refer to the distress when one actually sees *saṃsāra*. One sees the fact that one is living in a world of impermanent things, and even pleasant things are impermanent, etc. And there's a kind of distress of the renunciate in that. The elation is when one realizes there's a path and has confidence that one can follow that path. I don't know. I've never heard a meditation teacher dwell much on this, and I'm certainly not going to. It's just, when you go into the scholarly thing, there's a bit of a debate. It's like, "What's he talking about here, and why is he suddenly introducing these terms that he hasn't used before?" I don't think it matters too much.

The other phrase, "with the abandoning of pleasure and pain" – now, *that's* slightly odd as well, because you could say "with the *subsiding* of pleasure and pain," but *abandoning* is something we do deliberately. And the Pali word is *pahāna*, which is also the word the Buddha uses when you abandon unskillful ethical behaviour, or you abandon this or that that's unwholesome, unskillful. So I don't actually think it matters, but what it could be pointing to is what we talked about yesterday, when this question came up a couple of times about equanimity. So if I abandon – means if I deliberately let go of clinging to pleasure or pain – and 'clinging' can be pushing away as well, in my language, or pulling towards me, or hanging onto pleasure and pain. In other words, if I abandon the push-pull, *that's* something that I can do deliberately. I deliberately do that. Actually, in this case, in the way I would understand it, I'm not even *completely* abandoning it, because if you remember what we said yesterday,

actually, there's a whole spectrum here of really, really subtler and subtler levels of push-pull, clinging. So if I kind of abandon them a lot but not quite all the way, then what I'm going to end up with, following on from what we said yesterday: when there's less push-pull, then it attenuates the *vedanā*. The very pleasantness and unpleasantness eventually just attenuate, and they become neither pleasant nor unpleasant. So the dominant *vedanā* becomes the sort of neutral one, because I've abandoned not so much the pleasure and pain, but I've abandoned any reactivity. Or I've abandoned *a lot* of the reactivity. It actually gets confusing, and "Why is he introducing this now, etc.?" Because it seems to suggest another way of going into the *jhāna*, through playing with this push-pull and everything.

So two things about that. Okay, so pleasure and pain decrease, pleasant and unpleasant decrease, and one is left with neither pleasant nor unpleasant. But what one can say about the neither pleasant nor unpleasant that one is left with is that it's very, very, very nice. And if it's not, something's not right. It's not the fourth *jhāna* we're talking about. It's very nice and very enjoyable. Again, it's an improvement over the third *jhāna*, and it's felt that way, and it's experienced that way, and it's also somehow a kind of neutral *vedanā*. So that's one thing to bear in mind.

The second is, and possibly more important: all this talk about "abandoning pleasure and pain," and "earlier disappearance of elation and distress," and what the different possibilities of that might mean – there's a whole scholarly debate here. People think that one particular sutta has got mistakes in it, and they look for the Chinese parallel, and *da-da-da* – it doesn't matter. Basically, I would say, it basically says: "There is equanimity." And that's all we need to worry about, I think. Remember, we were defining 'equanimity' yesterday, when it came up in the Q & A, as not an on/off switch, not a black or white "I have it. It's there, or it's not. I have it, or I don't," but a spectrum. To the degree that there is equanimity, to *that* degree there is the reduction of the push and pull, there is the reduction of clinging. So equanimity is a spectrum, and another way of saying what that spectrum *is* is that it's a spectrum of decreasing push-pull, decreasing clinging.

I think that's all we need to really understand here. It's pointing to a state of deep equanimity. And as I said (it came up yesterday), there are different ways and different contexts in which the Buddha talks about equanimity, and it's a really interesting subject. This fourth *jhāna* is what the Buddha would call "equanimity based on singleness" in contradiction or in complement to what, on other occasions, he talks about "equanimity based on multiplicity."⁶ So you've got equanimity based on singleness, equanimity based on multiplicity.

What's this singleness or multiplicity *of*? *Phenomena*. So you've got equanimity based on many – in other words, equanimity in relationship to many phenomena happening, many things occurring in the senses. And this fourth *jhāna* is *not* that, because everything has pretty much disappeared, and there is just this translucent, refined, beautiful white stillness, bright white light, stillness. So it's an equanimity based on – there's nothing else happening. It's just that. The body, all the rest of it – there's just that. So it's an equanimity based on singleness, *versus* equanimity based on multiplicity, which we touched on yesterday. An example was when the Buddha talks about the eight worldly conditions – praise and blame, pleasure and pain, success and failure, and gain and loss – and then Victor was asking about the word 'equanimity.' Again, here are those conditions or those opposites, and we can have equanimity in relationship to those perceptions. There's the perception of praise and blame: this person is telling me I'm wonderful, this person is telling me I'm an idiot, whatever it is. And the mind can have equanimity

in relation to both. So, what that means at that level, it's a very important, but it's a more superficial level of equanimity. What that means is, we talked about, it's equipoise. Equanimity – I'm guessing from *anima*, equal feeling towards both. I'm not getting super excited and glad when this person praises me, and then super depressed or angry when this person blames me. There is equipoise, equal feeling, whatever we want to say, towards opposites. So it's not like, "I like this, and I don't like that. I prefer this, or I get excited about this, or elated about this and distressed about that." Do you understand? In relation to multiplicity of phenomena? Clear enough? Yeah?

But again, as I pointed out yesterday in the Q & A, we can have deeper levels of equanimity. So for example, and following on the example I used yesterday, I think: the state of the vastness of awareness. Was that yesterday? We've talked about that though. So when the consciousness opens up, because of the openness of the consciousness, and because of the way one is practising, it's basically like letting everything just belong to the space, that vast space of awareness. And after a time, it might seem like the bird that was just singing – it's just coming out of that silent awareness. And then the sound just disappears back into it, and one has that, and the body sensations, and the thoughts, and the rest of it. They're all just emanating from what starts to feel like a mystical, divine, forever-lasting space of transcendent, peaceful awareness. And things just arise out of that source – mystical source, perhaps – and disappear back into it. And seeing that, and then my job as a meditator at that point is to just let them come, let them go back, let *them* have it: "It's not mine." Let the space contain and let all these phenomena belong to the awareness.

And I don't know if you can hear – in what I have just described, there's a relationship. One is practising a relationship of 'let it be – let it come, let it go, let it be.' Can you hear that? So a really beautiful way of practising, extremely fruitful way of practising. A lot of potential there. Not that difficult – just something that with setting up the practice right, and just staying with it, and again and again, one is practising that relationship: let it belong to the space, let it come, let it go, let it belong to the space. And then the very mystical beauty of that space starts to help you let go. It's like the space itself is not doing anything, but the sense of it – it's almost like it can do the work. It can do the work of just being there, holding things, mystically being a source and (I don't know what you'd call it) a resting place of phenomena. And it's almost like the space does the work. Technically speaking, you're engaging a certain way of looking. You're engaging an insight way of looking which is just, 'letting be, letting go, letting go, letting go,' which technically means less clinging, less push and pull. And that just takes the whole thing deeper and deeper over time. And it might be that it starts to deepen, so that the ugly sound and the beautiful sound start to feel like they lose their associated *vedanā*. Exactly what I was saying before starts to happen: the pleasant, unpleasant starts to fade into more neutral phenomena. That neutrality may be impregnated with this mystical divinity, mystical silence, the mystical nature of awareness. But it's not in the particularity of an individual sound that it's pleasant or unpleasant. They've all got that – even the ugly sounds.

So it can deepen. The equanimity there can deepen – again, I think we mentioned it the last few times – it can deepen to the sense of one taste, which I mentioned in relation to the third *jhāna*. So everything in this (just following this example of the vastness of awareness), everything can begin at some point to have – all these phenomena, all these sounds, all the sensations, all the thoughts, whatever comes up feels like its true essence, its true substance is the same, and that substance is, in

this case, mystical, divine, lasting-forever awareness. So there's a kind of oneness of substance that emerges there. And the opposite – where at a more superficial level of equanimity, we were equanimous in relation to two things that were opposite: praise/blame, pleasure/pain, etc. – because everything is one substance, the opposites kind of lose their meaning, because they're the same thing. They're the same substance. They're no longer opposites any more. It's all, in this case, divine awareness, the awareness of God, whatever you want to call it.

There are many, many other possibilities that function in the same [way]. They unfold in the same way. A similar thing could happen with a kind of mystical love, or a mystical compassion, or all kinds of possibilities. Really, really lovely, very available, just need to set our practice in the right way, and follow it, and follow it. And lovely as it is, it's still not the end of the road, nor is it the deepest end of equanimity, because I think as I also mentioned yesterday, the limit of equanimity that's possible, there are no objects that are any more even arising, because the fading has not just faded the pleasure and the pain, the pleasant and the unpleasant *vedanā* – it's actually faded any sense of any object, or any phenomenon, or any sensation as well. So there are, then, in that ultra-deep equanimity, no objects, things, sensations, phenomena in relation to which a person can be equanimous. So there's a strange paradox in the depth of equanimity. The truest equanimity can't really be regarded as an equanimity, because there's nothing there to be equanimous about. Anyway, here we have in the fourth *jhāna* an instance of equanimity based on singleness, in complement to, in addition to other instances where the Buddha talks about equanimity based on multiplicity.

[35:50] So I think it's mostly true to say, let's say *predominantly* true to say, at this point in the fourth *jhāna*, there's a kind of – if you check there, what's the emotion? I think the most likely answer, the most accurate answer, or the answer that's most prevalent would be: there isn't an emotion. The emotions have been pacified in that state. There's an absence or a pacification of emotion. Let's say a bit about that and come back to maybe qualify that statement. So this is interesting. And again, this subject of emotion, as human beings, as I said, it's one of those subjects that I don't think there's any end for us. There shouldn't be an end for us as human beings of our exploration of emotion, even just in our *conception* of emotion, let alone what we *do* with emotions and how we *relate* to them.

But here, what happens, what can be very common, actually, for human beings – and we don't get a lot of help in our culture with this – is that it's quite common for people to be actually afraid of their emotions. If a strong emotion comes up, I'm really not confident that I can tolerate it, or be with it, that I won't end up being a puddle on the floor, or a nervous wreck, or out of control, or whatever it is. And so people relate around that fear in different ways, and it's only because in our culture we rarely get the training to really work well with the heart. And to me, Dharma practice should be, over time, broadening and deepening the capacity of the heart. We can hold a lot of emotion, we can hold intense emotion. And the grief at what's happening in our world – this is hard to bear, hard to hold. And it may be that for many people, that's one of the reasons why, for instance (I don't know if it's true, but maybe), species loss and climate change (and I think they used to call it 'species extinction'; I think a better word I read is actually 'species extermination,' mass species extermination), that it's just too much grief to bear. And so people avoid it. So if you look at what's most viewed every day in the newspaper, the climate change article rarely makes the top ten, etc. I'm not going to go into that now.

Or a personal grief, or whatever it is, or joy – sometimes, you know, we talked about that bandwidth of happiness, that for some people, it’s like, “Well, okay, that’s enough now. Can I move on to the calmer one?” Can we hold that much joy? Can we hold that much energy of *pīti*? Can we allow it to flow through us? Can we hold that much grief? Is there such a thing as skilful anger or frustration, in ways that can be skilful, that are really big? All this. So, to me, a huge part of the Dharma path is actually broadening and deepening the capacity, the holding capacity of the heart. We get very little training for this in our culture. But in addition, there’s the possibility of developing through Dharma practice what we’ve emphasized from day one: this sensitivity and refinement, so that not just our range of intensity, but also our range of *kinds* of emotions we’re even aware of, or that we notice or can tune into grows. And the beauty of having that extended palette in our inner life, and then from which to relate to others, and our beloveds, and the rest of the world, and ourselves, and art, and the rest of it – to me, that’s also really, really important.

But sometimes, as I said, for a lot of human beings in our culture, to some degree or other, there’s a fear of one’s emotional life: “I’m okay with *this* kind of range, but if it gets too much over there or too much over *there*, I’m really not sure that I’m okay. I’m really not sure I will be okay.” But there can also correspondingly be, for some people, a fear of the absence of emotion – maybe even the same person at a different time. There’s an absence of emotion in the fourth *jhāna*, you could say, and sometimes that can sound, “Well, I’m not sure I like the sound of that,” or one has an idea: “That can’t be healthy.” And sometimes that idea about that state – and it’s just a temporary state – the idea about it is maybe coming just from ideas that are woven into one’s view at the moment, because of what one is working on.

So I remember I started meditating, and I think I very briefly told you, kind of went a little nuts for a couple of years. And part of my ‘rehabilitation’ was getting into psychotherapy, etc., and getting really interested but really helped with my emotional life, which was either way too extreme, without my understanding it, or just kind of cut off from certain emotions. I got a lot of exploration and opening with the emotions and working with them. But then I feel like, in the view, I could have very easily gone into the opposite view, which is, “If the emotions quieten at any point, there must be a suppression, or that must have unhealthy long-term consequences if you do that kind of thing. Authentic being needs to have emotion, and it’s probably difficult emotion, because those are the more authentic ones.” So these are the kind of views, and they’re actually not uncommon. So there can be, for some people, a fear of emotion, and there can be for other people, or the same person at a different time, a fear of the quietening, a fear of the absence of emotions. Interesting thing to check out.

Having said there’s an absence of emotion here, it’s actually – again, like all these things, it’s not quite true. It’s not so black and white because of a few things. One is, I would say, the fourth *jhāna* still has happiness in it. It somehow still has happiness, but it’s so almost like invisibly woven into the texture, or impalpably almost woven into the texture. It’s so subtle. It’s implicit in it. It takes actually quite a while to even notice it. And it makes sense, because it was born out of happiness. So if you go through the *jhānas*, this state was born out of happiness. It was born out of the happiness of the second *jhāna*, and then the refined happiness of the third *jhāna*, but it’s not at all something you notice at first, really. But I would say it’s definitely there. Certainly in the beginning levels of the fourth *jhāna*, it still has and it still *should* have what we might call the ‘echoes’ or the ‘embers’ of the third *jhāna*’s *sukha*

and peacefulness, and that kind of really warm, gorgeous peacefulness. It's still kind of got the embers there, so that the beginning of the fourth *jhāna* has the echoes of that left over in the third *jhāna*. And they're, again, subtle, subtle emotional hues, colours pervading this space, if you like.

It also, I would say (again, contradicting what I said earlier about the absence of emotion), it also, like all the *jhānas*, has *mettā* in it. But again, it's hidden. The *mettā* is hidden at this point. And I've always found it interesting: when the Buddha talks about Right Intention, which is the second factor of the noble eightfold path, Right Intention or Right Thought – what other translations of that are there? Right Resolve, Right Thought, Right Intention. So what does the Buddha say? What they are – does anyone know? It's okay if you don't.

Okay, I'll tell you. He says the intention towards renunciation, the intention or resolve towards non-ill-will, and the intention or resolve towards non-cruelty.⁷ Now, technically, if you look at all the lists and all this business, ill-will is the far enemy of *mettā*, and cruelty is the far enemy of compassion. It's the opposite. So you think, "Well, why didn't he just say, instead of non-ill-will and non-cruelty, why didn't he just say *mettā* and compassion?" And sometimes you'll hear it translated that way. Partly, I think he's saying that to allow the legitimacy and the space for exactly this kind of state, the fourth *jhāna*, something like that. There's deep equanimity. There's *mettā* pregnant in it, but it's a state of non-ill-will. It's definitely a state of non-ill-will. It's definitely a state of non-cruelty. So it's a subtle distinction in language that he's making that allows room, in other words, for these things, *mettā* and compassion, not to be foremost all the time, which allows space and room to explore states where everything goes quiet, apparently, yet I would say there's *mettā* wrapped in it.

There's another kind of secondary emotion, but I think I'll come back to that when we talk about the formless realms, the formless *jhānas*, because it also has that one. Anyway, in some senses, it really feels like a pacification or an absence of emotion. In other ways, actually, it's not quite accurate. Again, nothing is really as black and white as it appears. It's not quite accurate to say that. I remember, several of you have shared, sometimes there are certain images that arise, maybe very briefly or very much in the background, that kind of either ignite a certain *jhāna* or help you access the primary *nimitta*, or even appear *in* a *jhāna*, not as part of a discursive thought, but just as part of something that's very subtly, from the background, supporting the whole thing, propping up the whole thing. So the Buddha's image of being wrapped in a white cloth (I find, actually, for me that was one of those), or wrapped in a – it could even be a cloth of pure, luminous stillness, or ... yeah, just wrapped in that pure, luminous stillness. But they may be (these images) very, very much in the background, but still doing their work in this very kind of *tinctural* way that we've talked about.

It's a very, very subtle way. If I go too much into the image, then it becomes more like an imaginal thing. But they can be very, very much in the background. The primary *nimitta* is still where the attention is, but they're kind of somehow helping to consolidate and get deeper into the whole thing, and the whole thing to get richer, the primary *nimitta* to get richer – not richer because there's more images. One I used to have was lying – it's almost like, maybe because I like the image so much of this pond with the lotuses, I used to get an image of lying at the bottom of that pond, and the sun coming. So imagine this clear water, I don't know, ten, twenty feet deep. And I'm lying on the bottom of the pond and looking upwards at all this light. But there's a complete rest in it. The mind is so not asleep, it's so alive, and it's so rested at the same time in this luminosity. So somehow, it was something that

just came. It's just like that lying and looking up and totally open in that way to this light. Yeah, I could breathe underwater, so ... [laughs]

Another one, which completely doesn't make rational sense, was I would kind of feel sometimes, or afterwards I would say to myself, "I just feel completely hung out to dry," which doesn't – it's like, what the hell does that mean? But the sort of image I would have afterwards was, like, as if I was hanging on a clothesline, like with pegs on my arms, and just hanging there, which doesn't even sound very comfortable. [laughter] So what was that about? It was actually that there was the sort of complete satisfaction that started in the third *jhāna*. It was like that was just ramped up beyond all limits. There was like, you couldn't have got any more completely wrung out, wrung through and put through the washing machine of this process, and then, just, "I'm done." But anyway, these are very, very much secondary *nimittas*. They're just little things that could somehow help at times or give indications.

Somewhere or other (I think it's in some commentary or other) it talks about two levels of the fourth *jhāna*. And I don't know what the two levels they're referring to are, but I could delineate two levels, certainly, in two different ways, or maybe three levels. So again, it doesn't really matter, but what matters is: am I getting to know the territory? Am I getting familiar with the different ranges and sub-states and textures of this whole space? So in a way, this thing about being hung out to dry – that peacefulness and kind of complete contentment that was there in the beginning of the third *jhāna*, and the deepening echoes of the warmth and tender peacefulness of the third *jhāna*, they characterize, you could say, the beginning stages of the fourth *jhāna*. So that may be one level we could talk about. But as it deepens, even those things begin to fade, and they almost become indiscernible, and there's just left this purity, this pure stillness, pure non-movement, pure absence of solidity, free of solidity, pure presence, pure awareness, pure consciousness. There's a sense of purity there that's very beautiful, and *that* comes to predominate.

You could also divide it another way in two (again, like we divided the third *jhāna*): that the stillness is *here* in the energy body size, but one might also, as it deepens, get a sense of a much larger realm of stillness. But again, as we said with the third *jhāna*, the primary focus wants to be in the energy body size. I'm not yet going out there. That comes later. I'm not yet exploring the far reaches of this realm of stillness. I want to be primarily *here* for the fourth *jhāna* to really consolidate and deepen, and really bathe in its milk. So you could make three or two, or this two or that two – it doesn't really matter. For me, it doesn't matter. I think the invitation, though, is, again, to discern more, to get to really know spaces inside out, and get really familiar with them.

So how does it progress to the fourth *jhāna*? How do we do that? Well, mostly through the maturing of the third *jhāna*. Over time, long-term maturing of the third *jhāna* will just deliver the fourth *jhāna*. It should, at some point. Eventually, how do we get to the fourth *jhāna*? Well, the same way, with all that mastery business. Eventually, it's just by subtle intention, through the familiarity of going to this space, this level, the fourth *jhāna* – eventually we just remember that stillness, remember that state, remember that beauty and purity, and it can come back just from the intention.

What can help, if it's ready to mature, if it's maturing and just needs a little help (and sometimes you don't even need to do that little bit of nudging), what *can* help is noticing within the third *jhāna*, noticing and tuning to – well, let's say two things: the stillness and equanimity in the third *jhāna*. So the third *jhāna* has peacefulness, but as I said, it also has a lot of stillness in it. It's not completely still,

but if I tune to the element, or the feeling, or the sense, or the frequency of stillness in it, again, that's going to stand out, and it may help the whole thing deepen, because what I tune to gets amplified. And in this case, the amplification is a deepening. So tuning to the stillness, noticing, and then tuning to, really tuning to the stillness or equanimity in the third *jhāna*, and/or noticing and tuning to whatever the most *refined* frequency is in the third *jhāna*, because again, as we move from *jhāna* to *jhāna*, there should be an increase in refinement. So tuning to what's most refined – this is a general principle now, not just applies to this – will help me, take me to the next level, and the stillness of the fourth *jhāna* will begin to emerge.

I would say, again, that a bit like what we said with the third *jhāna*, the fourth *jhāna* will *be* better, it will *feel* better, more compelling, more clear, more clearly discriminated, more fulfilling, and all that, when it actually has within it, and you can feel within it some of that profound and beautiful, tender gentleness that goes with the third *jhāna*. So in other words, the beginnings of the fourth *jhāna*, when they have *that* kind of experience, that usually ends up being a much richer fourth *jhāna* experience, even if later on they kind of refine out. They can get subtler and subtler, and then, as I said, they get purified out.

And so there's this luminous stillness, and you can play with the same things, really: opening, opening the body, and opening the mind to it, opening, abandoning, surrendering, or penetrating – same modes of attention. Or we can think about dissolving, which I think I mentioned before. But somehow, at this level, it gets really, really potent for me, this word 'dissolving.' What would it be to dissolve my body into this luminous, beautiful stillness, dissolve my body into it? The body *becomes* that, but the body also just dissolves in it. So there's a movement of intention there. There's a direction there. And again, just as in the third *jhāna*, sometimes there can be a kind of felt sense of bifurcating or splitting between the mind and the body a little bit, just subtly. Again, at first, body and mind totally integrated. They're just really into it. And then with a lot of fourth *jhāna* experience, sometimes you can feel like, "Oh, body and mind," and then dissolving my body, and at other times, dissolve my mind. What is it to dissolve the mind into this luminous stillness, to play with that kind of intention?

So at times, those feel like separate intentions, separate processes. Ideally they're one, but it doesn't matter. Again, we're getting out of this thinking of a *jhāna* as a very neat, defined, black-and-white on/off switch or box, and it's more just the territory here, and "Okay, now I dissolve my body, and then I dissolve my mind." It doesn't matter if they're separate. *Jhāna* practice is a broader thing, rather than worrying about those edges of "Is this it? Is it not it? Is it right? Is it wrong?" But like always, we want to really penetrate, and really get intimate, really get inside and intimate with this luminous stillness. And remembering the primary *nimitta* is this purity of refined stillness.

A funny thing can happen. You might have either experienced this, or witnessed other people. Sometimes in the fourth *jhāna*, what can be quite common is a kind of leaning forward. The physical body actually starts leaning forward. I don't know how common this is, actually leaning forward, and it can be really, really extreme, so that someone sitting cross-legged on the floor actually ends up with their forehead on the floor. And someone might think, "Oh, they're fast asleep," or they see them going like this, and they think [they're fast asleep] ... far from it! So the nodding looks very different and feels very different. You can tell the difference between these things. They both involve a leaning forward. They're really quite different phenomena.

So Ajaan Mahā Boowa was one of the great (he died not that long ago, in fact) twentieth-century Thai Forest meditation masters. And he used to say in relation to this leaning forward: don't alter it at all. Don't mess with it. The process is happening; you let it happen, and if your forehead ends up on the floor, you let it end up on the floor. I had a teacher who said: as soon as you start noticing that happening, stop it, and just make sure you can sit upright. So there are differences of opinions. I have, I admit, over the years, gotten into – not a *bad* habit; a habit that I slightly regret. So I do lean forward, and sometimes quite a lot. Looking back, it would have been better had I nipped that habit in the bud and not allowed it to develop, because it can be a little distracting as things go on. But it's certainly not a tragedy. However, I'm saying this now so that if you encounter it, you can perhaps nip it in the bud, and make an intention to sit upright, stop it when it's happening. But even if it does happen, you can sometimes just very gently sit up, keeping the meditation going.

What's happening here? So I don't know. I'm not sure, percentage-wise, how common this is, but it's really not uncommon. Is it that we're conceiving of our attention as something that operates forwards? And so the stillness is in front of us, and we generally conceive of our attention – I know I can hear something back there, but because the eyes go that way, and the nose is there, and the mouth is there, the sense organs are there, they're in the head, and they're kind of pointing that way – is it that we just habitually conceive of our attention going forwards? And then we conceive of the stillness primarily in front of us, and that's why we're leaning forwards.

So you can play with a few things here, and I think it's worth trying to nip this in the bud if it starts to come up for you. But you can play with a few things. Almost like imagine the stillness 360 degrees, like the Buddha's analogy – wrapped around the body, so it's 360 degrees around. It's a scaffolding of stillness, almost, that's right around the body space, that's keeping it upright, because there's as much support, or there's as much presence of the scaffolding in front, as behind, as to the sides. And so playing with that 360 degrees prevents us from a habit of feeling and sensing objects in the mind being somewhat in front of us. And then, in a way, my attention is pulled equally, equanimously in all of the different directions. There's maybe less chance of falling over forwards. Remember when, on the opening evening, when I introduced the counting with the breath, and I said, "Play with it behind"? Getting used to playing with or breathing in from the back, getting used to turning around in physical space 180 degrees the sense of where we're paying attention and which direction the attention moves in can bear significant fruits later on when it comes to something like this.

So it could be something like that. It could also be, at this point – I don't know; I've never really talked to anyone about this – it could also be that what starts to happen at this level is a significant degree of unfabricating is happening. So we've talked a little bit about that. Some of you are very familiar with this teaching. But it's related to what I said about equanimity. As we let go of more and more clinging in the moment, there's less and less push and pull, less and less clinging, then we talked about the *vedanā*, the pleasant/unpleasant are actually fabricated less, fabricated less and less and less and less. So there's more and more unfabricating, less and less fabricating of what? Well, of self, but also, in this case, of perception and sensation. Less and less and less, until at a certain point, the sensations don't even arise. Less and less and less. There's more unfabricating. There's quite a degree of unfabricating at this point, at the point of the fourth *jhāna*. Unfabricating – there's quite a degree of deconstructing or non-constructing going on.

So sometimes I wonder: is this falling over just a kind of reflection in the body of the kind of unfabricating that's going on? There's less construction. Because it also happens – well, I should say it also happens for *me* sometimes, and again, it's a habit that if I could go back, I would change. But it also can occur when you're deep in insight ways of looking, and they're working primarily with this unfabricating, working with deeply letting go, and a similar sort of thing happens. I don't know. I'm not sure. But it's worth knowing about and working with. It's part of the territory potentially here, and it may be something that comes to bother you if you don't nip it in the bud. Or it may be like – I don't think it's that much of an issue for me, but for some people, they feel like, “Oh, I really wish,” etc.

Probably a more significant thing to look out for, even, is that again, after many experiences going in and out of the fourth *jhāna* and getting used to it, you remember what I said about a dam bursting when you reach a new level? And it's just like, “Wow!” It's just happening. I don't have to do anything. It's just perfect as it is.” Then, after a while, it's like, “Ah. Now some more subtle work and play – I see the need for that and the potential for that.” So one thing that can happen, a kind of problem that emerges after quite a lot of experience going in and out of the fourth *jhāna*, is that sometimes, one's there, and it's very nice, it's very still, the mind is definitely very mindful, very equanimous, very focused, but it's just a *fraction* dull. So there's no nodding. There's none of that. The whole thing is much, much more subtle. It's very subtly, very slightly dull at times.

This actually is an important thing to notice, to look out for and notice. It's still a state of equanimity, of mindfulness, of clear awareness, and all the rest of it, of focus, of *samādhi*. But it, relatively to what it could be, is just a little bit dull, and that's a really important thing to take note of, to note, “Ah, it's just gone into that slight dullness, and can I ramp up, in this moment, the sense of presence?” So just turn up the sense of presence. I'm present to this primary *nimitta*, to this stillness. There's a presence there, a real aliveness of presence. One of the ways you can do this is, really come into the sense of now, now, now. [snaps fingers] It's *now*. This thing is *now*. This stillness is *now*. And really come sharply into the sense of now, with presence. It's two ways of saying the same thing. And that allows it to become brighter and more alive, etc.

There are many instances – like I said, the Buddha talks about the *jhānas* a lot in the Pali Canon, and there are some instances where he sort of does it in a certain formula, and other instances where he does it in another formula, and other instances where there's a third kind of formula or way of explaining. And one of these stock, almost contrived formulas is, he goes through the first four *jhānas*, and he describes them as we've just described them, and then he says, then the practitioner, then the monk (he's usually talking about a monk), he says: *so evaṃ samāhite citte*, which means something like, “He [the monk], with a *citta*, with a mind/heart, with an awareness *samāhite* thus” – *thus* meaning from the *jhānas*. Usual translation you'll hear is ‘concentrated,’ but actually it means *samādhified*.⁸ Partly why I'm wanting to dwell on it – he goes through a whole list describing what the practitioner has got from their practice of the *jhānas*, the first four *jhānas*, and then describing what they then *do* with that, how they put that mind to work. And there are different formulas and different contexts depending on who he's talking to and what he's describing.

But what's often translated, for example, first four *jhānas*, and then the practitioner, “with a *citta*, with a mind thus concentrated” – so I'm just wanting to point out (we've dwelt on this a number of times): what's the difference if we translate *samādhi* as ‘concentration’ or we leave it as *samādhi*? We

talked about this, right? So to me, *samādhī* is the richer word, and I don't get narrow into that view. Because it's very easy to read these texts and take certain conclusions, and I want to actually bother to take the time going through this, and indicate how we can read these passages and the translations of these passages, and just assume it means "with a mind very concentrated and very stuck, very able to stay steady with one thing, and very like a laser beam." So all these words are very easy to hear that way, and I'm going to bother to go through the Pali, and actually see – well, there are different ways we can open this out. So that's the first one: "with a *citta*, with a mind thus *samādhified*, thus harmonized, in agreement." To me, it's got a whole different range and richness of what's involved there, rather than just "concentrated." Then he says: "with a mind thus *samādhified*," and then he goes on. Other adjectives – "with the mind thus [not just] *samādhified* [but] *parisuddhe*" – which means 'purified.' What might that mean – 'purified'? Purified of what?

[inaudible response from yogi] Okay, but that should have come with the first *jhāna*. [inaudible responses] Yeah, so of *vedanā*, hindrances. It *could* mean all kinds of things. I think what I'm pointing to, partly what I want to point to is how easy it is to read these texts, and read them – like when we listen to Dharma talks – and listen already programmed or read already programmed to hear a certain narrow range of meaning which is not necessarily there. It could be also 'purified' of relative grossness, yeah? You know, when you refine something. So I just want to open up. So yes, hindrances, subtle hindrances; yes, pleasure and pain; yes, relative grossness. In other words, what is happening? Because this is the point: the Buddha has gone through the first four *jhānas*, and then he's explaining to someone or other what the point of it is. So again, we go back to this whole question. We started the retreat so much talking about "What's the point of this? Why are we doing this? What are we going to emphasize? What's important here?" Right? Coming back to that. So it could be purified of ... who knows? But it could be purified of grossness, of subtle hindrances, of pleasure/pain.

Then he repeats this, *parisuddhe pariyodāte*, which actually also means 'pure.' It also means, this word *pariyodāte*, means 'very clever' or 'excellent' or 'accomplished.' And sometimes it's translated as 'bright,' and in English that word has that "Bright – oh, she's very bright." So it has a kind of ambiguous range of meaning. And as I said, there is this sense of visual luminosity there, but that's really a kind of brightness of presence. And when we talk about a bright person, it's also that they're bright in presence. It's not just that they're very good at doing Rubik's Cube or whatever. The mind is bright with presence, but also bright with possibility, like when we talk about so-and-so is 'bright.' It's like there's possibility there. So this translation of 'bright' – it is, as I said, a very pure realm of still light.

The 'purity,' though, is interesting, if we linger on this word, because it's also related to the stillness. In other words, the stillness itself is something pure: purity of push-pull, purity of equanimity. So again, just expanding on the possible meanings. When you say a person has a really 'pure' character, it's like saying they have a lot of integrity, which is also like saying they can't be bribed by something pleasant or blackmailed by the threat of something unpleasant. So 'purity' could refer to something like that. It's about how is the mind in its poise right now, in relation to the threat and the dangling carrot of unpleasant and pleasant? So opening up meanings. It's so easy to hear and read, and just hear and read what we already know, what we've already been told. That's the most common way, unfortunately, for human beings to hear and read – just to hear and read what we already know. And as I said, it could

also be purity of refinement. So if you think about something like gold – you mine gold, or you (whatever they do) gather it, mine it, and it’s got other stuff in it. And so, to purify gold is also to refine gold. So all these things – it’s like the mind is getting down to something of its pure ... *nearer*, let’s say, to its pure and natural nature. So words like ‘pure’ – they can mean a lot of different things. And in a way, I think it’s pregnant with all those meanings, and it *should* be, rather than bringing it down, because *then* he says (still a lot of adjectives describing this mind after the meditation, after the fourth *jhāna*) *anaṅgaṇe*, which is something like ‘passionless’ or ‘blameless’ or ‘unblemished.’ And *vigatūpakkilese*, which means something like ‘free, without defilements or obstructions.’ *Mudubbhūte*, which means ‘malleable,’ ‘pliant,’ ‘supple.’ Later, there are passages where he does the same description, and he really picks up on that one. And he says, like a goldsmith, when they’ve got this substance, now they’ve got their molten gold, then they can shape it however they like: malleable, malleable, malleable.⁹ And that may be (or it is, in my view) one of the really centrally important fruits of all this. I stressed it at the beginning of the retreat: malleability. One of the main fruits of *jhāna* practice is the malleability of perception. So it’s here, now. *Kammanīye*, which means ‘workable,’ able to be put to work or directed in work in a certain way.¹⁰ *Thite*, which means ‘steady.’ And then the last one, *āneñjapatte*, which means ‘attained to imperturbability.’

Very easy, I think, to hear that or read that in that context, and just read it very quickly and think, “Yeah, it means the mind is now absolutely nailed to its object. It doesn’t move. It’s imperturbable.” But does it *only* point to that? Might it also point, again, to equanimity, which we’ve been talking about, and the quietening of the push and pull? Push and pull throws the mind out of balance. You’re exerting, you’re pulled by something, or trying to hang onto something, or pushing something away. It throws the mind out of balance. And so it could be that the imperturbability really refers, or refers as well, or maybe even refers principally, less to a kind of complete ability to fix the mind’s attention on something unwaveringly, and more to this capacity not to be swayed. It’s steady. It’s unshakeable. It’s imperturbable. I’m not swayed by my reactivity to any phenomenon – pleasant, unpleasant, or otherwise, maybe.

But really the point here is, again, just to point – it’s an illustration in a much larger context of how very easily we can hear and read, and just basically hear and read what we already know, and we’re learning very little new. Things are not being opened up or challenged. And in this particular case, to open up the view. And it’s related to: what are we doing here? Why are we doing this? And therefore, what’s important? Of all the different things that are going on when we practise *samādhi*, and all the different things that we could emphasize – and again, what we emphasize, how much the big picture view will end up directing us, consciously or unconsciously, wisely or unwisely, in terms of our micro-moment-to-moment choices – right? I’ve said that, like, five times already, so I’m just repeating.

And then he says *cittaṃ abhininnāmeti*, which basically means ‘directs or applies the *citta*, inclines or bends the *citta* towards,’ and then he gives a whole bunch of things that you can then do with the mind or direct your awareness to. And one of them is *vipassanā* practice or certain kinds of *vipassanā* practice. I want to point something else out about that sutta. So here he is. He’s speaking. He’s explaining to someone, this person or that person. It’s a kind of contrived educational situation, a contrived formula, in a way. He goes through the first four *jhānas*, he gives the stock descriptions, and then he gives this whole list of: “And thus the monk with the mind, thus *da-da-da-da-da*, and thus *da-*

da-da-da, and thus *da-da-da-da*, does this and this and this.” The whole thing is a very stock, contrived formula, but to me it’s like, not to get too (and I’ll come back to this as we go on) – not to get misled by that contrived formula. It’s actually, see the sutta in context, that it is a contrived formula. It’s a kind of educational heuristic technique he’s doing. It doesn’t then mean that we should then do *jhāna* one, followed by *jhāna* two, followed by *jhāna* three, followed by *jhāna* four, and then we decide, “Okay, now I’m going to do *this*.” It’s very easy to read a sutta like that and just take it, kind of not really understanding it as a heuristic tool, as an educational tool. It’s a contrived formula. It doesn’t mean that that’s how we meditate. But there are some people who would teach that way because it says, “Well, one, two, three, four, and then you do this, and then you do your *vipassanā*” or whatever. And then there may be other situations where they say, “One, two, three, up to eight, and *then* you do your *vipassanā*.” Do you understand what I mean by ‘contrived’? It’s not really a strict instruction for practice.

Okay, a couple of things. So if any of you, or any of your future selves, or anyone listening to this anywhere, any time, if ever you decide that you would like to really – you find that you would really like to get deep into *jhāna* practice, and you find yourself in that territory, and you want to devote some time to it, *jhānas*, and how they work with insight so beautifully and fertile, once you’ve got to this stage, it can be really helpful, I think, to almost make the ... I know a monk who teaches: make the fourth *jhāna* your base. Ajaan Lee, Ajaan Dhammaddaro, one of my teacher’s teacher’s teacher, a famous monk from the mid-twentieth century in Thailand, a Thai Forest monk – he said: make the fourth *jhāna* your base. It’s like it’s a hub, and from there you can go to lots of places. It’s this place of very bright, very steady, but kind of not very warm awareness and consciousness. I would like to say make the *third* and fourth *jhāna* your base. If you ever get to that level of practice, and you decide you’re really into this, make the third and fourth, because the third has such a lovely, warm, healing kind of space. It’s such a lovely, warm, healing space. So you can make the third and fourth your base, and then kind of venture out backwards in the *jhānas*, forwards in the *jhānas*, to different insight practices. And that becomes kind of home base.

But having said that, as I said, some of you will never want to do that, and you should never feel that you *should* do that. You don’t have to develop *jhānas* to that degree. You don’t have to develop *jhānas* to any degree. Sometimes people say, “I need the *jhānas*. I *need* the *jhānas*.” Or just because I’ve emphasized something, or they’ve heard someone, “I need the *jhānas* to get insight.” I don’t think it’s true. There is a passage where the Buddha says, “Without *jhāna* there’s no liberation. Without *jhāna* there’s no insight. Without insight there’s no liberation.”¹¹ But I’m not sure. Or you might have heard me say something. Sometimes what I say is just in a context, and certainly (where are we now?), it’s like, more than ten years ago, when I first started talking in here in public talks about *jhānas*, the context was much more anti-*jhāna* and much more dismissive and pooh-poohing, and thinking they were a ridiculous waste of time or a dead end or dangerous. So, teaching is in a context. I might really pump up and say just how important they are, but you don’t *need* the *jhānas*. And sometimes people think, I emphasize the healing qualities, and people think, “Oh, I *need* the *jhānas* to heal.” You probably don’t. They can be very healing, but it’s very rare, I think, that somebody actually needs the *jhānas* to heal, and they couldn’t heal in some other way whatever it is that they’re wanting to heal.

However, having said that, I would say the way we're emphasizing, the ways we're emphasizing working on this retreat, what you may need to heal, much more than the *jhāna* itself, is some of what we've been emphasizing in the way of working. So for instance, when we talk about opening, and *really* opening, and really abandoning, and really surrendering, *that* may be much more significant in a person's healing than the attainment of this or that *jhāna*, because that person may have, for lots of different reasons, actually quite a limited ability to really open. Or they think they're really opening, and actually, it's only halfway or whatever. Or to be really wholehearted – *these* things, I would say, however it comes, *they* may be necessary. I think it's probably rare that an actual *jhāna* (it may be possible) is necessary, and there's nothing else that will give that kind of healing for a certain person. But to be able to open as a human being, I mean *really* open, open the energy body and open, open – that may well be quite significant, because it has to do with much more than the attainment of a state in meditation. It has to do with one's relationship with life, and existence, and relationship with others, and all kinds of things, sexuality – all kinds of things.

Do you remember we talked about the cooking ingredients? So a similar thing: here, if you're in the fourth *jhāna*, and you want to go to the third *jhāna*, what do I need to grab from the shelf and add? Yeah, *sukha*. I just reach for my *sukha*, and I pour in the *sukha*, and fourth *jhāna* plus *sukha* should deliver you to the third *jhāna*. So, a handy trick, but again, part of the art of all this, and also just the malleability of perception and the art of playing with perception.

I think I mentioned this already, but it's worth stating again. It's probably over time – it's probably not just one or two experiences – but probably over more repeated experiences with the third and fourth *jhāna*, and the deeper *jhānas*, like *jhānas* from three onwards – their increased refinement, not retroactively so much as when you come back to the *pīti* and the first *jhāna*, they will usually have the effect of refining the *pīti* in the first *jhāna* – actually calming it (that's one thing), and then maybe refining it as well. Calming it, definitely, but also refining it. So when you go to these other *jhānas*, probably repeatedly, and then come back, it's like your sense of what the first *jhāna* is begins to change. And again, that's part of why the Post-it notes. And that may happen with other *jhānas*, with the *sukha*, etc.

So I don't need to repeat this, but just to include it: all the business about mastery goes here as well. So all the things, all the elements of mastery – you can play with them here. They're just the same: ability to sustain, ability to summon at will, ability to ping-pong, ability to go for walks outside, etc., all the rest of it. Because now you've got more *jhānas* to play with at this point, there are increased leapfrog ping-pong permutations and possibilities. You can be jumping all over and practise that. And again, once you get to this point, you want to be practising a little bit at the end, just having some fun at the end of sittings, sort of moving around and seeing how rapidly you can move. But mostly you want to be marinating. And *really* marinating in this, it *does* something very profound to the consciousness, to the being.

Okay, good. Let's have some quiet together.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everyone, and time for tea.

¹ E.g. AN 5:28. The simile of the white cloth below can be found in the same sutta.

² Frederick William Robertson, *Life, Letters, Lectures, and Addresses* (New York: Harper, 1871), 720.

³ E.g. DN 15.

⁴ E.g. MN 111.

⁵ AN 9:36.

⁶ MN 54.

⁷ E.g. DN 22, SN 45:8.

⁸ E.g. DN 2.

⁹ The simile of the goldsmith can be found at AN 3:102 and AN 3:103.

¹⁰ E.g. DN 2.

¹¹ Dhp 372.

01-01 Q & A

... A period of questions open, if anyone would like to ask. Juha?

Q1: differences between *jhānas* and satellite states; working with emotional, energetic, and soulmaking practices

Yogi: I have a question about primary *nimittas*, and you've talked about satellite states a few times. So last night, as I was practising with my base practice, it didn't feel like there were primary *nimittas* of *pīti* or *sukha* around initially, just with the base practice. Then, after a while, I noticed a sense of physical well-being in the body, which didn't exactly feel like *pīti* as I'd been used to, and it didn't really feel like happiness either. It was more of a physical, gentle calm. But that was what was around, so I sort of tried to absorb into it, and that worked to some degree. There was quite a lot of absorption into that state. But it didn't feel *jhānic* in the ways that other states have felt before. So then I started thinking, "Is this some kind of satellite state? Do all of the *jhānas* have satellite states?" And I also thought perhaps this is another kind of *pīti* which I haven't ... you know, it's a sense of physical well-being; it just didn't fit the box of how I've conceived of *pīti* before. And also some questions around primary *nimittas*, that you've encouraged us that the primary *nimitta* needs to be what we want to be focusing on in *jhāna* practice, and I began to wonder, why is that? If love is one of the characteristics of the second *jhāna*, for example, what happens – why do you not encourage us to sort of focus on those aspects? And then also some questions around soulmaking, where you talk about infinitude of qualities that we can theoretically absorb into. So it's not one question, but just sort of an exploration of those themes.

Rob: Yeah. Well, how nice was it?

Yogi: It was nicer than any hindrances! [laughter] I think it could have been a bit brighter, perhaps. It felt a little bit sort of low-energy, maybe.

Rob: The pleasure could have been brighter?

Yogi: Yeah, the pleasure, or the state itself.

Rob: Okay. So it doesn't sound – again, it's like, when to fuss over “Is it? Isn't it?”, you know? But that's kind of partly what you're asking. So it doesn't sound *jhānic*. And yes, the nature of the *pīti* will change over time, and it will certainly change, as I said, after you've got more into the third, fourth, etc. They really have a sort of effect on the *pīti*. But the *pīti* – they have an *effect*, but it's still, like, really yummy. It's not just they make it kind of “*ngh*.” It's actually really nice, it's just different. It's mellow, but really, really nice.

So yes, we could talk about satellite states, or states in the neighbourhood. I'm not sure I would call that a satellite state, or a state in the neighbourhood. I'll talk, hopefully in the next few days, about different kinds of satellite states, where there's this very clear, amazing state, and there's *this* very clear, amazing state, and they have some things really in common, as if they're part of a larger constellation. In a way, what it sounds like you're talking about is something just where some of the *jhāna* factors are a little bit gathered together, but not really in a way that they're really blossoming, you know? So I don't know, strictly speaking, that I would call that a satellite state, but it's in a certain territory.

The question practically, then, is “Is this fruitful, to hang out in that?” And obviously, compared to *papañca*, and compared to whatever else, it's skilful. It's fruitful. Is it going to be fruitful in the way that I can hang out in it, and the way that I'm hanging out with it allows it to blossom into an actual *jhānic* state of, say, peacefulness, or something like that? As I said when I talked about the third *jhāna*, it's a much safer bet to go through the happiness, and really drink. It's not to say that it's impossible, the other way, with just there's this kind of nice, calm feeling. It's not that it's impossible, and it's worth playing with and trying, you know? But generally speaking, it will be more the other way: from a really ripe, full, fleshy satisfaction.

Yogi: It didn't feel like how I would think the *jhāna* would feel like. It wasn't refined in that way. It was sort of the similar level of refinement as *pīti*, just without the sort of movement and energy.

Rob: Yeah. It doesn't sound at all like the third *jhāna*. So a lot of people, it will be very common – we've talked about this several times now – to mistake a kind of sense of calmness, maybe even one that they're familiar with (deep peacefulness, very quiet mind, etc.) for that territory. But the question is whether the way that I'm *being with it* can refine it. So it didn't *feel* refined, but the question is, can I be with it in a way that refines it? It is possible, but that's going to depend on a lot of things. Partly it will depend on, if I really have a lot of experience with the third *jhāna*, then the chances of a state like that refining into the third *jhāna* are much, much higher. If I don't really have much experience of the third *jhāna*, the chances of a state – and I mean the real third *jhāna* deal – if I don't have much experience of that, then the chances of a state like that refining and ripening ... it's not impossible, but it's not very high. Rather, it's much more likely to ripen through the second *jhāna*, etc., and that real fullness, and really, really getting into it.

As for the other secondary *nimittas*, you know, none of this is black and white. Of course, there's a lovely love there, of course you're going to want to explore that. It's just that if you make that your primary thing, it will ripen in something else. It will go in a different direction. So what we pay attention to is what gets amplified, but it also then sets a direction. So that's the reason. If we were on a retreat about exploring *mettā*, and different heart openings, and different kinds of love, and that kind of thing, then of course we would do that. But because we're on a *jhāna* retreat, we want to ... It's really something to keep this intention. It's like, "Okay, this is my road. Yes, there are lots of interesting things at the side of the road, and I can explore all that, but I need to remember this is my road," if we want to develop the *jhānas*.

As to soulmaking, yeah, there's an infinitude of that. What was the question with that? There's an infinitude of different states, and lovely things, and different openings, and ...?

Yogi: Yeah, I guess the question is that we're sort of selecting, in the *jhāna* path, a very specific trajectory, which you were just talking about. And then there's a curiosity of, well, what are the outcomes? How does it unfold if one begins to absorb into these other qualities? Like, sometimes in the second *jhāna*, there's a sense, or just in the sitting, there's a sense of nobility, for example, and then that would be more of an imaginal practice of taking that as an object, or feeling the resonance of that.

Rob: It may or may not be a fully imaginal practice. It could just be an energetic practice. So we did a thing ... was it on the opening evening? Just getting in touch with the sort of sense of devotion. Do you remember that? Something like that, it's very skilful. Laurence mentioned working with anger, then it goes to power. So those things are emotional/energetic practices, transformations. They don't necessarily need to be imaginal. For something to be imaginal, it involves a lot of different things happening. Yeah, all of these fruits are there, but like I said, what do we want to do? And it's not better or worse, because for some person, actually being able to feel into their devotion that's connected with their desire that way, and actually feel it in the energy body, and let that empower that, it's huge. For another person, or like what Laurence was talking about, the ability to be with an anger in a way that's not fragmenting the being, driving them crazy, hurting everyone around them, toxic, etc., to actually distil that in the alchemical vessel – actually, let's not use that word; distil that energetically, emotionally, and find the power and strength there, that everything coheres around it, and then sit in that, and kind of act from there, speak from there, be from there, perceive from there – that's huge, you know? Those things are huge.

So again, we have to really get clear: what is the larger context of what we're doing here? And to me, the larger context of what we're doing here, as I said in the opening, it sits within all these other practices, and feeds and complements all of them, and is fed and complemented by all of them, but it's also distinct. And if we're walking down this road, there's all sorts of, "Look at that lovely pear on that tree! And look at that over there!" It's fantastic. In the context of our larger life of practice, yes, we can go to that, and then there's a side road down where the apple orchard is, or whatever it is. Brilliant. But *jhānas* won't deepen unless that intention is really, "This is my road. This is my road. This is my road." It doesn't mean you can't have a few apples and pears on the way, but there's something about keeping it that way, to deepen in *jhānas*.

But yeah, there are more potential riches and openings than anyone can ever experience in their whole lifetime, whoever you are. That's the thing, especially when you get talking about soul – I mean, when we talk about soulmaking. So there are things that are just kind of part of what I would call basic Dharma training, by which I mean things like working with anger that way; things like being able to be with, get a sense of my nobility, and that's energized in the heart, and it affects my sense of self, and it affects my life; things like being with the sense of devotion, and letting that empower; things like working with the emotions; emptiness, *da-da-da*, all that. And that's all a very large plate of stuff to get through in terms of basic Dharma practices. Very possible. But once you get to soulmaking, it becomes infinite. By the nature of what the soulmaking dynamic does, it will always create new openings, new states, new perceptions, new territory, new beyonds. It will create and discover new aspects of reality. So there's a kind of distinction there. But I guess what I was just calling the sort of tray or the plate of basic Dharma practice, it's probably quite wide, maybe compared to some other sort of presentations. But it's definitely possible, and that's something that one can do in a lifetime. Soulmaking, you'll never get to the end of it. Emptiness, you can get to the end of; *jhāna*, you know, etc. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yes. Thank you.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: Maybe just – not a question, but a request. Earlier on in the retreat, you were saying that you were going to talk about soulmaking, and the relationship of that to the *jhānas*. You mentioned you had something, and then ...

Rob: Not as a *big* topic, certainly not. Maybe it was one little thing, which I've probably noted somewhere, to come later. But not as a whole big thing, no.

Yogi: Okay.

Rob: I don't think so. It would be too much, yeah.

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Hannah, yes. Please.

Q2: distinguishing *pīti* from *sukha*

Yogi: I wanted to ask about the difference between *pīti* and *sukha*. I got more used to *pīti* yesterday and today, and it really opens, almost opens up like an egg shape around the body that kind of pulsates in the same texture or vibration. And it felt it was becoming more subtle and more refined, in a way. And if I compared this to the *sukha*, which is still very wild – I have to laugh sometimes, like, loud – and I

don't feel the *sukha* is more refined as the *pīti*. I just wanted to make sure if this is still something that can happen.

Rob: Do you mean by 'refined' *calmer*?

Yogi: No.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: It could be a language barrier. I thought about this as well. I thought about this [?] that gets more ... fine.

Rob: Auf Deutsch? [yogis speaking German in background] So what you're using for 'refinement,' the word 'refinement' in German would be ...?

Yogi: Finer.

Rob: Like in English, finer, right?

Yogi: Yeah. Okay.

Rob: Hmm. I don't know. I mean, all I can say is it's early days yet. That's the thing about these Post-it notes. It may be that, at first, the experience of the *sukha* is just of a certain bandwidth of *sukha*, with a lot of bubbiness, which it sounds like. I don't quite know from your description what you're describing as *pīti*. So the egg shape thing should be there in every *jhāna*, because that's just part of what it is to have an extended energy body, and as the Buddha says, "permeating and pervading, saturating ..." So that's neither here nor there. That goes with anything. It is very much the case that there's a whole bandwidth for each *jhāna*, so there's a bandwidth of *pīti* in terms of, yeah, refinement, possibility, and even calmness, etc., and also with the *sukha*. So just from what you've said, it's hard to say. But I think it's good just to keep the exploration open. As you get more into the *sukha* and more into what you're calling *pīti*, maybe it starts to get clearer what the differences are, and you can discern a little bit. Other than that, from what you said, I'm not quite sure what else to say. They're both nice?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Yeah, great. So no problem there.

Yogi: Okay.

Rob: Just keep exploring. It's almost like the more familiar we become with the kind of states we tend to open up into, the more we visit them, the more it becomes clearer what the distinctions are for us. Maybe that's all that needs to happen, really, at this point.

Yogi: Okay. Yeah, I just wanted to make sure that I'm still on the right track.

Rob: Very probably you *are*. But again, I would say provisionally, from a teaching point of view, if you think, "Oh, in my first *jhāna*, have I skipped, and I'm calling something that's actually the beginnings of the third *jhāna*, am I still calling that the first *jhāna*, and then I'm calling the *sukha* something else?" Do you see what I mean? If that's a concern, though, I would check with the emotion, because the emotion in the *sukha* is going to be primary – this very warm, tender, exquisite peacefulness or satisfaction or whatever it is, depending on the level. But you're shaking your head, so it sounds like it's not that.

Yogi: No, the emotion is clear. It's more the refinement that I was concerned about.

Rob: Okay. Yeah, so I don't know, other than just hang out in both, lots and lots, and hopefully it will get clear. It *should* get clear. Yeah. But, you know, don't rush all these things. Probably everyone's got kind of Post-it notes still at this point, and that's appropriate, you know? Things mature. Things change. We notice different territories. We notice more as time goes on. Yeah? So basically, it's really nice, you're enjoying it, and it's just asking you to get more and more familiar with it, and then it will get clearer.

Yogi: Okay.

Rob: Yeah?

Yogi: Thank you.

Rob: Sure. There was someone here ... Andy, yeah?

Q3: going from second to third *jhāna*; spontaneous 'not me, not mine' arising in second *jhāna*

Yogi: So I have a question about going from second to third. Sometimes it feels like, especially if it's come from quite a kind of bubbly end of second, that when I get into third it's like coming from a really bright place into a darkened room, where it's kind of hard at first as we make out the nuances of third. It's like, "Okay, right. It feels peaceful." But I haven't yet seen the crystal clarity, or the tenderness, or the divinity, or those qualities. I've found that sometimes I actually end up in a space a bit like what Juha was saying, which is not *really* what I thought it was. So it's like, "Okay, that's not quite the kind of deep, dark pool of third." So ... yeah, what would you recommend at that point? It's just better to go back, or try and refine?

Rob: You could go back, because yeah, probably that place that you're describing that's not quite 'it' is one of these – not *hangovers*, but habit results of your insight practice over the years. It's a state of relative equanimity and quietness, and the mind has got quite used to that, so you're ending up in that. So one thing you could do is come back to the second. Maybe you could even start feeling the drinking of the happiness as *satisfying* (as a verb, in present tense). You understand?

Yogi: Mm-hmm.

Rob: And maybe *that* will take you, for instance, to then *satisfied*. So you're tuning a little bit more to something more specific, that's more related to the third. So that's one option. Another option might be, or should be, with time, that you can ... you know, a lot of this, again, it just starts to become memory and subtle intention, so that what you're remembering – and again, if it feels mature, if it's at that point where it's actually mature to do this – you're actually remembering the whole set of qualities of the third *jhāna*, that whole gorgeous, realm-like, exquisite – we were using 'divine' and those sort of words. You're actually remembering that flavour, and you bring that. You actually go there, try going there by memory of those things. Yeah? Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: So it's really a realm that you're remembering, almost, as opposed to just hanging out. Because you've been practising so long, there's probably a lot of momentum, and habitual momentum, to get into these other states that are, as we were saying, relatively skilful, relatively equanimous, relatively peaceful, relatively non-eventful, etc. It's all good. But if you want to make sure you don't bypass the actual third *jhāna* – which, by this point, you can see the qualitative difference is quite marked – then you have to aim a little more, either in the process of the second *jhāna*, with the 'satisfying, satisfying.' You see, what you're doing there, you're actually inclining the mind towards a certain emotion in the present, whose fulfilment is the third *jhāna*. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yes.

Rob: Or, as I said, you're remembering a whole realm, or other aspects of the realm, apart from the fact that there's equanimity and peace there, you know? It may not be ready for that, but it may be getting there. We have to see. But that's part of the whole mastery deal. And you can maybe remember that when it's going well in the second *jhāna* – you can maybe just lightly, subtly intend to remember that. Does that ...?

Yogi: Yeah, that's really helpful.

Rob: Good. Okay.

Yogi: I just want to ask one more thing. Yesterday I was sitting with a really bright, bubbly, quite silly, actually, happiness in second, and just really enjoying it, and then, suddenly, this spontaneous ‘not me, not mine’ came out of it. Just completely from nowhere. It was really surprising. And so then I had this happiness that wasn’t about anything and didn’t belong to anybody, and it had this kind of – it was this really wonderful, magical, just like, “Wow!” And I just wanted to know whether there was anything worth exploring there, or whether I should shelve that for later.

Rob: I think that probably, to some degree or other, there is less self-identification with the happiness in the territory of the second *jhāna*. So usually when we’re happy, it’s connected to a story, and quite a more fabricated sense of self who is feeling very happy *about* something or other, and there’s a whole projection in time, and with one’s life. And all that’s going, even if I’m not thinking and thinking and thinking. That’s all there. It’s all being fabricated to a certain extent – the self, and then taking this happiness personally. In the second *jhāna*, naturally – which I’ll get to in the next couple of days – the self, as we go through the *jhānas*, the self is less and less fabricated. I may modify that statement at some point. But it’s less and less fabricated.

So in the second *jhāna*, there’s very little personality. There’s very little story. There’s very little background history, and where I’m going, and what I want, and the whole rest of it, yeah? There’s even very little psychological history. It’s just happiness. So already, to a certain extent, there’s a kind of, to some degree or other, there’s a sort of “it’s not me or mine in the same way that it would be for the usual sense of self.” This is something we kind of notice as it goes on anyway. But because it’s a little less identified, then it lends itself more to being seen as less identified, and you have a history of ‘not me, not mine’ practice, of *anattā*, of disidentifying, so it just kind of piggybacks on that.

It’s available as a practice – and again, I hope to talk about this at some point, and maybe even a few times on this retreat: we turn an insight way of looking onto a *jhāna*. Or let’s say it this way: the *jhāna* itself, or the primary *nimitta*, becomes an object for an insight way of looking. I wouldn’t recommend that to anyone at this point, okay? It’s a whole other level of skill and art. But one can then regard this or that *jhāna*, the whole thing or one aspect of it, as ‘not me, not mine.’ And that becomes a super powerful practice, if you stay with it. You have to stay with it, stay with it, stay with it, and see what happens. But I wouldn’t do that before you really know that *jhāna* inside out and it’s really got established. Again, if you do that too early, so to speak, you risk being the foolish, inexperienced cow kind of thing that the Buddha was talking about.¹ It will probably just slide all over without kind of knowing where you are, and then you might lose control. So we really want the *jhāna* itself to be consolidated, thoroughly familiar, thoroughly steady and established, and *then*, for some people, they can start doing their insight ways of looking on the *jhāna* itself, and that, as I said, is a both very lovely but super powerful way of practising. But I will try and talk more about that another time. Yeah?

Yogi: Thanks.

Rob: Yeah? Good. Mikael had one? Yeah.

Q4: balancing opening with penetrating and probing

Yogi: Thank you. I have a quick technical question about steadiness and enjoyment. What to do when it seems that when I emphasize steadiness, I start to lose somehow the capacity to enjoy, and when I emphasize enjoyment, I lose my steadiness, and mind starts easily wandering? They seem somehow to close each one out to some extent. What could be the answer?

Rob: What exactly happens when you emphasize the enjoyment?

Yogi: Well, my way to emphasize enjoyment, generally, is to open and open and open to the enjoyment, and really let go, and somehow fall into the lap of, say, happiness or *pīti* or something – really let go, and let the whole consciousness and energy body sense open, and I just fall, somehow, into the arms of the *nimitta*. I wondered if this really opening, opening, opening strategy is actually causing some – it's kind of, like, too much.

Rob: Yeah, thank you for saying that. This is so individual, and can change with time, but just immediately when you say that, it sounds like – you know, you can't open too much, but what you can do is open too much *relative to* how much probing you're doing. So there's no end to how much you can open – I don't *think* there is. We're infinitely deep human beings. We can just open and open. But relative to how much penetration and probing you're doing ... You can hear it in the way you're languaging it, Mikael. When you're doing that, you're kind of going into quite a passive mode.

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: And that's the problem, okay? Whereas when you're penetrating and probing, with the intention, the agenda of enjoying, then it's really like they go together; the enjoyment and the sustaining go together. You understand? So it sounds like, for you, right now, in the mix of things, upping the penetrative probing with the enjoyment in the mix. For other people, for a lot of people, it's more opening that needs to happen. I said this already: people can think, "But I *am* opening," but actually one isn't opening as much as one could. One's so used to only a limited amount of opening in the being that one thinks, "I'm opening," but actually there's more opening to be able to do there. So all this is very individual. There are lots of modes of attention, but if you keep in mind these two sort of principles – one's a bit more yang, if you like, and one's a bit more yin; one's a bit more active, one's a bit more passive or receptive – if you just keep that in mind, and the necessity to play with both, and to move around, then the question becomes – well, there may not be a question; it's all going fine. Or it might be like, "Am I overdoing it a little bit right now on one or the other?" And 'right now' might be for this six months I've gotten into a habit of overdoing on one side or the other, or it might be just in this moment, or this five minutes or whatever. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: So when you probe, there's no mutual exclusivity between enjoying and sustaining. If I'm just probing, trying to enjoy to the max, I will obviously try and sustain – it's like, of course. But if I go into too receptive a mode, then everything gets a bit loose. I'm not doing any work. I'm not really working there. I'm expecting everything to happen. But again, this is an answer I'm giving *you* right now, and for someone else, it might be that what's needed is the other one, and oftentimes without realizing it or recognizing that's what's needed.

Yogi: Yeah, thank you. Would you say, generally, that steadiness arises out of the balance of opening and probing? When it really hits the sweet spot of opening and probing at the moment, at the *nimitta*, at the context of the practice, that's where the steadiness arises?

Rob: I'm not sure. I feel a bit – hmm – hesitant to say that. The probing and the opening thing is a very fluid, responsive, sort of unformulaic thing. So really, we were just saying the most general thing, like, “Don't neglect one for the sake of the other,” you know? So I'm not sure there's a sweet spot, per se, as much as just, you know, that whole movement is not only going to help sustaining – it's going to help deepening, it's going to help absorbing, it's going to help all kinds of things. If we go back to the Buddha's original image, or rather, the image for the soap mixer with the first *jhāna*, it's quite active. You're kind of mixing something. There's something about moving between those modes that's also part of mixing. And, in a way, that applies to the other *jhānas* as well, in a way, or at a much subtler level. So I don't know that that's just about sustaining, as much as the whole show is just worked better. It's like kneading bread, working it in, the flour and the ... yeah?

Yogi: All right. Thank you.

Rob: Good. Yeah. Is that Nic back there?

Q5: what to do when probing leads to opening and the probing is lost

Yogi: Yeah, it's just related to part of that question about the probing and the receptivity. You just called it 'passive,' as well as the more active being with the *nimitta*. So I've just really noticed, naturally, I'm just much more receptive. The opening comes much more naturally, so with the *pīti*, it's really opening to that. And I've been really trying to, yeah, develop a sense of what the probing is like. It's unfamiliar to me. And what I've found, several times when I've ... So I've taken a part of the energy body which has felt particularly strong in *pīti*, and really put my concentration there and probed that, and what tends to happen, immediately there's an opening. The sense in the energy body then is, the probing goes almost immediately into – it's like the sensation there just opens right up, quite big, and I feel like I've lost the probing already. And I don't know if this is just because I'm not very good at it yet, or if that's something that happens: when you probe into anything, there's space in there, and that's what you kind of fall into. So I'm a little bit confused about how to work with that.

Rob: Yeah, thank you. Yeah, I think it's very normal, and that's where I use that image of, like, imagine someone diving into a lake. That's a probing movement. That body becomes kind of streamlined in its shape, if you're diving and not just sort of splattering into the lake. If you're diving, there's this streamlined probing of one point in the water. But then, very quickly, you find yourself surrounded by water. You aimed at a point, but then it was like, "Oh, now I'm in a new territory." So that may happen [snaps fingers], as you're describing, very quickly, or it may happen at some point when you're probing. Very normal. But then you can just do the same thing again. So it's not like you're getting it wrong; you can just, "Okay, same again. Same again. Same again." And it's not like, "Right, same again, immediately! Quick! Don't lose any time!" The whole thing's just like, what feels helpful right now? So if it feels good, great. And then you may try doing it again and again and again. Or you may, at some point, switch to a more open mode, you know? It's not that we're trying to kind of eliminate any gaps in the probing. Do you understand? If it's opening that way, something is working. Does this make sense?

Yogi: Yeah, it does. Does it mean that you can't sustain the probe in one area, that it just won't sustain, but you can go back a bit later and probe somewhere else? Or can you stay much more probing?

Rob: Well, let's take this person who dives into a lake, yeah? They dive, and then they're underwater, and it's all around them. They could, if they want, just keep going in the same direction. They're in a bigger space, but they could just keep going in the same direction. It's something like that. Their perception is, rather than a spot that they're aiming at, aiming to dive right on that spot in the water, their perception is, "Now it's 3D around me, but I can keep going in the same direction."

Yogi: So it's more like a direction than ...

Rob: Yeah, yeah. Something like that.

Yogi: Okay. Yeah, thank you.

Q6: spectra of *pīti* and *sukha*, exploring the spectra or moving on to the next *jhāna*

Yogi: I'm wondering about the kind of spectrum between *pīti* and *sukha*, because I've been exploring the really, really subtle, fine end of *pīti*, where it's just really beautiful, tiny explosions, and loving it. And I'm less familiar with the *sukha*. But there are times when I'm in that bubbly, really bubbly energy, that that has much more *pīti* in it than, say, the fine end of *pīti* does, and I've been kind of playing with cross-fading *pīti* and *sukha*, and so it seems almost like *pīti* has this – it's *here*, if that's the *pīti* spectrum, and then the second *jhāna* spectrum is *here*, as though you can almost go finer in *pīti* than you might at the top of the second *jhāna*. Does this make sense?

Rob: Not quite, and I couldn't quite see what you were doing with your hands there.

Yogi: Sorry. That's okay.

Rob: Can I say something and see if it helps? And if not, we'll try again. Okay?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Yeah, so there is a spectrum of refinement across all the *jhānas*. As I said, the eighth *jhāna* is just unbelievably refined compared to – well, actually, compared to *any* of the others, but compared to the first, certainly. So there's *that* spectrum of refinement. Then there's a spectrum of refinement – well, again, it's maybe these words, 'subtlety' and 'refinement,' that get a bit confused. So I would probably say there's a spectrum of ... let's use the word 'calming' and 'refinement' differently. What gets confusing is maybe the word 'subtlety.' So there's a spectrum of calming *sukha*, for instance, through the second *jhāna*, and there's a spectrum of calming, the peacefulness in the *sukha*, in the third *jhāna*, as it gets towards the fourth *jhāna* – all that. In the first *jhāna*, it's like, although *pīti* has a large range, in a way, it's not that the deeper end of *pīti* has a subtler or more refined *pīti*. If I said anything – I probably wasn't that clear, because I think these words are getting slightly overlapped and confused, and I'm perhaps not being consistent with using them. The thing about subtle *pīti* is just that if that's all there is, then we need to be good with that, and be able to work with it, and kind of really okay with that.

Yogi: Yeah, I've been loving subtle *pīti*.

Rob: So that's all we need to do – if you're loving it, and you can work with it, and you can get into it, great, fine. *Tick*. You've passed that particular thing. And generally speaking, then, it's like, if I've got all the other elements of mastery of *pīti*, then I really want to just be getting into the *pīti*, no matter how strong it is, until it just goes to the second *jhāna*, rather than keeping it at a subtle (or what you're calling refined) state. Do you understand? It's like, let's just do this thing until it gives birth to the *sukha*, and then we're going with the *sukha*. Does that make sense?

Yogi: Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, it was kind of like a nerdy question more than a problem, really.

Rob: Okay.

Yogi: I think that happened, and I can tell the difference of refinement in the quality between the *pīti* and the *sukha*. The bodily sensation of them feels different, and that seems clear to me.

Rob: Yeah, good.

Yogi: It just seems like there's ... Yeah, go ahead.

Rob: There are probably all kinds of, like, nerdy – *your* word! – corners we could get interested in and all that, but in terms of, like, okay, what do we want to do on this retreat, it may well be it's time for the second, and really ripening into that, and really getting into that. And then maybe sometime later you can come back and explore this level. In terms of priorities of ... yeah. So yeah, it may well be, and there are all kinds of interesting things, and that's great, but just in terms of setting our priorities, it might be that it's ripe now, and you're just holding yourself back a little bit unnecessarily, and we want to kind of move on, it sounds like, to me. Yeah? Okay.

Q7: micro-probing vs sustained probing; maximizing pleasure vs maximizing enjoyment; how certain kinds of attention make the unpleasant disappear

Yogi: I've developed two habits in my working with *pīti* that I wanted to check out with you and just make sure I'm not veering off course. The first is, because I think I'm not so good at probing without probing too hard and kind of turning it into – what was the word the Buddha used?

Rob: Snatching.

Yogi: Snatching, yeah. I find myself kind of, like, micro-probing just for a second, like, "Pleasure over here! Pleasure over there! Pleasure over here!", and what can the being do to maximize it just for a split second here or there. Does that feel like a suitable substitute? Should I work on the way you describe it more?

Rob: My intuition would be no, it probably wouldn't really cohere that way, and it would be much more useful – and probably useful in your life as well – to be able to really sustain a kind of probing intensity without it being too tight.

Yogi: Okay.

Rob: So there's a *jhānic* skill here, but there's probably a mirroring on a life level of also, like, what is it to really be able to focus on something, and sustain that effort, and sustain intensity, without it being problematic, you know? But really, having said what my intuitive sense would be, I should have first said, "Well, how does it work? Does it work well?"

Yogi: It has resulted in *jhāna*, in first *jhāna*, a few times.

Rob: But not so consistent, or it feels like ...?

Yogi: It's probably the most useful thing so far, but I haven't had a whole lot of – I don't feel super successful about attaining *jhāna* on this retreat compared to my expectations in the past.

Rob: Yeah. So you could do it sometimes, and also think about developing the capacity to probe, be very directed, be intense, without it being a kind of problematic grasping.

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: And view that as something that you could develop. But don't give up this, because as you said, it's been successful sometimes. In the end, we want to find out what works best for *you*. No matter what I say or anyone else says, it's really what works best for *you*. But if you've got nothing to compare it to, then you're not actually going to know, "Is this the optimal thing for me, this method? Or actually, is it second or even fifth best?" And there may well be, like a lot of these things, when we talk about opening, when we talk about hanging out, there are fruits here to developing certain ways of working that may be worth more than the *jhāna*, in terms of life, in terms of desire, in terms of capacity to be intense sometimes in life and sustain that. Some of these things are much more significant than whether or not I get into the first *jhāna* or whatever it is. So there are different levels here. But try a few things, and it may well be that what you're describing actually is your method, and it works fine, no matter what anyone else says. But you don't *know* yet, because you haven't tried enough.

Yogi: Okay. Cool. And the other thing that I find myself doing, you've said "maximize the pleasure," and I think because of all my insight practice, I notice that my attention goes so easily to pain – maybe it's just being a human. What I noticed myself doing yesterday was, "How could this not hurt, this place of pain?" Because when the *jhāna* comes, gross pain pretty much just goes away, and what I was finding yesterday was that focusing on a spot where there's pain, the pain would go down, just from the attention. I guess there's a certain degree of letting go in the way the attention is. That, I'm not sure – it doesn't really seem synonymous with "focus on pleasure," or "maximize the pleasure." I'm just wondering your thoughts on that.

Rob: Well, there are two things. First of all, I didn't say "maximize the pleasure." I said "maximize the enjoyment." They're very different. Pleasure is in the object; enjoyment is in my relationship with the object. Do you understand the difference? Is that clear? This is really important.

Yogi: That's helpful.

Rob: That's really important. Then, just now, you said "focus on the pleasure," and that was an instruction at some points, because what we are trained in, maybe just as human beings, or habitually, and certainly as insight meditators, is paying attention to the unpleasant and the difficult. Mostly that's what most people spend most of their insight meditation retreats doing, is paying attention to what's difficult, in one way or another, and there's a real encouragement given for that, and development of willingness, etc. So when you come to *jhāna* practice, you realize that sometimes, what you can choose to do is focus on the pleasant. When there's unpleasant and pleasant, you can focus on the pleasant. You can choose to do that. And in doing that, you can learn all sorts of things – not just about the tendency of the mind; actually, it's really hard, because the mind keeps wanting to go to the unpleasant. You

don't say, "Why don't you just stay there?"; it just will go there. So there's something to learn about the tendency and habit patterns of the mind. But there's also, again, something to learn about dependent arising. Sometimes, when I focus on the pleasant, that pleasant amplifies, and it takes over, and the unpleasant disappears. What's going on? What do I need to understand about perception there? So there are at least two things to understand, if that's the case. One is just a *jhānic* skill – that if I want to develop in *samādhi*, there are many occasions when it will be more helpful to focus on the pleasant and not the unpleasant. There's a life skill in that, but there's also a *samādhi*/meditative skill in that.

But then there's another level that has to do with dependent arising – dependent arising of perception. How is it that this pain that has been there for however long disappeared, was unfabricated when I looked at the pleasant? Really, really important. Then there's a third option, or a third category, which is, as you said, sometimes I bring the attention to the unpleasant, and the unpleasant disappears. Just bringing attention to it makes it disappear? No.

Yogi: A certain *kind*.

Rob: That's the thing. It's a certain *kind* of attention. This is the thing: we talk about mindfulness, as if mindfulness is just mindfulness, and it's a pure thing; you bring mindfulness to this, you bring mindfulness to that. We don't. We bring mindfulness, plus about a hundred other things. Maybe not a hundred, but. We bring mindfulness plus intention, plus relationship, plus subtle aversion or grasping or not, plus equanimity, plus *mettā*, plus self-view, plus reality view. All this is in a moment of pure, so-called 'bare' attention. It's not bare at all. There's no such thing. Do you understand this? This is really, really important.

So what you find is sometimes I bring attention to a pain, and it makes it worse, because there's more aversion wrapped up, or there's a certain view, or there's a certain time-view: "How much longer?" Or whatever it is, or a certain reality-view – all kinds of things. What's wrapped up in the mindfulness in that moment, or while I'm looking at it, is actually just fabricating more unpleasantness. Other times, one looks and brings an attention, and what's wrapped up in that attention, or what's *absent* from that attention, allows the pain to unfabricate. Other times, you bring it, and it just stays the same; whatever's in the mix of mindfulness is just kind of holding it at a level point.

Two important things. One is to *realize* this. There's an old teaching – I remember a teacher saying, "If you pay attention to a pain, three things could happen: it could go away, it could get worse, or it could stay the same." And what's the insight there? In that, the insight was, "You can't do anything about it. Just put up with it." In other words, you're not in control of pain. This isn't *my* teaching; I'm talking about [someone else]. Have you heard this before? Have you heard anyone say that? It doesn't matter. Anyway. What *we're* saying here is, can I realize two things that are extremely significant: (A) that there isn't such a thing as 'bare attention' or 'pure mindfulness.'

And how do I know that? (I'll try and talk about this tomorrow.) Because I start experimenting with noticing what else is in the mindfulness, and then *changing* what else is in the mindfulness, playing with what else is in the mindfulness. And that equates as playing with perception. Okay, what is it to have a mindfulness that has much less aversion in it? Going back to Andy's thing, what is it to have a mindfulness that has "this pain is 'not me or mine'?" It has much less 'me' or 'mine,' much less

identification. What is it to have a mindfulness that has much less “this is a real thing,” or much less time-sense in it? These are all factors, in the real sense of the word. They *do* stuff – from the Latin, *factus*. So they *do* stuff, and we want to realize that. And the only way we can really realize that is by actually getting skilled. Learning the art of playing with this is really, really subtle. And you start to realize, when I bring *this* kind of attention, let’s say with no aversion, the pain will decrease. When I bring *that* kind of attention, let’s say with *more* aversion, it will increase, etc., and all these other things. And they equate as, playing with this equates as what I’m going to call ‘insight ways of looking.’ I start to get really interested in “How does the way of looking affect the perception?” In this case, we’re talking about pain, but it could be anything.

And in my view, that’s the whole road of insight meditation. I start learning about playing with perception and its effects on the perception of anything – the dependent arising of perception. And that has to do with emptiness (I’ll go into this when I talk about it more), meaning this pain does not exist as a thing unto itself. It’s dependent on how I look at it. When I say “how I look at it,” or “way of looking,” I mean how I relate to it, everything that’s involved in my sensing of it. ‘Way of looking’ is just a shorthand for what’s in my sensing of it – my conception of self, of it, of reality, of materiality, of time, and also my relationship with it (a little bit push away, a little bit “I need to hang on to this because it’s an important” – whatever). All that’s part of the way of looking, and the art is to really start exploring all that, and really playing with it, and eventually coming to the conclusion, “This thing, and that thing, and that thing, and that thing, and that thing, and this thing, and that thing – everything, every thing, no thing exists independently of a way of looking. It’s not any thing by itself.” And that’s what emptiness means. A thing, every thing, is empty of independent existence, of an existence inherently, independent of the way of being looked at in the moment. Does that make sense?

So there’s a lot here. At the moment, it sounds like what you’re bringing is a skilful attention, and it’s disappearing. What I’m adding to that is: fantastic, and that little discovery there should pique your interest (as it is), and there’s a huge, gorgeous avenue of insight exploration that takes you to the most profound insights, if you want to follow it and explore all that.

Yogi: But in the context of a *jhāna* retreat, should I not be doing that?

Rob: No, in the context of a *jhāna* retreat – so then you’ve still got these different options. We could say, what order do we choose them in? So here’s this pain. First thing is maybe don’t focus on it. Just focus on the pleasantness. That’s my first choice in the context of a *jhāna* retreat. I’m still, as I said, learning about dependent arising there, if the pain disappears. But in this context, if that doesn’t work, then I can bring the attention to the difficult, and I can actually bring the attention – you’re doing the *mettā* as your base practice, right?

Yogi: For the most part, yeah.

Rob: Okay. So then I can bring my attention to the difficult, and I can work with it in two different ways. One is – and we mentioned this already – what if I make that very difficulty, that unpleasantness, that stuckness or whatever it is, I make that the centre of the *mettā*? So then, in a way, if we talk in

terms of attention, I'm bringing a certain kind of attention to it. I'm looking at it in a certain way. There's a certain way of looking, which is, "Let's just imagine that that's where the *mettā* is coming from." [It] also involves the imagination, yeah? That would be like a second-choice way of working.

But a third choice, in this context – in other contexts, it would be the first-choice way of working – but in this context, you bring the attention to it, but you take care of what's wrapped up in that attention, primarily in terms of aversion and identification. But there are lots of other possibilities, and as we get deeper in this whole insight exploration, you also get much wider in terms of how many possibilities there are, and also the power of different ways of looking, so that, for example ... Does that make sense? The three?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Yeah? So just to finish, then, going back to what Andy said, to view something as 'not me, not mine': "This pain is not me or mine." The conventional view is, "Yeah, well, it's happening in my shoulder," or whatever it is. So automatically, without thinking about it, we identify with it: "It's me or mine." To bring in a view, and actually practise this subtle view – it's not a philosophy; it's a subtle [view], subtly woven into the attention; or, you could say, what we're doing is subtly *taking out* the habitual, subtle 'me, mine.' You understand? Rather than adding something, you're actually taking something out. Does that make sense? You're taking it out, rather than putting something in. Yes?

So then you start to realize, "Wow, that's really powerful." Then, as you develop this more and more, there are whole other kind of more powerful ways of looking. So to get to the point where you're sensing this pain, and woven into the sensing is "It's not real. It's empty. It doesn't exist independently," *that's* even more powerful, or rather, it works even more powerfully to unfabricate. Again, you could put that, flip it around: it looks like you're doing something extra, and people say, "I don't like *doing* in meditation. I don't like *doing*. I want to *just be*." Well, we're doing plenty all the time with this unconscious, habitual "me, mine, me, mine," or "It's real." Now, I don't walk around *thinking* and *obsessing* – actually, *I* do, but most people don't walk around thinking and obsessing, "It's a real knee. It's a real pain," or whatever. There's just automatically, subconsciously, non-verbally, woven into the way of looking, 99,999 times out of 100,000, views of "me, mine" – not verbal, not conscious – and also views of "This is a real thing. It's a real thing."

At first, of course, when you do these practices, it feels like you're *doing* something: "Oh, now I have to remember 'me, mine, me, mine.' What a lot of work. I do this over and over," or 'not real,' 'empty,' etc., and there are different variations of that. But actually what you're doing is you're taking away in that moment, in those moments, a doing that has just become so habitual and is so unconscious that you don't even recognize it's a doing. Do you understand? So you can view that, as well, as a kind of *less* doing.

Who knows the story of Bāhiya and the Buddha?² Monica, surely you know the story of Bāhiya! Yeah. "In the seen, just the seen." What does it mean? What's the Buddha getting at? It's bare attention, right? "In the seen, just the seen." You *could* read it that way. You could read it, "In the seen, just the seen," let's see what else, let's investigate what else we're adding to the seen, habitually, unconsciously, through *avijjā*, through ignorance, that we don't even realize. And "In the seen, just the seen," let's start

taking those things away. See what happens. And *that's* why the *Bāhiya Sutta* ends with a description of the cessation of consciousness and perception, of the Unfabricated, the transcendent. The Buddha says “No air, earth, fire, water. No sun, no moon, no nothing. There's no form, no perception there.” If it meant just bare attention – he's given Bāhiya this instruction of bare attention, Bāhiya's gone and done his bare attention practice, and then what should Bāhiya end up with? He would end up with some kind of vivid sense of this moment and its pristine sort of reality. That's what you get from bare attention practice. But if you actually think about “in the seen, just the seen,” maybe, hidden in there, is a teaching about, “What else is there? Can we remove those factors, and *then* see what you get?” And what will happen is all these factors are fabricators. To just say in different words what I said before, every time we're sensing something with an unconscious ‘me, mine,’ or an unconscious sense of its reality, it's fabricating that thing. I start taking out those – and there are lots of hidden ones, even the belief in a present moment, it's hidden in, and then conception of time: there's a past, there's a future, there's a present. It's so everyday, woven in. No one's walking around like, “Is there a present moment?” It's not at that level.

Start taking these things away, what's going to happen? You're going to end up – unfabricating, unfabricating, unfabricating – end up in the place that's at the end of the *Bāhiya Sutta*, which is “no this, no that” – disappearance of everything. *That's* why Bāhiya became an arahant. It's not because he ... Anyway. [laughter] Do you understand? So again, how we can read something or hear something a hundred times. I don't know – how many times have you heard about the *Bāhiya Sutta* or read about it? Many, yeah. It's very common. And we just read and hear, and we're just thinking, or reading and hearing, listening with the same old ...

Yogi 2: Fabrication?

Rob: Fabrication, same old view, same old box, and it filters out any ... Actually, maybe – I won't insist on it; I don't mind – but maybe there's a whole other level here, and that actually makes sense of the two parts of the *Bāhiya Sutta*, because otherwise they're *very* strange. And it's an *Udāna* sutta. *Udāna* means ‘inspired utterance.’ And the inspired utterance in that sutta is not the “in the seen, just the seen,” which is what you often hear in the teachings, as if that's the thing, that's the golden piece: “In the seen, just the seen,” as an instruction for bare attention. The inspired utterance is actually at the end, when the Buddha describes the Unfabricated, the cessation.

It's a very terse instruction. If you take it as meaning one thing, it just totally disconnects the two parts of the sutta. They just don't make any sense together. They don't belong together, and the *udāna* has gone, the inspired utterance. It's gone, and it's significant – that's why you hardly ever hear it mentioned in the context of the *Bāhiya Sutta*. Do you understand? I'm going to ... [laughter]

But anyway, the principle is really, there's a way of understanding what insight meditation is or can be. There's a way of framing what insight meditation is that just keeps opening up deeper and deeper into this territory of emptiness and dependent arising, and I would like to talk – I've obviously talked about it already a bit, but. That's really also understanding what attention is, and things like that, and understanding these kinds of experiences that you're describing, and that's so, so important; so, so potentially profoundly fruitful. Yeah? Okay. Good.

Andrew? I don't know what time my interviews are. Does anyone know? Do you have a sense it will be a quick one, Andrew? Or you're not sure? It wouldn't be a quick one. Shall we save it for another time, and put you first on the ...?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Well, why don't you take the mic?

Q8: clues to deeper insight in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*

Yogi: I really enjoyed that, Rob. I wonder if you could do the same thing with the mindfulness sutta, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* or the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, whether within them you can also find clues to deeper insight.

Rob: I think so, yeah.

Yogi: And maybe also the *jhānas* in there somewhere. I don't know.

Rob: The *jhānas* in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: I'll just say one thing about the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, or one clue in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, if that's okay for now, and then maybe we'll pick up the rest of it another time. Is that okay?

Yogi: Yeah.

Rob: Who knows the refrain in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*? Like the chorus? What does it say? Does anyone remember?

Yogi: It says "arising and ceasing." [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. So it says something like – it goes through each foundation, a description of what you pay attention to, and then there's a refrain after each one. And part of the refrain says – I can't remember the words as it usually gets translated, but something like, "Mindful of or attending to arising and ceasing." Do you remember? Something like that. "Attending to arising and ceasing of something with regard to *vedanā*, with regard to mind states," or whatever like that.

And of course, we read that, and we think, "Oh, it's an instruction about *anicca*, impermanence." But the Pali word is actually *samudaya*, and that word, it's the same word that the Buddha uses in relation to dependent arising, and the teaching of dependent arising, and how suffering arises. So when he present the Four Noble Truths, *dukkha* is something that *samudayas* – it 'arises together.' I can't

remember what the Pali is, but something like, “Pay attention to origination factors and dissolution factors, factors of arising and factors of ceasing.”³ So to me, it’s possible, one could interpret that refrain as saying, “Pay attention to not just the *fact* that things arise and cease, but *how* they arise and cease.” So coming back to Jason’s question, it’s like, okay, here’s a pain, and it arises and ceases. Okay, great. That’s a really good – it’s good to realize that pain is impermanent. And I can take that practice, and I can develop it, and notice more and more impermanence. Or I could start getting interested in what we’ve been talking about: the fact that when there’s *this* kind of attention, a pain intensifies or arises more. When there’s *that* kind of attention, it fades. It gets fabricated more, fabricated less. And I’m interested in the origination and dissolution factors of *vedanā*. Does that make sense? There are other suttas, and they’re kind of repeated, and I can’t remember where, where the Buddha says, “How do you move from *this* level of awakening” – I think it’s to the final level of awakening. And the Buddha says, “A practitioner should train themselves to pay attention to the aggregates,” *vedanā*, and perception, and body, and all the rest of it, mental formations, consciousness. And the usual English translation is something like, “And see, and pay attention: such is its arising, such is its disappearance.”⁴

But I think the emphasis there is on the ‘such.’ In other words: how? How is it arising? How is it disappearing? Otherwise, it’s just a teaching on impermanence, rather than a teaching on this whole business of the dependent arising of perception. Is this making sense? Yeah? But, you know, this is what I tend to emphasize as being what I feel is the more interesting, profound, liberating, and sort of coherent view. Whether it’s what the Buddha meant and *da-da-da* – it’s like, I’m not particularly interested in that. But it’s what *I* tend to teach. Now, of course, like I said, noticing impermanence is important. Just relatively speaking, the liberative power, and the kind of radicality – sorry, Boaz! – the radicality of what gets uncovered is of a whole different order, because to say that everything is impermanent is – okay, you could say it’s ‘radical,’ but to say that nothing really exists at all as any thing is a whole other level of, to me, radicality. It’s a whole other level of “Whoa! We’ve just gone to a whole shift in our reality view.” So, again, people will know that’s what I tend to emphasize. But the impermanence thing is really important, too, and fruitful. Anyway. Is that okay for now?

Okay. I think we’re definitely going to need to end, so why don’t we have a bit of quiet together?
[silence]

Okay. Thank you, everybody, and time for tea.

¹ AN 9:35, *Gāvī Sutta*, or the *Cow Sutta*.

² Ud 1:10.

³ MN 10: “He remains focused on the phenomenon of origination [*samudaya-dhamma*] with regard to ..., on the phenomenon of passing away [*vaya-dhamma*] with regard to ..., or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away [*samudaya-vaya-dhamma*] with regard to ...”

⁴ E.g. SN 22:89.

Jhānas and Insight

What I would like to talk about today is primarily the relationship of *jhānas* and insight – something about that, at least, quite a lot about that. And in a way, it's fortuitous, some of what came up in the Q & A yesterday. Some of the questions really elicited a sort of outlining, explaining of a kind of different way of framing what insight could be. So we've already kind of made good headway with a lot of this – the insight part, at least. Some of you, regarding the insight part, have heard or read this kind of thing many times. It's been framed to you many times. And for some of you, it will be really quite new. And so, fine either way.

My experience teaching this over the years is that to really fully understand what we're saying here, or rather, this frame, this framework for *an* understanding of what insight could be, or how we can understand the journey of insight and what we're doing, and actually, the journey of Dharma – so it's not just insight meditation. It's how the whole thing fits together and can kind of fit together quite coherently, in a way that it just goes really into the depths, in a very coherent way, and the whole Dharma coheres in that. That framework really takes a while to fully understand. And it takes really a while to really understand the implications of it.

So to me, part of the reasons for presenting the Dharma this way, or presenting insight this way, is because the implications are profound, and coherently profound. It's very, very rare for someone to fully understand this and fully understand its implications on two or three hearings or reading, or something like that, or even sometimes ten. You may think you do, or one may think one does, but experience has shown me over some years of teaching that actually, even when people think they do, there's more here, to really grasp this. So if it feels like this is, "What the *hell* are you talking about?", that's all fine and normal, because this is a process of understanding something. It *should* be. If you feel like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know all that," then maybe that might be the time to sort of question a little bit. It takes time; it takes repetition; it takes pondering – and again, this kind of *active* pondering.

Someone told me – they came, did a long retreat, we worked together, and then they went back home, and very wisely, I thought, were trying to fit this framework (that I'm going to explain) about insight that we've already touched on – were trying to fit it into frameworks of Dharma or insight meditation that they already knew. And so, "Well, it must be just a version of that," or whatever. And after a lot of hard thinking, and a lot of intelligence, realized that they couldn't. Actually, it was something quite different. But the point I'm trying to make is about the active pondering and the active wrestling with something – *and* practice. It's quite rare for someone to have done all that with this. So if you feel confused, there's good grounds for that – hopefully not just because I'm completely incoherently babbling. [laughs] That may be the case!

It's also, some of you will know, a lot of what I'm going to say today – regarding insight and emptiness and that business – forms, really, the conceptual foundation for Soulmaking Dharma. And it's kind of what gives legitimacy to Soulmaking Dharma, and doesn't just make you as a Soulmaking Dharma practitioner easily consignable to the fruitcake bin. [laughter] It's really ... [laughter] Okay, so back to repeating a few [things]. Some of this we've said already, either yesterday or earlier in the retreat, but still, because it's difficult to really see how it all coheres, and really digest that in one's

being, repeating a bit, and some will be repeat from, as I said, near the beginning, and some perhaps from yesterday, but perhaps in different words, different approaches.

Perhaps most common in the Dharma world, with regard to *jhāna* practice, is a kind of view: first you practise your *jhānas*, and you get that together. Or rather, in a session, even, first you do your *jhānas*, then you do your insight. Right? And if you're not into *jhānas*, because either they're dangerous or taboo or they're ridiculously too difficult to reach, first you practise your *concentration*; you're steadying your mind, then you do your insight. Right? That's a kind of normal way of ... Come across that? Yeah? That's perhaps the common view: first the concentration, if no *jhāna* – *jhāna* or concentration, then the insight.

As I pointed out in one of the other talks (and I gave that example, when we went through all those Pali words), to me, reading that passage and kind of getting a sense of the context of it, and similar passages in the Pali Canon – this is really a very contrived formula that the Buddha's presenting in a certain teaching situation. The whole thing is probably a contrivance. It's, you know, first you do *jhāna* one, then you do *jhāna* two, in a session, then you do *jhāna* three, then you do *jhāna* four, and then you do your *vipassanā*, or whatever. If you kind of get a grasp of the session and who he's talking to, it's not really an instruction for, "The meditator sits down and does this thing in order," I don't think. You *could*, but to me it doesn't read – there's not anything convincing there at all to suggest that *this* is what you need to do in your forty-five minutes of sitting, or whatever. So first, the usual view: first your concentration, then your insight. And you can, one *could* look at passages like that and say, "Well, the Buddha's saying it. Look at this." But I don't actually view such passages as actual meditation instructions, really, at all.

And again, repeating other stuff we've said, there's a view that when you're concentrating the mind, you're sharpening the mind. You're making it more 'pointy,' its ability to to point, and you're sharpening Mañjuśrī's sword (Mañjuśrī is the bodhisattva of wisdom). So really, what you're doing in concentration, the most important thing that you're doing is sharpening the mind, 'sharpening Mañjuśrī's sword' (in inverted commas) so that your mind and the gaze of your mind, the attention of your mind, can dissect the phenomenal world, dissect experience. And in that dissection, it dissects so finely because of how sharp Mañjuśrī's sword, mind, has become through the concentration, through the one-pointedness – dissects it so sharply that it reveals the ultimately true, atomic nature of things: that there is a momentary arising and passing of five aggregates, etc., through time, very, very fast. And if I sharpen my sword enough, I can see that.

Or (and again, this is all repeat) one has the kind of view that what you're really doing in concentration practice is gathering the energy of the mind like a laser beam, similarly. And that laser beam of intense energy gets focused on something. It gets focused on a rock, layers of rock. And because of the intensity, and because of the power of the laser beam, the power of the mind, empowered, energized, gathered together through concentration, that laser beam is able to drill down through layers, through rock layers of construction, rock layers of fabrication, rock layers of illusion, all the way down until it reaches something called 'reality.'

Or (again, all this is repeat from the beginning of the retreat) there's the view that what you're *really* doing in concentration is making the mind so steady, imperturbably steady, that this unwavering gaze cannot help but see the truth of things. The unwavering gaze – we don't know the nature of things,

we don't see the truth of things *because* our gaze is not unwavering enough. It wobbles. We get micro-distracted or hugely distracted. If we can just unwaveringly gaze at something, that will reveal how things are, how things *really* are.

Or there's an idea – and again, some of this is explicit. Some of it's implicit. Some of it, you have to kind of tease it out of a way of thinking that you hear about. Or we have the idea, and/or we have the idea, that getting rid of thought is what we're trying to do through concentration. Thought is the problem. Thought is the enemy and the obscurer of truth. And that when we get rid of thought through concentration, then, in doing so, we're lifting the veils on reality, because thought is obscuring that way. We lift the veils on reality, on the real world.

So there's all of those, as I said, explicit or implicit kind of conceptions of what we're doing, and how 'concentration' fits into what we're doing. Then, perhaps more recently, but perhaps, to some degree, all the way along the history of Buddhism, there's also the idea that awakening doesn't really involve any extraordinary or deep insight or realization. Awakening, in this view, just really involves the ordinary sense of things, the *ordinary* sense of the world that everyone would agree on, but without the tendency to *papañca*, to gross *papañca*, that we all know – that getting caught up and self-obsessed, and making a big issue of this or that. So just the ordinary sense of things, no extraordinary insight, without so much of a tendency or without any tendency for gross *papañca*, and with a reduction of the three *kilesas*, the three primary defilements: greed, aversion, and delusion. And that becomes what awakening is. And then we have to ask: well, what do you mean by 'delusion,' if you've said there's no extraordinary realization? And in some models, delusion will just be – delusion and *papañca* are equivalent. *Papañca*, because of its creating all this mess everywhere, is basically delusion. You're believing all kinds of nonsense, all kinds of stuff that's not true, swimming in that murky, turbulent soup. And that's delusion. So that's what you get rid of, when you get rid of *avijjā*, for instance.

Or it may be that the *avijjā* is a little more deeply defined as 'believing in a real personality, believing in the self as a reality of personality,' so that then, okay, there is this – nothing *really* special changes; there's no special insight or realization about the nature of things – just the ordinary sense of the world, less *papañca*, less greed and ill-will, and the end of the belief in the personality. And instead, the belief, perhaps, in the process of the aggregates in time. The true nature of the self is this process of momentary aggregates arising and passing, five aggregates of body/mind, arising, passing, moment to moment. And that's what awakening is, and that's what an awakened person knows.

So in that last system, or the different variations of it, there may be no place for *jhāna* practice at all, because why would you need *jhāna* practice? There's no extraordinary, as I said, or deep insight/realization into the nature of things. It's just the ordinary sense of things. Less *papañca*. Maybe *jhāna* has a place in exactly that, as a kind of retraining the mind into the habit of non-*papañca*. So that's what happens when we're in *jhāna*: the *papañca* is just very quiet, quietens very much. And that's the purpose of *jhāna* practice: you're just getting used to less *papañca* until the mind is weaned off the habit of *papañca*. So *jhāna* has its [place]; that's its place. Or it is that state of [non-*papañca*], or somehow it contributes to the lessening of gross *papañca*. So there are variations of this view, this kind of view, to different degrees.

As I pointed out before, all of them – and this is really, really key – all of them, quite rightly, need to situate the view of concentration, and thus of *jhāna* practice, coherently within a larger view, which

must somehow start with, “Where am I going? What is awakening?” So the view of awakening, which needs to be intimately tied up with, “What is the view of truth and reality?” – they go together, the view of awakening and the view of truth and reality. Someone may not have even thought this way, but it needs to be, to some degree, coherent this way. The view of awakening is tied in with, “What is the view of truth and reality?” If we’re absolutely fixed on a certain view of truth of reality – this world, as it seems to common sense, post-Isaac Newton and Descartes and all those people, is the reality of things – my awakening, or my vision of awakening, has to fit into that view, whatever it is. The view of awakening – tied in with that is the view of truth and reality. And drawing on that, or emerging from that, is the view of what insight is. Do you see how these fit together? View of awakening, truth and reality, insight. Insight is what opens up truth and reality, and that gives me awakening.

And then, last stage within all that, within all that framework, I have to situate coherently, what is my conceptual framework, what’s my view of *jhānas*, or no *jhānas*, *jhānas*, what for, and as we said before, what do I emphasize within *jhāna* practice? So what I emphasize moment to moment – I’m really fussing over this, “Can I blooming well stay with this, my nostrils, or whatever?” How much I emphasize that, and how much I even get upset or not at its success or failure in the moment, is actually determined by this larger-scale structure. How does my ability to stay at the nostrils relate to insight? “What do I *mean* by insight?” is related to “What’s my view of reality and truth?” And that’s related to awakening. You see how all this nestles together? It *must*. Now, it needs to be, to some degree, coherent. But all this fits together in different models, different paradigms.

What’s also quite common is that, if someone is supportive of *jhāna* practice, then *jhānas* contribute to insight. So *jhānas* lead to insight. Much less so the other way round: insight is much less regarded as – insight practice as a process, or insight per se, having insights – as something that opens up the *jhānas* or delivers the *jhānas*. So the causality is one way. And that’s probably, again, what most of you have come across, right? *Jhānas* go to insight.

What we were saying here earlier in the retreat is that *jhānas* are not enough for liberation, which we said, but they have their part in what contributes to liberation, alongside other factors – not just insight, but other factors that we talked about. *Jhānas* contribute to liberation, awakening, or *jhānas* are part of the pool of factors that open up liberation. And insight is a large contributing factor to liberation as well. What I want to say as well – so *jhānas* can bring insight, absolutely. *Jhānas* should deliver insight. And we want to go into it. What I want to go into today is: how? How do *jhānas* bring insight? But also, I want to stress that insight leads to *jhānas*. So another way into *jhānas* is through insight. Or if you’re doing insight, let’s say, in what I would say is the most *fruitful* way, *jhānas* are going to be very available on that road. And so, *jhānas* lead to insight; insight leads to *jhānas*. And the question in both directions is: how?

So, not wanting to dismiss any of these other conceptions at all, but really wanting to add to them. There are some modifications I would definitely make to some of them regarding views about what’s ultimately true, and what’s ultimately real, but it’s all good. There is a place for the laser beam. There is a place for all the rest of it. But in addition to all those views, all those ways of conceiving, with necessary ontological modifications, what we would like to say is that an awakened person *knows* something deeply. They know something. And to know something deeply means, not just as an idea, not just in the head – in the heart, in the being. They know something deeply, and they can engage that

knowing in their very sense of things. And they can engage that knowing deliberately in their very sense of things. It's a deep heart-knowing.

And what do they know? They know the emptiness of all phenomena. That's what an awakened person knows: the emptiness, the total emptiness of all phenomena, the total, radical emptiness of all phenomena, which means a phenomenon is empty, and it doesn't leave any bit of itself or any level of itself that's not empty. That's what the 'radical' bit means: it goes to its root. An awakened person knows deeply the emptiness of all phenomena.

There is no electron, no basic unit of matter, that is not empty. That happens to agree with the current understanding of physics; that may or may not change. But there's no electron. There's no basic building block of matter that's not empty. There's no self or self-view or conception of the self that is ultimately true – I'll say it the other way around – that's not empty. All conceptions, all views of the self are empty. This is what an awakened person knows. The energy body is empty. Space is empty, and not just empty of having things in it – empty of having independent existence, of existing independently of the way of looking, of having inherent existence. Awareness is empty. Awareness is not fundamental. Consciousness is not fundamental. It is empty too. Time is empty; not just past and future, but the present moment too: empty. Awakening is also empty. So this is what an awakened person knows.

And to say that they're empty means, as we said yesterday, that none of these things, no phenomenon whatsoever exists independently of the way of looking. It exists *as this* or *as that* dependent on the way looking, and it exists *as anything at all* dependent on a way of looking. It does not fabricate as a phenomenon unless the way of looking makes it fabricate as a phenomenon.

So what's that got to do with freedom from suffering? Is it obvious what it's got to do with freedom from suffering?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah. Derek said we only cling to what we think is real, actually. So when I first started teaching this, and I realized I was going on and on and on about this stuff, and then some people were just like, "Well, why are you talking about this?" It was just as if it was some abstract philosophy sort of thing. But no, it's very intimately, directly connected with suffering. Suffering comes from clinging and craving, right? That's pretty much what most Buddhists believe. And soulmakers, shush. [laughter] No, soulmakers also believe that. And we have something else called 'eros.' We're *not* going into that today. Craving and clinging are what cause suffering. Take them away, and the suffering goes out. You should know this at some level, or you wouldn't be here if you didn't know. But we only crave and cling to what we sense is real. When we realize something is not real, we don't cling or crave. We don't try and get rid of it – so the sense of self, the sense of an object or other, the sense of time, all these things.

So seeing the emptiness means seeing that they're not *really* real in the way that we thought they were. We say they're neither real nor not real. But that's enough to take away the sense of inherent reality that we usually have in relation to things, dependent on which our craving and clinging gets established. And dependent on that craving and clinging is suffering. This is really important.

Okay, well, how does an awakened person get to such a knowledge, such a sort of far-out sounding understanding and knowledge? Again, it's in the heart, in the whole being. Well, one way is by playing

with what we call ‘ways of looking,’ which we talked about again yesterday, and several other times. ‘Way of looking’ means the way of relating, the way of conceiving, the way of viewing, the way of sensing. And everything that’s wrapped up in that relationship with any phenomenon, any experience, perception, experience, appearance in the moment – that’s what we mean by ‘way of looking.’ Everything that’s wrapped up in there.

And one begins – one way of doing it – one can begin playing with different ways of looking, and one starts to see, like a scientist: “Oh, well, this way of looking – actually, when I look that way (like when we’re in the middle of *papañca*), it actually fabricates more suffering.” And suffering gets worse or gets locked into place. It actually fabricates more sense of self. The self feels more solid, more separate, more contracted, etc. It fabricates more of whatever it is that I’m tussling with or grasping after, more of an object. And more sense of time – time itself also feels heavier, more pressured. One starts to realize all this. And because I’m playing with ways of looking, I also start to realize: “Oh, there are some ways of looking that do the opposite.” They release suffering. They unfabricate the self to some degree. They unfabricate objects and things to some degree. And they unfabricate, eventually, one sees, the sense of time as well. Those are the interesting ones. Actually, it’s all interesting, but those are the ones I want to follow and develop: the ones that unfabricate suffering, and with the unfabrication of suffering, they unfabricate self, and the world of objects, and eventually time, etc.

And one can, over practice, getting really interested in this, and also the delight of practising this way – not just the art of it, but the freedom that it delivers in the moment. I’m *looking* at this thing this way (means I’m *relating* to this thing this way), and right there and then – I don’t have to wait ten months or ten years – the suffering goes out of experience. The self is less fabricated. The object itself gets less fabricated. There’s release, relief, ease, openness, etc., and all kinds of, we could say, mystical states of consciousness begin to open, because the self and objects and time are not being fabricated in their usual way. So other senses of things open.

Delightful ways of practice – one gets really interested in that – develops one’s range of ways of looking, and also one’s depth. In other words, as we said yesterday, some ways of looking let go of a little bit of clinging, and some ways of looking that we can develop let go of clinging at a whole deeper level, a much subtler level of clinging. And because they do that, they have even more power in unfabricating, because it’s the clinging – and I use that word very widely – but it’s the clinging that’s fabricating. It’s fabricating not just the suffering, but also the self, objects, the world, time, etc. So one gains, one develops one’s range, and one’s skill, and one’s depth, and goes deeper and deeper into this, learning to unfabricate more, through the ways of looking that one is developing through practice.

We talked about, for example, pleasure and pain and equanimity, and said equanimity is a letting go of push and pull. In other words, it’s an attenuating, a letting go of clinging. And as I just do that and do that and do that, the pleasure and pain get less, eventually. The pain might go to pleasure and *then* get less. I get left with neutral *vedanā*, and eventually that fades. Eventually, as we touched on yesterday, again, *everything* fades. No thing, no self, no consciousness (in the usual sense), no time, no present moment, no space, no world. Buddha had different names for that: the Unfabricated, the Deathless, cessation of perception and feeling, the Unborn, lots of different names. We can open to that, something that’s incredibly hard to put into language, because language is based on a world of things and subjects and objects. But this is possible for us. If we just take this one idea of ways of looking, notice that some

fabricate more and some fabricate less, and get really interested in that, and just keep going, we can get all the way to the Unfabricated, just following one principle and playing – playing and having a fun and a delightful time doing it.

It doesn't stop there, I would say. Some people would say it stops there: "Now, I've realized the Unborn." I would say it doesn't stop there, because then, one can also see: time is empty as well. And one may have seen that, getting there, or one may need additional little ways of seeing that. And also, what is fabricated is empty. Fabrications are empty. The things that are fabricated in this process – they're not real things either. So time is empty. The time in which the process of fabrication happens also is empty. And fabricated things are empty. That means the whole notion of fabrication is empty. So the very idea and thread that we were following, this idea of fabrication, ends up dissolving as well. It's empty too.

When one had reached the Unfabricated, the Unborn, whatever you want to call it – some people use the word *nibbāna* for that – there can be an extreme duality between (1) that transcending of the world in the Unfabricated and (2) the world, the world of *samsāra*, the world of form, the world of struggle – this world that we all agree on. And then there's *this* that's completely transcendent. This [the Unfabricated], holy. This [the world], essentially worthless except as potential stepping-stone to *that*. Once one has seen that fabrication, too, is empty, then actually, the whole duality collapses as well, because there is no fabricated, and without a fabricated, the Unfabricated, as an idea, doesn't make sense. So that hierarchy of sacredness collapses: everything empty, everything sacred; Unfabricated, fabricated; no ultimate truth; no place that has, ultimately speaking, more reality; no view that has ultimately more reality than another. There are only left ways of looking. That's what we have as human beings, an awakened human being: only ways of looking, a huge range and depth of ways of looking, ways of playing with perception, and the art of that.

And we can do that, an awakened person can do that for different ends. Classical Buddhadharma, of course – why do I choose this way of looking over that way of looking? It's because I want less suffering. So this situation, I look at this way to reduce the suffering. It's just basic Four Noble Truths in condensed version. When you get into Soulmaking Dharma, actually, you might choose other reasons for ways of looking that are *not* primarily the reduction of suffering. That's not really what you're going for. You're going for something else, sometimes. There will often, in Soulmaking Dharma, of course, be an overlap – in other words, when we choose a view because we want the sacredness there, or the beauty, or the soulmaking, that most often also reduces the suffering. But sometimes not. Classical Buddhadharma – that's why we choose certain things. Everything's oriented to reducing suffering.

So practising – what was that word that the Buddha used? – *mudubhūte*, the malleability of mind, the malleability of perception, the malleability of ways of looking, of views. Or we say, playing with perception, playing with perceiving – this is a way of construing what insight practice is: playing with perception, and seeing, through playing with perception, what happens when I look this way, when I look that way, when I look *that* way, when I look a fourth way, seeing what the perception is. I perceive a certain way the perception is. The experience, the appearance, the phenomenon depends on the way of looking. So that, in a nutshell, is what we could say is insight practice, and how it all hangs together.

Now, we can understand – and in a way, we’ve hinted at this quite strongly several times already – we can actually understand the *jhānas* as doing that too, as well as being these really, really valuable resources in all kinds of ways that we’ve talked about, as well as (certainly the way we’re teaching them here, and the way that you guys are practising) kind of developing our sensitivity and our attunement, and all the beauty of that, and the gifts that *that* gives in all kinds of realms of our lives – relational, emotional, energetic, soulmaking etc.; also for emptiness practices.

But as well as resources and sensitivity and everything else we’ve said about the *jhānas*, we can also view them as playing with perception and begin to understand, actually, there’s one spectrum. There’s one spectrum of more or less fabrication of suffering. *Dukkha* is a better word; ‘suffering’ is such a heavy word in English. But *dukkha*. In other words, sometimes you open to a new level, and you wouldn’t have considered where you were before had any *dukkha* in it whatsoever, and it’s only when you go deeper that you realize, relatively speaking, the older level (which you’ve now transcended) had some very subtle *dukkha* in it. So I prefer the word *dukkha*; because it’s a foreign word, it can keep for us a much subtler range than we tend to associate with the word ‘suffering.’

But you realize there’s one spectrum: one spectrum of *dukkha*. We can be fabricating a lot, really a lot, somewhat less, somewhat less, somewhat less, somewhat less, all the way down. But that spectrum of fabrication of suffering is the same spectrum as the fabrication of self-sense. They’re just two threads of the same rope, of the same spectrum. When we’re suffering a lot, the self-sense is fabricated a lot: much more solid, much more contracted, much more separate, much more *ergh!* But so is the world is fabricated. The perception of the world is correspondingly – it’s just another thread of that rope, of one spectrum. And so is clinging, if we use the word broadly enough. This end, the *dukkha* end, has got a lot of clinging and craving in it. And as I said, when you start engaging practices, and really sustaining them and playing with them, practices that take away clinging, craving, repeatedly, moment after moment, then we move down that spectrum. And as we take away more subtle levels of clinging and craving, we just find it’s the same spectrum. So this is a spectrum of suffering. It’s a spectrum of self-sense. It’s a spectrum of object-sense, thing-sense, because they fade as well: sensations, things, sights, sounds, all the rest of it, the world; also of clinging, and also of *jhānas*. It’s one spectrum. We’re just talking about different, if you like, threads of a rope. Does this make sense? I’m going through it quite quickly.

[38:02] A few little things I want to throw in at this point – a little bit came out of Andy’s question yesterday, which I’m glad you asked. After a *jhāna*, in a *jhāna*, or kind of around the territory of a *jhāna*, and Andy was asking about the happiness and the sense of self in relation to the happiness, but let me say a couple things. In the territory of a *jhāna* – after, in, or around it, sort of *peri-jhānic* – a few things happen in relation to classical insights, again, which is tied into what I’ve just been saying. We’re more clear, and we’re more spacious, so that something like impermanence is just completely obvious to us. In that space, it’s obvious that things are impermanent. Also, because of the yumminess of a *jhāna*, whichever *jhāna*, it’s much easier to see the *dukkha*, the relative *dukkha* of other pleasures, or the fact that other pleasures are a lot less satisfying. So when you’ve tasted, let’s say, even just a really strong *pīti*, and you’re really absorbed in it, it would be hard to match that with any sensual experience – certainly the happiness.

More saliently for what I want to say today – but these are all related, because they all have to do with the kind of unfabricating – is that in, around, or after a *jhāna*, it's much easier to see that phenomena are not-self; they're not me, not mine. It's much easier to see. Why? Tying it to what we just said about this rope – this spectrum of fabrication which has different threads in it, of different things that are, if you like, getting fabricated together as one process, just different aspects of the same process – the *jhāna*, tying it to that idea, is already less fabrication of self. And so, because the self is less fabricated, what the self habitually does is also less fabricated at the time. And one of the things the self habitually does is appropriate – 'me, mine, me, mine, me, mine, me, mine.' Without thinking about it, that's what the self does. The more self, the more me-mining, the more appropriation. As the self gets fabricated, just naturally, in the *jhāna*, fabricated less, *naturally* fabricated less, there's less me-mining. And because there's less me-mining, less appropriation, things are much more likely to appear to us as 'not me, not mine' – *anattā*, as the Buddha said, 'not me, not mine.' And the transition from that point to deliberately viewing things as 'not me, not mine' is just a very small step, because it's already in that direction.

So there is, in *jhānas*, this attenuation, this unfabricating of self. And all these factors unfabricate together; the self is one of them. However, I want to read a note that I got. This is really, really important:

You talked about resistance against the idea of having an autonomous self. I felt this was blocking the whole process.

So a person reflected on this, and then they said:

I felt this was blocking the whole process, and made me believe that I had matured in some *jhānic* states, when actually this wasn't the case. Today, it feels more like this belief of 'having matured' took me away from actual learning. I then noticed that I tend to stay in a passive/receptive mode during meditation, but also in life. When, today, actually, I tried to play with active and receptive modes, finally a strong felt sense of 'I' arose. 'I' am alive. 'I' exist. I *am* alive. I exist. I *am* here in this world. I can influence. I can be active. I felt very powerful. Now I can actually find *my* pace and *my* way of working. This psychological basis just wasn't developed. Wow! What a blessing and lovely fruit of this retreat.

This is really, really important. So it's important because it stands in contradiction to what I just said, but an important contradiction. I just said the *jhānas* are about fabricating less, and here a person was saying, "Actually, by the way we're practising *jhāna*, it *does* invite the self to be active, to be more autonomous, to see itself and feel itself as more active and autonomous." That sounds like a more separate and more fabricated self, right? Really, really important. That's why I said, at some point in the last few days: careful. You may think, or one might think, very understandably, "I need a *jhāna* to heal something." And it may be more *not* the *jhāna* that we need to heal something. For some people it is. They need to just really bathe in that third *jhāna*, whatever it is.

But probably, more often than not, it's something in the ways that we're adopting to work that heals something psychologically, and has its mirror in the life. It's mirrored in the life that *that* freeing and *that* opening and *that* reclaiming is maybe going to be more significant than whether I have attained X or Y *jhāna*. So when we talked about this, I said, you know, the ability to stay, and choose to be intense, and choose to show up that way – 'me' being intense, and the 'me' can be quite a subtle sense, but still, I have to sustain something. Or opening, opening, really opening the being, surrendering, opening, abandoning. Or what this person is sharing. Or the happiness – that's a kind of emotional range that I don't usually let do something. There are many, many examples. But here's a very important kind of exception. Okay, so that was one thing. One spectrum. So everything's tied into these threads of one rope.

So revisiting our idea of working with pain, and being able to look at pain, and the pain unfabricates, or we refabricate an unpleasant sensation in the body as pleasant – *pīti* or happiness or whatever it is. Just to be clear about this, because it might be that someone hears about that and thinks, "Well, yeah. When you're meditating there's pain. Basically, because of the meditation, you're relaxing, and the relaxation allows the tissues, the muscular tissues to relax, and therefore expand, and they're not squeezing on the blood vessels," and excuse me if my biology is completely wrong, but something like this. "They're not squeezing on the blood vessels, so I'm not getting pins and needles, and they're taking the pressure off the system and the tension, and so, some pain disappears just because of organic, biological relaxation reasons." So yes, absolutely, there's a level that happens there. And then, to start talking about emptiness just for that would be a complete misuse of the word 'emptiness,' and would just be easily dismissible. But there is some of that going on. There's an organic reality to it, if you like. We can explain it in 'real' organic terms – let's say that – or in terms of 'real' organicity.

Secondly, though, is the level of the energy body. [46:54] So the level of the physical body: muscles and blood vessels and nerves and all the rest of it. But then there's the level of the energy body, and the energy body changes. Almost like a definition of certainly the first four *jhānas*, or first five *jhānas* at least, is there are changes in the energy body. And the energy body is more homogenous, more unified, and has a different vibration. But another way we could actually understand what the energy body *is* is that the energy body is a kind of reality that straddles the physical and the mental, a kind of reality that straddles the physical strata of the cosmos and the mental, so that it spans those, so that it is, for instance, susceptible to the mind state. The mind state changes; the energy body changes. Mind state is obviously a mental factor; it's extremely susceptible and malleable through the mind. And we've talked about using the imagination. Why? Imagination is in the mind, and the energy body experience, the way the energy body is, *how* the energy body is, will be affected by what's in the mind – if I imagine this, if I imagine that. So we don't tend to think in these terms any more in our culture. Probably back in medieval times, there were certain strata of reality, ontological categories that spanned both the physical and the mental. The energy body is one of them. So there's that level too, and that's happening in *jhāna*, and that's happening when a pain dissolves, etc., through meditation, through *jhāna*.

And there's a level of this playing with perception, and the fact that actually the pain is unfabricating, and it's empty, and it's malleable, and therefore can be refabricated. So there are all these three levels: (1) a kind of level of organic reality, so to speak, (2) a level of energy body, which spans

physical and mental, and (3) the level of emptiness and playing with perception. They're all part of that experience.

Okay. So yesterday, when we talked about Bāhiya,¹ and this idea of bare attention, which that sutta doesn't use those words 'bare attention,' nor are they anywhere in the Pali Canon. I don't even know what the Pali would *be* for bare attention, or even mindfulness, the way many people would understand what mindfulness is, or in the past have understood what mindfulness is – maybe it's changing now. I don't know. Despite kind of not being ultimate, if we fit it into this whole idea of a spectrum of fabrication, then actually it just fits nicely at some point on the spectrum of fabrication. When I'm engaging bare attention, there are certain things I'm not adding to the experience. I'm not adding a lot of *papañca*, I'm not adding a lot of views and concepts, and I'm not layering over that way. That's probably how you've been taught about bare attention, right? Not to layer. I'm doing a similar thing here. We talked yesterday about taking things out of the way of looking that are automatically there. Also in bare attention and mindfulness, there's stuff we're taking out. So it's a relatively skilful way of looking. There's a modicum in it of unfabrication, or it involves a modicum. To a degree, we're fabricating less. [50:45]

The mistake would be to think that what we sense through bare attention is an unfabricated reality. Then I've approached this whole question of fabrication with a presupposition of where unfabricating stops, of what actually is real and is not. It makes a huge difference. I'll come back to this. The concept that I've started with was limited. It wasn't an open-ended investigation, despite whatever rhetoric I might be dressing it up in. I've actually limited something. I arrive at that limit, and then I call it 'ultimate reality.' It's still very skilful though. On this rope of unfabricating, on this spectrum of unfabricating, it's still somewhere! It's just, it's kind of more at *this* end. But still, relatively speaking, less suffering, less self, less all the rest of it.

Okay. So, thinking about the *jhānas* and their relationship to insight, I mentioned this phrase that I use – there must be a more elegant phrase – but what I call 'after-effects on perception.' And this, to me, is hugely significant, this idea of the after-effects of certain states of consciousness on our perception, because those after-effects imply something about the dependent arising of experience, and correspondingly, they imply something about the emptiness of our perceptions. So these after-effects, as we move through more territory, *jhānically* and in other kinds of states, there's a spilling over, outside of the meditation, into how we sense the world – after-effects on perception out there on the lawn, out there on your walk, whatever it is, out there with the lunch bowl in front of you, whatever. And they open new worlds and new experiences for us.

So I'm mentioning it now; I was humming and hawing whether to give the talk on the fifth *jhāna*, the realm of infinite space, before I gave this one. Anyway, I've decided this way. But usually, this business about after-effects on perception gets really, really potent with the formless *jhānas*. But I tend to think the first glimpses of it are with the third *jhāna*, and I mentioned that, this sort of 'world of peace,' etc. However, the other day, I got a lovely note. This was actually a few days ago, but:

For some reason, I hesitate to write these non-questions, non-issue notes. But since you seemed to enjoy the one from earlier, here's the epilogue.

So this is from our friend of the radiant Buddhas, if you remember.

Seeing everyone as radiant Buddhas was so lovely, so delightful, that I was back in the second *jhāna* by the time I made it outside. I then spent forty-five minutes wandering around the grounds and marvelling at how everything seemed shot through with joy.

So the after-effect on perception is basically the primary *nimitta* starts to colour things. Things are coloured. Things are seen that way.

I stopped in my tracks and mouthed “Wow!” at the sight of the old fruit crates piled by the outdoor loo, the bins by the Hermitage, the hedge by the nuns’ graveyard, the dead leaves on the path, all of it radiant with happiness and light – and something beyond, something blessed. And if that’s not enjoyment, well ...

So sometimes this is subtle, and sometimes it’s very powerful, and not just from *jhānic* states – from all kinds of states. As I said, usually, you get the first glimpse of it in the third. This person’s saying, “No, earlier.” But it gets very marked in the formless *jhānas*. Can have a very – clearly, you hear there – very profound and touching impress on the being, on the sense of existence. If it’s just a one-off, you tend to think, “Oh, *pffft*, something was weird in my brain or something,” or you forget about it, or it becomes just this thing that I don’t quite know how to get back to.

But if it’s repeated enough (and they can come from lots of other non-*jhānic* states as well, other perceptions, other ways of looking) going in and out of a normal perception and this kind of perception (for example, let’s take from this person’s note), in and out, in and out, many, many times – at some point you start thinking, “Well, which is the real way things are?” Which is the real? Are they *not* shot through with joy? The universe is just purposeless and cold, or very hot matter, in the Newtonian sense? Or is there some way that joy is mystically woven into the fabric of the cosmos? That joy, perhaps, is the essence of things – the divine essence of things? Or that there’s a joy that shines through things, a transcendent joy, and that transcendent joy shines through this world of appearances, this world that we call ‘the world,’ this world that we’ve so grown accustomed to sensing in other ways, in disenchanted ways? If one goes back and forth, back and forth, so many times, which is actually real here? Which is real? How do I know? Which mind state, which way of looking reveals the way things really are?

Yogi: You said [?] equanimity. [laughter]

Rob: In the States, do you have what’s called ‘detention’? [laughter] Or lines. Do you know what lines are? [laughter] I’m kidding. [laughs] It’s good that I’ve practised a lot of equanimity. [laughter] So years ago, we did, I think, three years in a row, we did a retreat. It was called *Loving Kindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening*, something like that. Maybe some of you were even on it. Can’t remember. Maybe a couple of others, but years ago – it was 2006, 7, 8, I think.² I can’t remember. It was also a three-week or three-and-a-half-week retreat. And first week, did *mettā*. Second week, did compassion. And the third week, after people had developed this kind of really (by that point) quite

strong current of *mettā* and compassion, people would say, “You walk into the meditation hall, it’s like cutting the air, it’s so thick with love.”

But after they had developed that stream, then I gave them a practice of deliberately directing that *mettā* and compassion – not to beings, self or others, but to phenomena: this sensation, this sound, this whatever it is, this pain, etc. And I let them cook a little bit, and then I came back and asked them, “Did anyone notice that when you were doing that, what it was you were directing *mettā* to actually faded?” “Yes.” So there’s almost a law here. All this depended – that’s what the Buddha calls it: a ‘dependent arising.’ Dependent arising is the law, Dharma. The word for Dharma is ‘law.’ If I trust this enough, it’s like putting a cake in the oven: you go away, you set the thing, come back, and will this have happened? And for most people, yes. It’s a law. They faded.

Then there’s a question: oftentimes, here was a phenomenon, a sensation, an experience, a perception. When I direct the *mettā* or compassion to it, it fades. It unfabricates. It disappears to some degree or other, and often completely. Amazing – similar to the kinds of things we’ve talked about. And then you ask, “Okay, how much *mettā* reveals the real thing, or the real sensation, or the real self?” A little? Or a lot? Because *mettā* is a skilful quality! Or kind of somewhere in the middle? We’ve got to get exactly a medium amount [that] will reveal the real way things are?

Mindfulness, as we said yesterday, actually is a composite. Or all attention, mindfulness is always with something else, with lots of other things. And those qualities, that composite of qualities, determine the fabrication, the unfabrication, the locking into a certain level of fabrication of whatever phenomenon the mindfulness is looking at. Now, Derek might *like* to say, “Okay, not mindfulness, not mindfulness – equanimity, because equanimity gives this sense of balance,” or whatever. But we’ve already talked about that. The more equanimity means the less push and pull, right? That’s what we’ve defined equanimity as. Less push and pull is the same as less clinging. If I just practise that, get more and more equanimous, at a certain point (we’ve said this already), phenomena will fade. How much clinging reveals the real object? Here’s this phenomenon, this pain, even a sight or a sound that’s continuous or whatever – how much clinging reveals the real object? A lot? A little? None? If it’s none, then where’s the object? It’s completely faded. A medium amount?

[1:01:51] So this is what we mean, or another way of saying what we mean, by something is ‘empty.’ I cannot privilege a certain amount of clinging, or a certain amount of *mettā*, or a certain amount of equanimity. I cannot privilege any particular way of looking, or amount of what’s wrapped up in the way of looking, to reveal the ‘real’ way something is – anything. In other words, it’s empty. It doesn’t exist independently. And there’s no kind of ‘zero point’ anywhere.

Like I said, someone already had a very strong experience, maybe others also as well – these after-effects on perception. But when we get to the formless, they start to kind of go up a notch in their power, and what they can deliver, and the worlds that they can open up in these after-effects – the sense of things, the way it can influence the sense of existence, impact the sense of existence, open up the very sense of the cosmos. An interesting thing, though, for when you get there, is that the strength, and even the impact, of the after-effect of perception is not actually predictable from the strength and degree of absorption of the meditation just before. So I take that as good news. You’d think, “Oh, I got a really strong seventh *jhāna*,” or whatever it is. And then I go out there, and I expect a really strong after-effect. Maybe, maybe not. Or I go, “Ehh, it was in the neighbourhood of the seventh *jhāna*. It

wasn't really – I was not quite consolidated or deep,” or whatever. And I get up, and afterwards, the after-effect is really strong.

So it's telling you something: don't worry too much. It's SASSIE all over again. Yes, I go for more absorption. Yes, I go for more steadiness, etc. But there's no end to that, and now we're adding, in terms of these after-effects on perception – which again, in terms of liberation, the way *I* would conceive it, which is a whole different sense of the cosmos, a whole different sense of existence, is what the awakened person knows – how absorbed I am at any time, in any sitting, may not relate to how much opening there is afterwards, in terms of the after-effect on perception and the world, the sense of the cosmos that opens up. To me, that's good news. I don't have to worry about it too much. I've got a direction to go in, but I'll be surprised by the fruits afterwards.

Okay, so we said, one spectrum. One spectrum of fabrication, more or less, one way of viewing things. And in a way, like I said, you can actually put the whole Dharma in – the whole Dharma can be seen as relating to or pertaining to or emerging from that one understanding. Everything. We talked about generosity – same deal. Things that don't seem like they have to do with obvious ways of looking – same deal. But to be less fabricated means less is getting fabricated, less is getting built. There's less there in the perception, so less solidity, less substantiality. Going back to earlier in the retreat someone was saying, “Well, it looks like things are almost like I could put my hand through the walls.” There's a perception of less solidity and less substantiality also to the body, also to the energy body.

Another way of saying that is there's more refinement. We've talked about this word ‘refinement,’ like the refined cloth: less substance, less solidity. Or refining gold or flour or something – there's less solidity there as a substance. Again, something I've said before: if I'm unsure what this new experience I've hit, if I'm unsure, “Is that the next *jhāna*? Is that the next deepest *jhāna*?”, one probably almost more important clue than any other is, “Is it more refined? Does its texture feel more refined?” Which isn't the same as, “Is it stronger or calmer or weaker?” It's “Is it more refined?” Its actual texture is more refined.

I think I'll come back to this another time, what I'm going to say right now, but I'll mention it now. There are several suttas (I think I mentioned it yesterday) where the Buddha talks about establishing oneself in a *jhāna*, any *jhāna*, and actually taking that *jhāna* itself as an object on which to practise certain insight ways of looking.³ Let's come back to it, hopefully, later in the retreat. In other words, you hold that *jhānic* perception in attention, the primary *nimitta* and everything else that's involved, and very precisely, in a very exact way, you start removing different kinds and levels of what I'm going to call ‘clinging’ in relation to that *jhāna*. I'll use that word ‘clinging’ to include also appropriation, ‘me, mine,’ or even ‘me, mine’ of the attention – not just the primary *nimitta*, but also the attention being paid. That's also ‘not me, not mine.’ So ‘clinging’ is a big word. I use it to mean that, and more. But basically that's what you're doing. With the *jhāna*, it's helpful because it's a steady object. It's very, very steady. And then you start taking things away. So this is a very advanced way of practising, but it's actually very powerful, and very available for people who want to go down that road and develop it.

What happens when I do that? What would we expect to happen if I do that on the first *jhāna*?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: *Pīti* ... I think I'm hearing all the right things. It will fade, *pīti* will stop, or it will go to the second *jhāna*, yeah. All of the above. So it could just go to the second *jhāna*. Why? Because the second *jhāna* is a less fabricated state. If *pīti* fades completely, something is fading, and it will go to the third *jhāna* if it fades completely. Or just generally speaking, it will fade, but the spectrum, again, is all one thing. So it will go down the spectrum of the *jhānas*. But this fading business, this unfabricating business, you know, sometimes it's like being in an elevator, and it just, okay, stops at every floor. But sometimes you're just in an elevator, and it just goes, *whoosh!* And you've missed – it's just gotten like, "Oh. Everything's gone now." But the point is that there's an unfabricating going on. And again, the *jhānic* spectrum fits into this spectrum of unfabrication. [1:08:56]

All right, why do things fade with an insight way of looking? Why is there less fabrication with an insight way of looking? That's not a fair question. To explain something, you have to rely on something else, right? To use it to explain it? So if we think about the twelve links of dependent origination, how do we explain fading, unfabricating, based on the twelve links of dependent origination?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: And where does that fit in?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: But where? Do you know where exactly?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: No. This is all good. Everyone's right. [laughs] *Nāmarūpa* is the fourth. It's presented as if it's in order, but that's not a really helpful way of looking at it. So usually the first – but it's the first in terms of it's the most fundamental – is *avijjā*, which means 'delusion.' The fourth one is *nāmarūpa*, and *nāmarūpa*, the Buddha says, involves different factors. It includes *vedanā* and perception.⁴ The way I'm using the word 'perception,' going back to the beginning of the retreat, is synonymous with 'phenomenon,' 'experience,' 'appearance,' 'perception' – they're all the same thing. Clinging and craving come later, or they *seem* as if they come later when it's thought of linearly, but it shouldn't be thought of linearly. It should be thought of as a kind of – I don't know what the word is – completely interlinked web that's not a linear process in time. And self seems to come *really* at the end, with becoming and birth, if you think of the whole thing in a momentary way. But to think of a thing more, as I said, not a linear process in time, not a process in time so much.

When I'm engaging an insight way of looking – we've already said, what defines an insight way of looking is clinging less or craving less. So it seems to come *afterwards*, but if we don't think of it linearly, it basically has an effect on the fabrication of self, which seems to come later after craving, clinging, becoming, birth – that's where people usually put the self. So you can see that: less clinging, less self is fabricated, and then less *dukkha* and all the nasty stuff at the end. That bit's clear. But it works, as I said, *not* linearly as well. So it'll work back to this, what's actually the fourth link, *nāmarūpa*, of which one element is perception. Another element is *vedanā*, so that decreasing clinging decreases – they're not on/off switches. Again, each one is a slider switch. Less clinging, craving, less self, less *dukkha*, less also *nāmarūpa*, which means less perception and *vedanā*, less experience and *vedanā*. There's a fading.

Avijjā is the first link. And as I said, it's not the first in a temporal process. It's the first in terms of what the Buddha said: "This is the fundamental problem." Everything rests on this, in that sense.

What's *avijjā*? *Avijjā* is a lot of things. Or it has a lot of different levels. When I'm engaging an insight way of looking, you could say I'm engaging a view that has less *avijjā* in it. [1:12:40] So, going back to what Andy shared, this example of seeing something, sensing something as 'not me, not mine': to sense something as 'me' or 'mine' habitually, unconsciously, has more habitual ignorance, delusion, *avijjā* in it than to sense it as '[not] me' or '[not] mine.'⁴

So let's contrast two ways of looking. (1) One is the normal way of looking that we have in 99 per cent of our states of consciousness – that is, always something is 'me, mine.' Or this pain is 'me, mine,' or this pleasure is 'me, mine,' or whatever it is. It's always 'me, mine.' I'm not thinking it, but it's just there: 'me, mine.' That's one. The Buddha calls that appropriation. It's based on a self-view. He calls it *avijjā*. When I engage an insight way of looking, for example *anattā*, I'm actually looking, 'not me, not mine.'

So you could say, what I've done there is take away that particular element, that particular level of *avijjā*, which usually sees as 'me' or 'mine.' So *avijjā*, again, it's not an on/off switch. If it's all like water in some kind of plumbing system, less *avijjā* – no, that won't work. [laughs] Less *avijjā*, in any moment, in a way of looking, means less perception, and also means less clinging and less self. Do you understand? So this is mapping this understanding onto the twelve links of dependent origination. They're not on/off switches. They're just like, if you put a lot of *avijjā* in your way of looking, you're going to get a much more fabricated perception, much more clinging and craving, much more suffering, much more self-sense. If I take away a lot of *avijjā* – let's say I've got it half-full, whatever that is – then I'm going to get half of my ... you know, being silly, but less perception, less suffering, less clinging, less self. If I get *avijjā* really, really low – so that's another way an insight way of looking can work. It's not so much by relaxing clinging, but actually by changing *avijjā* in the moment, I'm taking away – again, I think I'm *doing*, but I'm actually *non-doing*. I'm taking away the habitual *avijjā* that's programmed or habitual in my way of looking at any point. This is how all this fits together with dependent arising. Again, what's the Buddha pointing at when he talks? What's the most important thing the Buddha's pointing at, when he gives this teaching about dependent arising? We can get deeper, deeper into it than that, but that's enough for now.

[1:15:32] And what one finds is that, with a lot of this, and especially with the formless realms, a specific insight way of looking kind of goes with a specific *jhāna*. Or if I practise a specific insight way of looking, it leads to a specific *jhāna*, and a specific *jhāna* opens me up to a specific insight way of looking. A very good example of this is the seventh *jhāna*, the realm of nothingness, the realm of 'no thing-ness,' so that after I emerge, after one emerges from the seventh *jhāna*, from the realm of no thing-ness, if the after-effect on perception is reasonably strong, one can be moving around and looking around and recognizing there are things, but there's a kind of more compelling sense that these things are 'not really things.' The thing-ness of them is an illusion. There *are* no things. So that the *jhāna*, in its after-effect on perception, has delivered an insight that there are no things.

But one can also work the other way round. If, in meditation, I sit down, or stand, or whatever it is, walk, and I engage the way of looking: "No thing. There are no things. Everything is a dependent arising, or everything is fabricated in this way," it will take me to the seventh *jhāna*. So, specific insight, specific *jhāna*; they correspond, and the causality, as so often is the case, works both ways. Or the eighth *jhāna*: one might emerge from that, and one of the senses one can have is called 'neither-

perception-nor-perception.’ One of the after-effects on perception is all this, it’s just a perception. It’s just a perception. And again, one could take that view, ‘just a perception,’ and engage it repeatedly in the meditation. And I just sustain that view on all phenomena, ‘just a perception, just a perception,’ it will take me to the eighth *jhāna*. Specific insight, corresponding *jhāna*. [1:17:50]

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, so it gets qualified a little bit by – if you’ve never spent time in any of those *jhānas*, but you really engage that practice, everything depends on – you know, I could teach my little niece when she’s five, “Just look at everything and say, ‘no thing, no thing,’” or whatever. “It’s a dependent arising, empty of inherent existence. Just say, ‘empty of inherent existence.’” [laughs] It’s not going to take her to the seventh *jhāna*. [laughter] But if you understand what that *means*, and very, very delicately, very, very subtly – it’s not a big cogitation thing. We’re really talking about a very subtle, delicate, beautiful way of looking. I understand what that means, so that when I say, ‘no thing,’ it’s got all my understanding wrapped up in the way of looking, very subtly, very agilely. If I understand it, even if I haven’t gotten to the seventh *jhāna*, it will take me to the seventh *jhāna*. If I practise *anattā*, ‘not me, not mine’ – “I understand that one. I don’t quite understand this ‘no thing-ness’ thing, but I understand ‘not me, not mine.’ I know what that means. I can make it work.” If I do that, and I’ve already been to the seventh *jhāna*, then the ‘not me, not mine’ may well take me to the seventh *jhāna*. But if I haven’t gone to seventh *jhāna* before, it may well not. In other words, sometimes what happens is, people open up from these things as far as they can go, but with training, actually – if they go together, the *jhānic* training and insight training – you can kind of stop the elevator. You press the button on the elevator. “I want to get off at floor seven,” or whatever.

Usually we think of insight as something we ‘get.’ You’re meditating, you’re being mindful, and you ‘get’ an insight: “Now I really ‘get’ the fact of impermanence at another level.” And that’s a good way of thinking about insight. But this way of thinking about insight is *insight as ways of looking*, insight as something we ‘do.’ We actively decide to perceive in a certain way, to look in a certain way.

Once I get to a certain level, there’s a way that what we’re engaging are ‘provisional truths,’ if you like, a certain degree of less *avijjā*. So even this thing about ‘no thing’ is not quite an ultimate truth. It’s pretty deep, but it’s still a provisional truth, and what you’re really doing is engaging a provisional truth as a way of looking. And through the *jhāna*, you’re gaining access to that level of provisional truth, a skilful opening of perception.

Jhānas, then, are, as we said, *resource*, huge resources in all these ways that we’ve talked about before, as well as providing both indirect and direct insight. And even the second *jhāna* (I think I mentioned earlier on the retreat) – just to *know*, and really know firsthand, that happiness, *that* degree of happiness, that *much* happiness, and that depth of happiness is available, and is not dependent necessarily on getting something from the external world or from someone else, that’s an insight, you know? We also talked very briefly about the relationship between letting go of aversion and the arising of happiness. So that’s also part of the insight there. Or, in the third and fourth *jhānas*, the fact that that kind of peace, that kind of stillness really happens when we let go of push and pull. So all this is kind of insight woven into *jhānic* openings.

So *jhānas* – what can we say? – they loosen attachments, and they relativize objects for us, meaning our usual sense, our usual perspectives and beliefs about things in the world, about objects,

about things that we can get. They certainly relativize (as we were just talking about, the second *jhāna*) the pleasure that we can get from sense objects. Leaving aside the soulmaking teachings of sensing with soul, there's no way that one would get that degree of happiness that you get in the second *jhāna* from any sensual object. It's just of a different order, as we said earlier on the retreat. In time, or later on, or more and more, in time, they relativize the nature of objects too, or the relative nature of objects too. As I said, all these perceptions open up, these insight ways of looking, these provisional truths, and we start to see, "Yeah, a thing is a thing; it's also not a thing." So my very relation, my very sense of something is different when I've seen that. So not just the relative pleasure of something, but actually the relative nature of something becomes, well, more relativized.

So Soulmaking Dharma, just very briefly, is dependent, as I said right at the beginning, on this understanding of emptiness and the flexibility – the idea of the potential flexibility of ways of looking. That's at the basis of Soulmaking Dharma. And Soulmaking Dharma, for those of you who are into it, also leads to that. It opens up more flexibility, and it calls into question the whole idea that there is a fixed way things are: "This is like this, and that's like that, and that's just how it is." With Soulmaking Dharma, there's another way you can pry that open. And it breaks open the whole idea that something is this way or that way in itself.

So both insight into emptiness, and also the *jhānas* – in a way, the way I would teach it, they depend on our willingness to play with perception, depend on our willingness to be malleable with perception. But they deliver for us, they open up for us a malleability of perception – both the insight work into emptiness, and the *jhānic* work. And you know, we talked about that with pain, and some of you have been experimenting with this and been almost startled at what's possible with unpleasant sensations – that they can become *pīti* or happiness. What about the mind – foggy mind, dull mind, agitated mind? To the degree that I know that it's empty, that's also a perception. I have a perception of a mind state. It's a perception. Everything's a perception, just a perception. And knowing that it's empty *means* – the implication of knowing that it's empty *means* that it's malleable. It's not a fixed thing. The mind state too – so that's maybe at some point something one can experiment with too. I've seen it with physical pain, unpleasantness. Can I also see the mind state in that way, as flexible, and then shape it?

I don't know. I would probably say that all *jhānas* open up for us, or deliver for us, more intuition and intuitive capacities. And sometimes that's related to creativity, like poems and music and whatever else. You know, there's something in the *jhāna*: it's almost like they become sources of creativity, or potentially become sources of creativity or creative openings – intuition, let's say. But also intuition regarding insight. So again, one of the blessings of a *jhāna* in regard to insight is that it opens up our capacity for intuition in the realm of insight – our intuitive seeing and grasping of things, insight.

I would still say, though, other factors are more important. So no matter how much intuition, etc., seems like it's opening up, intuition regarding insight from *jhānic* experience, I would still say that gets trumped by what our conceptual framework of the Dharma is, and what are conceptual framework of insight is. That will be more important. And if that's limited, it will limit what insight is possible, no matter how much the *jhānic* opening, and how much it feels like, "Yeah, I'm super-intuitive, and I must be really seeing reality," and all that.

So the question comes back to: is my conceptual framework for insight, or of insight, is my conceptual framework of Dharma actually big enough, helpful enough? Will it lead me – because it

should; the conceptual framework should actually lead me to more insight. Or actually, does it hinder and limit? And that will trump any sense of intuitive opening or whatever from the *jhāna*.

We talked about three ways it's possible to get attached to *jhāna*. So, last point now, but when we went into those three ways – attached to the pleasure, attached to the sort of self-grandiosity, or attached to view – actually, as we investigated each one, I suggested that it's more likely that the repeated experience of *jhāna* releases attachments, including attachments to certain insight views. And I gave the example of the sixth *jhāna*, and just the fact that (A) one experiences something beyond that infinite consciousness, one experiences the seventh *jhāna* and the eighth *jhāna* – just that, and (B) the fact that it's in the map. Both the map and the experience, the conceptual framework and the experience, help me go beyond, so I don't get too entrenched and too attached to such a view.

If my conceptual framework – and I might not even be someone who thinks I *have* a conceptual framework, because I don't like conception, or I think it's intellectual, or I think it's not the real deal, or whatever – I do have a [conceptual framework], you do; everyone has a conceptual framework. It might be conscious, semi-conscious, or relatively unconscious. It might be coherent or incoherent. It might be muddled or not. It might be mixed with whatever. But you can't *not* have a conceptual framework, I would say.

But if my conceptual framework, for example, says something like, “This vastness of awareness” – that lovely opening that I was describing, precious opening – “that sounds like emptiness. When I hear a talk about emptiness, it sounds like *that*. *That* sounds like the ultimate, when I hear talk about the ultimate. *That* sounds like the nature of mind, when I hear talk about the nature of mind as the sort of ultimate thing that one wants to open to, or the nature of awareness. That sounds like *rigpa*,” if you know the Vajrayāna teachings. “That sounds like when the Buddha talks about consciousness without limit, without feature.”⁵ “That sounds like the radiant mind,” or whatever, that I've heard the Buddha talk about, or other teachers talk about, or read about, or whatever, etc. Especially when we get into Vajrayāna teachings, the language can get quite confusingly similar and not differentiated enough, really, as signposts. So if I've got that kind of conceptual framework, and I experience this vastness of awareness, and I've got no further or deeper experience than that vastness of awareness, nor have I got any way – I not only don't have the experience, but I've got no way of going beyond that experience of vastness of awareness, no way of going further. I wouldn't know how. I wouldn't even know how to try to go further. None of that fits into my conceptual framework. My conceptual framework doesn't support any of that, or doesn't suggest how. Then I'm limited, and maybe trapped, and maybe forced into a kind of attachment to a certain view – ‘entrenched,’ to use the Buddha's words.⁶

But that doesn't have to be the case, obviously, if I have a conceptual framework that actually can keep going beyond these things. And partly, the *jhānas*, as I said, can be part of that, and they're woven into the same conceptual framework. And this isn't for everyone, but some people say, “Oh, yeah, that makes sense, and it *allows* more.” There's more potency there. There's more distance. There's more depth, potential there, and less likelihood of getting entrenched in a certain view of anything as ultimate, or of “This is how things are. This is the reality of X or Y.” And that's what an awakened person knows.

Okay. Let's sit quietly together for a bit.

[silence]

So I don't know how all this lands. Don't worry if it doesn't all, as I said at the beginning, if it doesn't make complete sense right now. Maybe that's the case, but it may still be, even though it doesn't make sense, that there's some kind of sense of beauty there, or something that calls you or draws you – maybe; maybe not, of course – some perfume, some sense of possibility. Maybe that's the important thing, if it feels like it doesn't quite make sense. Maybe that's there.

[silence]

Okay. Thank you, everybody. Time for tea. Enjoy.

¹ Ud 1:10.

² See Rob Burbea and John Peacock, *Loving Kindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening* (2007) [retreat talks], <https://dharmafeed.org/retreats/1303/>, accessed 17 Feb. 2020, as well as Rob Burbea and John Peacock, *Lovingkindness And Compassion As A Path To Awakening* (2008) [retreat talks], <https://dharmafeed.org/retreats/1265/>, accessed 17 Feb. 2020.

³ E.g. AN 4:124, AN 9:36.

⁴ E.g. SN 12:2.

⁵ The phrase 'consciousness without feature' (*viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*), appears at DN 11 and MN 49.

⁶ 'Entrenched,' possibly *nivattā*, e.g. at Snp 4:8.

The Fifth Jhāna (The Realm of Infinite Space)

What I wanted to talk about today is the fifth *jhāna*. Actually, the Buddha never calls it the fifth *jhāna*, to my knowledge. He calls them the first, second, third, fourth, and then he calls them the realm of this, the realm of that. And the fifth *jhāna* is the realm of infinite space. So I don't know how it is for you listening to, hearing about things that you may not have experienced yet. For some people, it's interesting. For some people, it's super exciting, and they want to jump straight there. For some people, it's just, "What's that got to do with me?" And something turns off a little bit. For some people, the inner critic kicks in: "Oh, I'm not there yet." So it's always interesting, I've found, over the years, talking about or possibly talking about things, and areas, and experiences, and openings, and insights, where it's often the case that many or some of the people I'm talking to are not there yet, and how that lands. I've noticed over the years, I can be talking about something, and one person's totally transfixed and bewitched and enchanted; another person's sort of looking out the windows. But again, this is for you, and it's for future yous, of which there are actually an infinite amount for each of you. And it's for other beings elsewhere, now and in the future.

So, the realm of infinite space – I don't know. How does that sound? [laughs] [inaudible response from yogi] What's that? Cool, yeah. Let's hear ... [inaudible response] What's that? Big, yeah. [laughter] Let's hear what the ... not a place where you want to lose your keys. [laughter] Let's see what the Buddha has to say about that. [laughter] So, the practitioner is practising, and has reached a certain place in this very contrived exposition, contrived unfoldment. This 'stage by stage' is a teaching contrivance. So he/she/they reach a certain stage in their *samādhi*, and they're sitting there or standing there or walking, whatever:

And the thought occurs to him: “What if I, with the complete transcendence of perceptions of physical form [I’m going to come back to retranslate that, because I don’t like that], with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding, not attending to perceptions of diversity, realizing, ‘Space is infinite,’ what if I then were to enter and remain in the sphere of the infinitude of space?” Without jumping at the sphere of the infinitude of space, he enters and remains in the sphere of infinitude of space. He sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, and establishes himself firmly in it.¹

That’s all the Buddha says about it. Actually, no, there’s a bit more in other suttas – suttas that, for some reason, are very rarely talked about. I’m very fond of them, but ... that’s one translation. I’m not particularly keen on a lot of that. This: “The complete transcending of perceptions of physical form” is translated by someone else here as: “by passing entirely beyond bodily sensations.”² I’m not entirely happy with that either. The Pali is *rūpasaññānaṃ samatikkamā*, and it means – *samatikkamā* is something like ‘transcending, going beyond.’ *Rūpasaññānaṃ* is just *rūpa* and *saññā*, both of which are words you might know: *saññānaṃ* is genitive plural of *saññā*, which is ‘perception,’ and *rūpa* is *rūpa*, but *rūpa* is an interesting word, because it can mean ‘body,’ and it can also mean ‘form,’ as in a shape of something. I think the least misleading translation here would be something like: “With the complete transcending of perceptions of materiality.” I think that would pinpoint it more easily.

“With the disappearance of perceptions of resistance”: so the floor is resistant to me, and that’s why I can stand on it. The wall is resistant to me, and that’s why I feel it. When I look at the wall, I sense a sense of, “It will hurt if I run at it with my head first.” There’s a sense of, it blocks something. Physical objects block something.

“And not heeding to perceptions of diversity or manifoldness” means not paying attention to the many things that make up the world of materiality: there’s the clock, there’s the lamp, there’s the glass, there are the flowers, there’s the shirt, there’s the table, there’s the person, there’s the body, there’s the cushion – not heeding all these separate things, transcending the perception of materiality, and the quietening, the disappearance (or the ‘setting down’ is really the Pali), the putting down of the perception of resistance (another way of saying ‘solidity’). And then again, “without jumping at it, without snatching at it, enters and remains” – but then again, there’s: “stick with it, develop it, pursue it, establish it.”

That’s pretty much all the Buddha says about that. The descriptions get shorter and shorter, and terser and terser. We’ll come back to another sutta where there’s a bit more said about it, but only in terms of how to get there. And then often you get, in these translations, not: “with the transcending of perceptions of materiality, [etc.] ... *thinking*, ‘Space is infinite’” – it’s a strange Pali [construction]. It’s a common but slightly unusual Pali construction. I’d prefer something like “seeing” or “sensing” or “perceiving that space is infinite.” And ‘perceiving’ has both a passive aspect, or recognizing that space is infinite, but also ‘perceiving,’ as we’ve highlighted so much on this retreat, has this kind of active aspect. I actually tune the perception, I play with perception so that the infinitude of space opens up. So for me, the word ‘perceiving’ is a little better, because it captures both that passive recognition and the active playing. I play with my perceptions so that infinitude, the sense of infinitude opens up.

So the first four *jhānas* are called *rūpa-jhānas*, and the last four *jhānas* are called *arūpa-jhānas*. ‘A-’ is a negative, so usually it’s translated as the *rūpa-jhānas*, and then the *arūpa-jhānas* are translated usually as the ‘formless *jhānas*.’ Again, I’m beginning to wonder whether a better translation would be the ‘immaterial *jhānas*.’ And even, as I said, the Buddha doesn’t actually use the word *jhānas*; he uses the word *āyatana*, which is a word in Pali that means something like ‘sphere’ or ‘realm’ or ‘base.’ So I prefer ‘realm.’ It’s a world. It’s a realm. It’s a realm of existence, *āyatana*. So these *jhānas*, five to eight, are really opening up to other realms. We had a glimpse, a taste of that, the beginnings of that in the third and fourth *jhānas*, perhaps, but now we’re really clearly in other realms.

And this business of realms is quite important, because it actually relates – so this whole range of *jhānic* experiences maps neatly and coherently onto a whole cosmology. In Buddhist cosmology, there are three worlds. They talk about three worlds (*tiloka* in Pali: *ti*, three; *loka*, world). *Tiloka*: three worlds, or three realms, or three (we could say) planes of existence, or three levels of the cosmos.

(1) There is what we might call **the ‘form realm,’ the realm of *rūpa***. It’s sometimes also, in the Buddhist cosmology, called **the ‘desire world,’ the world of desire, *kāma-loka***. But I want to, actually, again, point to – it’s **the world of materiality**. It’s **the world of the four elements**: solidity, liquidity, air (which really means movement), and heat and cold. So earth, air, fire, water. It’s the world of materiality. So this is the world that we all agree on. We might slightly disagree or slightly be more or less informed about what the current thinking in physics is about the nature of the world, but it’s the world we all experience, the world of materiality that everyone agrees on. This is one – it’s the lowest level. Well, actually, it’s not the lowest, because there are other realms.

(2) But it’s one level, it’s a plane of existence, above which is **a world that correlates with the first four *jhānas*, the *rūpa-jhānas***. And this is **the world of subtle form**. In each level of the cosmos – see, all this kind of gets ignored, oftentimes, in modern, secular Buddhadharma, of course, because it’s just kind of, you know, ‘superstitious, religious mumbo-jumbo’ belonging to ancient Eastern thought. But actually, when you start to really go in and out of these *jhānic* perceptions and move between these different realms, you start to, begin to, “Well, maybe there’s something to this.” So again, what looks like completely irrelevant, abstract, and pretty arbitrary metaphysics, actually you see its direct correlation with meditative experience. But this – the world of the four *jhānas*, or the plane of the four *jhānas* – is the world of subtle form, the *rūpa-jhānas*. Again, I would better say ‘subtle materiality.’

And if we think about what’s happening to the sense, the perception of the materiality of the body: here I sit, normal consciousness, solid, solid bones, solid flesh, etc. That’s my body, organs, all the rest of it. Even in the first *jhāna*, the body *becomes*, in this cosmos – it’s much more subtle. It’s more refined, the perception of the materiality of the body. It’s subtle materiality. And yesterday, we were talking about the energy body as something that kind of spans physical and mental. Again, that we would put into the category of subtle materiality. This kind of cosmology and this kind of thinking also in relation to the energy body don’t just exist in Buddhism. They also exist in, for instance, Islamic mysticism, probably some strands of Jewish Kabbalah. Bit more complicated in Christian mysticism, but maybe there. Energy body or subtle body belongs to that realm, that middle realm of subtle materiality.

(3) And then you get **the immaterial realm**. It's in Christianity, and also in Islam, and maybe in Judaism, but there are also different levels of angels, and also in Buddhism, different levels of devas and gods inhabit each realm. So usually translated as 'formless,' but 'immaterial' may be better.

How do we get there? How does this open up? Well, probably, in most cases, it's going to first open up in a convincing and persuasive and deeply impactful way from the fourth *jhāna*, probably at first. And then the fourth *jhāna*, really, a sense of it being really deep, and really well-established. And then one of the things you can do, once that fourth *jhāna* is really established, then you can start almost feeling into the space of the energy body again, with a view, with feeling for the sense of the body space. And what you sense there is a lack of solidity, a complete lack of solidity, as if it's just empty space. And actually, that goes with a subtle well-being. So you could either tune into the – here I am in the fourth *jhāna*. It's not *pīti*, it's not *sukha*; it's something much more subtle, but there is a well-being there, despite this 'neither pleasure nor pain' language. There is a well-being, but that kind of well-being is the well-being of non-solidity, of non-materiality. It's almost like you feel as if you could just put your hand right through this space here. That feeling right there, in this location in the energy body space, in the energy body region – the kinaesthetic sense of that lack of solidity, and the well-being that goes with the absence of solidity and materiality – is very refined.

Again, if we think about the five *jhānas*, or five *jhānas* plus normal consciousness: normal consciousness – it's just solid. It's not very refined at all. First *jhāna* – more refined. Second *jhāna* – more refined. We've said this before. Third, fourth – fourth is very refined. By the time you get to the fifth, it's refined out all of any sense of solidity. There's not even a sense of a kind of energetic substance, or the stillness, or whatever; it's kind of gone. It's just an extension of the same thing, the energy body sense of refinement. So to really sense that, to really feel into it, inhabit it, and stay with that – stay with that very sense of the well-being that comes from the absence of solidity, and really focus on that. This is one approach. And one might notice: "Actually, there are no edges. This very absence of solidity has no edges. It's edgeless." Or one might notice that any edges that maybe habitually creep in – the assumption or even an imagination of edges that might creep in subtly into the mind – they just keep dissolving. The mind just sees through them. They just *become* space.

In the *Visuddhimagga*, which is this commentary that I mentioned a couple of times from Sri Lanka, there's a technique where you use little discs. They're called *kaṣiṇas*, and you focus on them. They can be different colours. And that's one of the sort of meditative techniques that's explained a lot and emphasized a lot in the *Visuddhimagga*, and then from that little technique, then you deliberately try imagining a bigger and bigger disc, until it's infinite.³

But this way of doing it that I've talked about – I don't think you need to stretch anything. Just this absence that you're feeling, the kinaesthetic sense of absence – you don't need to stretch anything. You don't need to push anything outwards or make an effort, kind of stretching space to infinity. Just hanging out there, after a while you realize it just goes on forever. There's no end to this. And as I said, if there *are* edges, they just keep dissolving. You just keep kind of seeing through them.

So for many people, they have an internal visual imagination, and there's literally the seeing of space. And that can be really helpful – really, really helpful. There's a seeing of this kind of infinitude of space. But we really also want to get a kind of kinaesthetic sense involved as well. So it can feel as if one were just falling through space. I think it came up partly in a Q & A, really early in the retreat. It

can feel like: “They’ve just taken the floor away, and it’s as if there’s just nothing underneath me at all – nothing above, and ...” So the visual and the kinaesthetic sense can very much work together, and that will really help empower the whole thing and consolidate it.

And there is a delight in this. There is something, actually, to enjoy. So technically, you’re supposed to be beyond pleasure and pain and all that, but actually, there’s (*I think*) a great delight in this very absence of resistance that the Buddha’s talking about: the very sense of just infinite [space], of just falling through space, or potentially being able to fall through space, nothing there, nothing at all in the way, nothing at all that one could bang into, or that would obstruct in any way. So that enjoying is actually quite an important element. We’ll come back to that. But really, what one is doing is really staying focused on the space, on the total absence of solidity or resistance, and not really attending to anything else that comes up in the mind, or anything else that one might perceive. That’s the “non-attending to perceptions of diversity.” And you keep doing that, and the thing starts to get bigger, but also really, really consolidated.

Sometimes, people want to worry about, “Well, how big is it? I’ve got a sense of space. It’s definitely not solid, but how big is it? Is it infinite yet?” I don’t think we need to worry about that. It’s the same thing: I don’t need to worry about pushing it. It’s more just, one senses that there aren’t edges. So the Pali word in the suttas is *ananta*, which literally means ‘without end’ or ‘without a boundary,’ ‘without edge.’ It’s that absence of boundaries, and any sense of wherever they could be – they just disappear, and the mind falls through them. They just disappear, and then the sense just opens out, opens out. Keeping with the sense of space allows the expansion.

[20:52] Sometimes (as we mentioned already), there’s a kind of level of the fourth *jhāna*, which we could say is a slightly deeper level, like the third *jhāna*, where it opens up wider. In the third and fourth *jhānas*, we want to keep the attention more in the energy body space. But there’s a sense of a wider realm. It could go from there. One starts giving one’s attention to the wider realm, rather than just keeping the energy with the energy body. But essentially, it’s the same thing, and you’ll have to see what works better for you.

So as usual, dam bursts at first, perhaps, and it just goes there, effortless, etc. But it might be, in time, and with enough experience, in and out, in and out, then one time, one’s practising this, and body sensations start to come back, or even physical pain starts to come back. Either one then needs to go back to a lower *jhāna* (probably the fourth *jhāna*), or if you have more experience, you could go to a higher *jhāna*, actually. So let’s say you already know the sixth or the seventh, and here I am, trying to get into the fifth in this session, but something in the body keeps returning. Could go back to the fourth, or could go to the sixth or seventh, if I know them, and *then* come back. And those visitations will really help everything to become less solid again, and then one can stay more in the fifth *jhāna*.

Or another option might be that one could – here I am, pain is starting to re-emerge in the body, or just body sensations, and one can almost focus *in between* the regions of pain. Just look at the gaps, the space in between, and eventually those will open up, and the space will re-establish itself. But really, I think the best foundation is probably a really strong sense of stillness from the fourth *jhāna*, really refined and pristine, pure sense of stillness from the fourth *jhāna*. And then, as I said, if one attempts the fifth *jhāna* then, and it’s not steady, one can always return to the fourth *jhāna*. You can make it kind of a home base, in many different ways. [23:14] Like I said, a lot of what I say will have exceptions,

but generally speaking, the fourth *jhāna* wants to be really quite mature before the fifth can be really established.

Sometimes, there are suttas (I couldn't find them, but there are suttas) where the Buddha talks about (if I remember) – it's almost like, "Okay, there are four *jhānas*, and then there are immaterial realms, and what they really *are* are perspectives on the fourth *jhāna*." They're ways of looking at what's happening in the fourth *jhāna* – particularly ways of looking at what's happening to the sense of the body, so that the immaterial realms are different ways of sensing or different ways of looking at the body sense in the fourth *jhāna*. So in a way, infinite space, as a realm, is already there in the fourth *jhāna*. If I look at the fourth *jhāna*, and if I look at the sense of the body in a certain way, and I just see it as space, it's already there. There's already so little solidity that I just look at it, and sense the body as space.

Or (and this one matches more the Buddha's descriptions) if I sense the body space, what did the Buddha say about the fourth *jhāna*? The analogy was purified, bright awareness, a purified mindfulness. That's what was pervading – it wasn't *pīti*; it wasn't *sukha*; it was a purified, bright awareness that was pervading the body.⁴ So that one's already hinting at the beginnings of the sixth *jhāna*. I look at the body, and I see it as awareness. What I'm paying attention to is the very awareness there, and that will take me to the sixth *jhāna*, etc., or nothing, or whatever.

I've never done a statistical analysis, but I think for most people, this *jhāna* is perceived as pitch black. So you could have a very luminous, white, bright white fourth *jhāna*, but for most people, I think the fifth *jhāna* will be black. But it doesn't really matter. That's a very secondary thing. I think one of the lovely things about this realm is that you can actually practise it with the eyes open, and this is something I would really, really recommend in addition to the usual eyes-shut ways of working. Sitting, standing, looking at the sky, for instance, looking at space, getting a sense of the space, feeling that space, the space of the sky, the space there in nature, feeling it with the body, feeling it kinaesthetically as well, and again, realizing it's boundless. It's *ananta*. It doesn't have boundaries.

So when I was learning this, we had a heatwave, and I think it was *really*, I mean, *really* hot, from something like March until October or something, and I was on retreat the whole time. And I would just stand in the fields, in the less busy lanes, and just be staring at the sky, much to the amusement, probably, of the neighbours. [laughs] But it's one way of practising, and it's very, very potent – just as potent. Eyes open, looking, and getting a real feel for the space. The body and the mind become kind of one with boundless space. We're trying to, again, dissolve the body and dissolve the mind in this boundless space. And it's a very exhilarating – exhilaration is perhaps a really accurate word. There's *really* a sense of, "Wow!" It's almost dramatic in that dissolution, in that infinitude, in that disappearance of body and solidity. We're, again, moving in that direction. It's the same thing with SASSIE. It's the A. 'Absorb' is a direction. Dissolving body and mind, absorbing into it – "Being space," I used to say to myself, "Being space. I've become space." But it's a direction. However absorbed we are, we can always be more absorbed.

So with this kind of opening, there is, or there *should* be, a very strong sense of cosmic oneness, mystical cosmic oneness that emerges with this, with the opening to this realm – both *in* the *jhāna*, certainly, because one has *become* space (there's nothing but space; the whole cosmos is just space) and also in the after-effects on perception. As I mentioned yesterday, to me, the after-effects on perception

become really important at this level, the formless *jhānas*, or really powerful. They're potentially very potent. So there's a strong sense of cosmic oneness, and again, that does something to the heart, to the soul, to the sense of existence, to all of that. [28:57] I'll return to that later, come back to the oneness bit later.

In this state, there's also what the Buddha calls a sense of 'release.' I meant to look up the Pali; I can't remember. So the Buddha talks about 'release.'⁵ Now, all *jhānas* are releases. They're releases from the hindrances. Certainly the first four *jhānas* are releases from sense desires and the irritations or aversions to sensual impacts. But here we have a different kind of release: we're released from perceptions of materiality and solidity. And that really is felt as a release. That release, that sense of release is what I would call a secondary *nimitta*. The primary *nimitta* here is space and its endlessness, space, just nothing solid there, just nothing, nothing, nothing solid there. That's the primary *nimitta*. A secondary *nimitta*, which again, like we've talked about before, with the love or other secondary *nimittas*, you can lean into and emphasize and explore more at times, but probably overall, if you want the whole journey to deepen, it needs to remain secondary. But it's still really important to sense the release here, and that's what I would call the secondary *nimitta*. Tremendous release, to be released.

This is one of those things. Stop a person on the street, and ask them if they feel imprisoned by materiality and solidity. [laughter] And it's like, "Pffft, you need to get out more," or whatever they would say, but ... [laughter] Yeah. There are imprisonments that we don't realize are imprisonments until we've gone beyond them. That's why I prefer to keep the word *dukkha* in the Pali, because it's talking about subtle things that we have no sense of them as *dukkha* at all. We wouldn't list them on our list of what's *dukkha*. But the release from perceptions of materiality and solidity, really – there's a freedom there. So that's also a secondary *nimitta*. They're completely connected: release, freedom, secondary *nimitta*. Very exhilarating. There's joy as well, perhaps, as a secondary *nimitta* at times, and, I would say, wonder and awe. But these are all secondary.

The sense of infinity itself is going to affect – or again, it *can*, if we let it, if we don't get in the way, if we're not entrenched in certain views which erect walls of conception and view that are not demolishable. If we actually let it, then the sense of infinity and this sense of release from materiality, and this whole perception, and the cosmic oneness – they really affect the being deeply, affect the sense of existence, the whole relationship with death, the self and the self's dying. This taste of infinity – it's more than a taste, this immersion in, this dissolution in infinity.

[32:32] And like I said, all the *jhānas* really have their impact, or part of their impact, a strand of their impact, is in lessening attachment. So here as well. Another secondary *nimitta* will be love – *mettā*, let's say *mettā*, more accurately, *mettā*. Why? All this oneness and non-heeding to perceptions of diversity. *Mettā* is unconditional love. The more oneness, the more naturally there is *mettā*. And when I'm not heeding diversity, and not attending to perceptions of diversity, then everything, everyone is equally deserving of *mettā*, and the *mettā* flows to all equally. It's when I prefer this bit of diversity to that bit of diversity – that's when the *mettā* becomes conditional and not so pure. So *mettā* is there as a secondary *nimitta* – again, something we can certainly lean into at times. Or in the after-effects on perception – you might have a lot of different after-effects, so that might be a very strong one, just walking around after this kind of experience, and there's tremendous *mettā*, and one may really lean

into that. “Okay, I’m not so much concentrating on the space then, or the infinitude. It’s just the *mettā* now, the profound ocean of it.”

Just a small point here that may not be needed any more, but I remember, years ago, it was commonly taught that *mettā* and *karuṇā* and *muditā* – loving-kindness, compassion, and appreciative joy – were good objects for *jhāna* practice, but they only went as far as the third *jhāna*. That’s as far as you could take them. Has anyone heard that? Yeah, it’s from the *Visuddhimagga*.⁶ The Buddha never said that. In the Pali Canon, the Buddha says *mettā* can take you to the fourth *jhāna* and fifth *jhānas*, etc., and he goes more. So I don’t know – again, it’s a strange historical thing that has happened with the *Visuddhimagga* that a lot of stuff in there gets unquestioned for some reason, even though the Buddha’s saying something quite different. But a little bit relating to what Derek asked yesterday, he says, *mettā* delivers or *karuṇā* delivers to, let’s say, the fifth *jhāna*. Or rather, let’s say *karuṇā* delivers to the fifth *jhāna*. And he says: “For one who has not penetrated to further release.”⁷ In other words, if you know the sixth or seventh, your *karuṇā*, your compassion practice could take you to the sixth.

There are a couple of interesting things here to point out.

(1) First is just a small point in terms of *karuṇā*, that if *karuṇā* is taking you to the second or the third *jhāna* (*karuṇā* means ‘compassion’), that means that it needs to be – that means **compassion is a happy state**. So sometimes people have an idea that compassion is not a happy state. But actually, it’s very clear: what the Buddha meant by compassion is a happy state. It’s a state where there’s a lot of happiness in it. That’s a small point.

(2) The other thing (and I throw this out for you to explore, or whoever to explore, when you want) is that, at some point with all this, if you really get into it, **you can start experimenting with different kind of cocktails**, what I call ‘cocktails.’ It means exactly this: for instance, **mixing infinite consciousness, the sixth *jhāna*, the realm of infinite consciousness, with, let’s say, compassion**. You’re starting to *colour* space or put two things together that are ordinarily not thought of together. And you’ve got, like, mixing cocktails. So what you read or what you might hear, in terms of the categories, and this does this, and this does this – you start to feel like, you start to get the sense that actually, a lot more is possible than you may have read about. And all kinds of creativity and playfulness are possible. So you can make your own cocktails and give them funny names.

So the after-effects on perception – I think, again, this is so, so important, I think, and so much what touches the heart and makes the difference in one’s life, brings the liberation, brings the wonder, and brings the change and the opening out of the sense of existence. It’s this, almost as much as what happens in the meditation. [37:44] So from this, there are two we could pinpoint, from the realm of infinite space, two after-effects:

(1) One is that **all is space**. So you may – where’s my apple gone? [laughs] She gives the teacher an apple, and she takes it! [laughter] Anyway, all right, we’ll have to ... [inaudible response from yogi] Yeah! All right, this – not as good as an apple, but this is the ... [laughs] You’ve probably all heard this before. This is the nucleus of an atom. Where are the electrons? [inaudible responses] Yeah, how far? [inaudible responses] Plymouth? Any advance on Plymouth? [laughter] Johannesburg. Yeah, so ... [laughter] *Something* like that. Anyway, the point is, we feel ourselves to live in a world that’s very, very solid. What’s the world made up of? It’s made up of atoms. An atom has a nucleus and is orbited by electrons, in the classical view that’s been completely trashed by quantum physics. But anyway, the

distance between the nucleus and the electrons is something like – actually, if it's that size (because it's usually an orange; that's why I wanted the apple). So with that size, it would actually be somewhere like the moon, or somewhere like that. So basically, the idea is like, **most of what we're looking at and feeling and sensing as solid is actually space**. So that's one after-effect.

(2) The more significant one, and I think the one the Buddha puts more influence on – that's still important, that space thing; it's an important perception. But the second one is that – and this has to do with oneness – it's that **all sense objects are really one materiality**. They're one stuff, one substance. We are star-stuff. Everything in this room, everyone in this room, all the atoms that make up everyone and everything in this room probably all came from the same supernova. A supernova is when a star explodes, and the physical and chemical processes that happen when a star explodes. It generates more complex atoms, which can then make carbon and make other elements that form the world of materiality. All of us and everything on earth probably came – all the atoms came from the same supernova that exploded somewhere or other a long time ago. So in a way, we are all one materiality. And then before that, it all came from the Big Bang, allegedly.

We can hear that kind of stuff, but with this kind of perception, the perception of oneness, oneness of materiality, oneness of physical substance, becomes, *impresses* itself on the heart. Like, it's not just "Ooh, isn't that interesting?" It really impresses itself on the heart. It's a level of oneness that really starts to touch one's being. It's a mystical oneness, really. Even though we're talking about matter, we have that sense of the mystical – not just connection, but oneness with all materiality, the whole earth, each other, bodies, trees, everything.

Now, there are (I don't know how many) suttas that mention the realm of infinite space. Most of them just say just that little bit, what I read to you at the beginning that the Buddha said, which is really two or three lines. There's another one, a sutta. I was a big fan of this sutta for a while when I was exploring the relationship of insight and *jhāna* practice. And it's a sutta in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, and it's called something like *Ways to the Imperturbable* or *Conducive to the Imperturbable: Āneñjasappāya Sutta*.⁸ So again, we're going back to what we were talking about yesterday: insight ways of looking that open up a particular *jhāna*. Here, it's not so much that the insight way of looking that one employs or engages or practises is "Space is infinite." It's rather that, what the Buddha teaches, that "All sensuality and all sense perceptions," he says – he gives three options, but it's really the third one that we're interested in. He says:

(1) "They're all *dukkha*. All sensuality and all sense perceptions are *dukkha*."

(2) Then, second one he gives: "All sensuality, all sense perceptions are impermanent."

So these are – again, they're not just like, "Oh yeah, that's right. I shouldn't be attached," like an idea, and then we say, "Yeah, yeah, it's bad to be attached." They're views. They're insight ways of looking. I have to translate that agilely, subtly, into my way of looking in the moment, and keep looking over and over, keep sensing over and over. This is what we mean by an 'insight way of looking.' Not: the Buddha says, "All sense objects are impermanent"; it's like, "Yeah, okay, that tells me I should live, and try and not be attached." It's going to have about zero power in our life. But if we engage it as a way of looking – I mean a subtle, meditative engagement – this is what I mean by 'insight way of looking.' It's something very light in the consciousness. As we're looking, we're looking in a particular way. We're sensing, we're relating in a particular way, seeing, sensing in a particular way:

“Impermanent – all these things are *dukkha*, all of it, whatever I see.” I walk around, I sit, I look at the materiality, I sense the materiality: ‘impermanent, *dukkha*.’ Then it starts to do something. And it’s not that it starts to do something twenty years later – “Maybe I’ll be a little less attached!” I mean, it may well have that effect, too, but it does something *now*. And this, again, is what I mean by insight ways of looking. They have their power *now*. They bring release *now*. They change the perception *now*, if I just do it over and over and over. I’m training, I’m playing with perception over and over.

(3) But the most significant one here of the three that the Buddha gives is not the *dukkha*, not the impermanence, but the **“It’s all materiality. It’s all just the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water.”** So again, what does that mean? It means, perhaps I do my walking meditation, or I stand outside, or I sit with my eyes open, with my eyes closed, and any sense of any sense object, I’m looking: “It’s just materiality. It’s just materiality.” This has to *mean something* to me. If it doesn’t mean something, then it won’t work. So it has to both mean something, but also, in the looking, be incredibly light and incredibly agile. I can’t have a big philosophical essay that I’m kind of pondering through and repeating. But pregnant in my just, “impermanent, impermanent,” or “It’s just materiality. It’s just materiality” – that one’s quite an easy one, I think, but it has to encapsulate something that means something for me about its [materiality]. Then it has its power. Then it starts to have its power, and I need to sustain it. Moment after moment, I sustain it. It’s a way of looking, an insight way of looking. And that insight way of looking can take me to the fifth *jhāna*, to the realm of infinite space. Why?

[inaudible response from Nicole] Yeah, so Nicole’s saying, you’re not attending to diversity. Yeah, that’s one reason. And especially with the ‘impermanent’ and ‘*dukkha*,’ there’s also a sense that “I’m not interested in this.” It’s just all materiality, all sense objects, sense perceptions are kind of not – I’m just not interested. There’s a letting go of any clinging with regard to materiality and material objects. So both for the reason Nicole said, not attending to diversity, but also this kind of – we’ll come back to this. Basically, the Buddha says: “This is worthless. This is *dukkha*. This is Māra’s snare. This is a cancer. This is a dart, an arrow.” All that’s kind of in there. It doesn’t need to be so – the Buddha’s a little extreme sometimes in his language. It’s more just kind of like, “Hm. Hm. Meh. Meh. Meh.” But very subtle, and then we’re doing something very, very powerful, and this other realm can begin to open up from the insight way of looking. I haven’t gone through *jhānas* one, two, three, four; I’ve gone through the insight way of looking.

In that, and in all this (both in the sense of oneness that comes, in the after-effect on perception also), if you follow that insight way of looking that I just described and the Buddha offered there, in time (certainly in the moment, but also more long-term in my life), more disidentification with the body becomes available. And again, I would say it becomes available rather than just a constant thing, because sometimes it’s important to identify with the body. Of course it’s important. But that view, that relationship with the body of non-identification becomes much more available through the insight way of looking, or through the after-effect on perception from the *jhānic* realm. They’re just elements of the cosmos, just the material elements of the cosmos. And when we’re eating, we’re just moving elements from there to here, and then out again – or breathing, or whatever. And again, there’s a release, there’s a beauty in that. If I only ever think of body and physicality like that, to me that’s an impoverishment. I

miss all kinds of wonderful, beautiful, important things about existence. Do you understand? I think that's really important. So that's one way it can happen.

But the other way is not with the eyes shut, nor with the eyes open, looking at the sky or looking at space, but actually looking at objects, and particularly if you have a lot of experience going in and out of the realm of infinite space. But also maybe from other meditative experiences which many of you have actually already had, where you look at an object – and usually, as I said, I look the wall, or I look at Nathan, or whatever it is. And in the looking, there's a sense of their solidity. I just somehow sense it, as a part of the normal consciousness. Again, I know there's going to be resistance, and there's going to be obstruction there.

[49:50] But sometimes, especially if you done a lot of fifth *jhāna* or other kinds of meditation, there's this other perception available where you look at something, and you can kind of see right through it, so to speak. It just doesn't appear solid. So you can also train your perception, play with a way of looking, where you're seeing and sensing things *as space*, not as solid. I just look at the table, and just get a sense of it *not as solid*. One's ability to do that rests on probably how familiar you are with that kind of perception from before. And as I said, it could come from your previous experience of the realm of infinite space, but it could also come from other kinds of meditative opening, because that decrease of solidity is, again, a kind of unfabricating. And any meditative practice, certainly any kind of classical meditative practice, is a practice of unfabricating to some degree. *Dāna*, *sīla*, ethics, concentration, *samādhi*, *jhāna*, insight practice – they're all unfabricating to some degree, so that this kind of perception, if you're practising many different – *any* different kinds of meditation, it's very common to have that experience.

So it might be that, resting on one's previous experiences of a sense of the non-solidity of things when one looks at them, you can actually engage that more deliberately rather than just waiting for it to come as a result – engage it more deliberately, and then the realm of infinite space begins to open up with your eyes open. I don't need a big space, don't need the eyes shut. It's more just a way of seeing, a way of sensing what's there that we usually perceive in a certain way. I'm just perceiving it in a different way.

As we said at the start, most of you guys are pretty interested in this, but why am I doing Dharma practice? Why am I meditating? People have a lot of different reasons why they're meditating. They're looking for a lot of different things. It's such a huge variety in terms of what brings people to practise meditation these days. It's enormous. And even within Buddhadharma, and even people who come on retreats, and maybe, I would say, even really hardcore practitioners still have a lot of range of what they're wanting.

So if what I want is: in my life I want simplicity and equanimity – equanimity in the sense of, with regard to the eight worldly conditions (praise/blame, pain/pleasure, success/failure, gain/loss). That's kind of why I'm practising. I have a vision that the Dharma and meditation can make my life more simple, and that attracts me, and I want this kind of evenness of equanimity. If that's kind of the goal of practice, or those are the goals of practice, I'm not sure whether there's that much point or need to open up to these kinds of realms, really. Maybe attention to impermanence, realizing the impermanence of things would help, but I don't know that this is really necessary.

Turning that around, if my vision of awakening, my idea of what an awakened person knows is that they know the impermanence of all things, I'm also not so sure that one needs to open up to the realm of infinite space, or the other formless, the other immaterial realms. You don't *really* need that.

So I would like to, having said that, just revisit again this question of desire, which we talked about at some point earlier on the retreat. And one of the points I made (I was trying to convey its significance, because it wasn't obvious) is, I think I said something like: what I desire, exactly what I desire, exactly what I'm looking for is more significant than whether I reach a certain *jhāna*. How I relate to my desire, and what exactly my desire *is*, is more significant than whether I reach *jhāna*. As a teaching, that very nugget there – how much what unfolds depends on both exactly what I'm desiring and how I'm relating to my desire – *that*, as a teaching, I would say, is more significant than any tip or technique, or telling you how to move from this *jhāna* to the other. And I think I asked how many people believe me, and some of you put your hands up, and some of you didn't. [55:42]

And then we talked – I talked a bit about desire. And I don't know. I think the piece I wanted to emphasize was not so much *how much* desire we have, because sometimes, I know, sometimes I can talk, and it might sound to some people like, "Oh, there's so much desire. I don't have enough desire. Rob has all this hot-blooded, Mediterranean, Arabic passion and whatever, and I'm not like that." So it wasn't really about how much. It was about how we *relate* to our desire, and what *exactly* we are desiring. And an enormous amount hinges on that. An enormous amount of what will unfold for us as practitioners hinges on that. And knowing that and understanding that may be more important than how to get from one *jhāna* to another, and it may be more important than attaining whatever *jhāna*. [56:39]

Again, what are we really desiring? Again, there's such a huge range in the Dharma. Many people these days, with meditation in mainstream culture, come to the Dharma for some ease, understandably enough – for some reduction of suffering. They're oppressed and badgered by their inner critic, and they want a certain amount of freedom with relation to the inner critic, the self-judge, or whatever you call it. They want some ease in their life, and I want some reduction of suffering. What might happen is a person might *get* that. They might get some ease over time, through practice – some ease, some reduction of suffering, some abating of the inner critic. Maybe it comes from a certain amount of Dharma practice. Maybe it comes – that ease, that reduction of suffering, and that reduction of the inner critic – as much from a change in the outer circumstances: a shift at work, now I'm in a relationship, or now I'm out of a certain relationship, or life conditions change, and I actually feel better. So I've got what I wanted originally. I've got that degree of ease, or that reduction of suffering that I wanted. And then maybe, at that point, I don't really want anything more. Why am I even practising any more? I've kind of got what I wanted. How much are *jhānas* and these immaterial realms – it's like, how much would such a person even want or need to come on a retreat like this, or give much time to all this?

Exactly what we want determines what unfolds, determines how we relate to practice and Dharma and all that. Someone was telling me a while ago, they were talking about going on another *jhāna* retreat. Or for them, it would have been the first *jhāna* retreat, and explaining why they wanted to go. And they said they thought that the *jhānas* would enable them to be more present. And they had been practising meditation for probably twenty-five or thirty years. And that was how they viewed the whole of practice. It was really about being more present. Can I be more present to life? And they practised diligently, very, very committed. But that was their view. It's about being present. Wrapped up in that

“It’s about being present,” actually, is a whole cosmology. In other words, being present gives a kind of sanctity to something. To what? To the present moment, to this world as I perceive it. It’s got a whole hidden metaphysics (and I’ve talked about this elsewhere; I’m not going to go into it now) and cosmology on which this idea and this kind of raising up of this aspiration over and over, to be present, to be present to life, to be present to the way things are, to be present to the moment.

All these charged words: ‘life,’ ‘the moment,’ ‘things as they are’ – they all pick at, or rather, scratch away at the charge, and they all hide certain world-views. They’re all pregnant with certain world-views. Again, such a person, I don’t think would need to come – first of all, the *jhānas* are not going to make you that much more present. You can – I don’t know. You don’t need the *jhānas* to practise presence. So maybe that person would have gone on a *jhāna* retreat and actually found only a marginal increase, if at all, in their ability to be present, but would’ve also realized that you don’t need that. I think, more, would at some point decide that it wasn’t really their cup of tea. They weren’t really interested in that. And it would be hard for them to sustain an interest in *jhāna* practice. We talk about other realms or mastery, or this mystical state or that mystical state, but the whole elevation of the idea of ‘presence’ – those things have nothing to do with that. Presence has nothing to do with other realms or opening to other realms. So such a person, had they gone on that *jhāna* retreat, probably would have decided – well, wouldn’t have been able to sustain the intention. If it was a long retreat like this one, they wouldn’t have been able to sustain the intention. They wouldn’t have kept working and playing, because it actually wasn’t what they wanted. They wanted something else, and wrapped up in all that other thing of wanting more presence, was resting on a whole cosmology which was kind of entrenched, and there was no real interest in shifting the cosmology. [1:02:29]

Or sometimes it’s obvious in other ways, a person doesn’t want to – it’s a kind of negative desire: my desire is *not* to budge a certain cosmology. So I also run into people talking about *jhāna* practice and *jhāna* retreats they’ve been on, where there’s – I think I mentioned this before – the person’s come after a *jhāna* retreat and said, “Oh, it was really fun. I had a great time.” But there was a kind of walled entrenchment in a certain cosmological view, in a certain view of the world, of human being, of the cosmos, of what awakening is, of *being itself*. And the absolute priority was that that view did not get challenged, that it remained what it was. There was so much invested in that view – that “The world is like it is, and existentially we have to face up to that: a purposeless world of cold, [purposelessly] dancing atoms in which a human being inexplicably finds themselves, finite life, death. And the whole point of Dharma practice is to realize that, face up to it, and be relatively okay with that existential truth. And *that’s* the point of Dharma practice. So you can do a little bit of *jhānas*, but not too much! You can have a little bit of fun.” And even the language, “Oh, I had a great time.” It’s almost like – “I had a great time” – it was like a little hobby at the side, something that was kind of cute to play with for a little bit. “I don’t want to do too much, because then, if I have enough of these kind of experiences, then it might start challenging my view of the cosmos, my view of what a human being is, my view of existence, of what the world is, of what reality is.” So there’s a kind of negative desire, if you like, operating – a desire for something *not* to be pushed on and challenged. That person will limit the exploration of *jhānas* and ways of looking that we talked about yesterday, so that they’re not allowed to repeatedly open up drastic and radical changes in the sense of things and existence. Limited exploration limits the challenge. So you can zip through *jhānas* from one to eight, but it doesn’t really make any

difference to the whole sense of existence. It's just a fun game that one's playing, maybe pleasant in the mind.

Or, again, it might be, someone wants a kind of equanimity in daily life, and that's what they want (we've already said this). Then, again, it will be limited. The interest in this kind of thing will actually be limited. A little bit of impermanence, maybe a little bit of the vastness of awareness, because you get quite an equanimity there, maybe a little *anattā* at a certain level, but also those practices will be related to as a decrease of *papañca* (we've talked about this), as a decrease of reactivity, as a decrease of fussing. And that's the point of Dharma practice: decrease of *papañca* and fuss.

So I just want to speak a little bit more about desire. Yesterday we spoke about emptiness, and talking about awakening, and we're speaking about *jhānas*. I still think, more fundamental and more fundamentally important than emptiness, than *jhānas*, and than awakening, is the question of desire and how we're relating to it. I'd say it's more fundamental than all of that. So when I talked about it the other time, what I perhaps should have said (if it was a little out of balance) is: people are different with desire. In other words, people are unique, a little bit, with their desire. It's not everyone burns with a certain kind of passionate desire. Some people do, and some people don't. Some people, their desire burns differently. So whatever I said, whenever it was, I didn't mean to sound, and I'm sorry if it did sound, as if I was kind of implying you should all burn this way, or like this, or with this kind of intensity.

I think the more important question is, what is authentic for you? What's authentic for you – like, your desire and how that burns? And I was giving some stories from my past, and how the pain of desire and of staying with something, and the sort of torment and all that, and the rub of it and all that. But some people, much more naturally – it doesn't burn that way. It doesn't burn with a great, huge, passionate flame of intensity that's problematic, their eros, their desire. Either they just don't have so much – it's just, what's authentic to them is *not* so much desire. And this has to be respected. That's one of the points I'm trying to make. Or it burns in a kind of much easier, less intense way than something like I might somehow communicate when I share about myself, less pressured way. So this, I think, is really important. Some people, it does burn with a lot of pressure, with a lot of intensity. Sometimes the pressure and intensity is not authentic. It's something added on by the inner critic, or by peer pressure or something like that. Sometimes a person's desire is not so flaming, burning, and passionate like that, and sometimes *that's* authentic. But sometimes, not being so burning intensely is not authentic. In other words, there's actually something going on that a person is dampening their desire, without even realizing it – inhibiting it, blocking it, avoiding it, fearing it, dissipating it, forgetting it. So the question here, one of the important questions is about authenticity for each soul in relationship to desire. I think partly after the other talk on desire, I felt like I didn't make that clear enough, so that's partly why I'm saying this now.

I think I've said that a talk is a talk, so when I give a talk in public, and there are many people, and it's being recorded, I speak in certain ways, but it *should* be, I hope you feel that if you come to an interview with me, I need to match you where you are, and not impose anything about, "You need to be desiring this," or "You need to have more desire," or whatever it is. My desire for a one-to-one interview is to meet you where you are with that, and to really respect, genuinely respect if your desire burns differently than mine, or than the next person. And it would be kind of a bit obnoxious if I didn't,

I think. But talking with a group is a different thing. And talking when there are recordings, we don't know who's going to listen to this in however many years. It's a different thing. Anyway, I didn't make that clear enough. So I need to respect how your desire burns, and how much desire there is, if that's authentic. And even if we're working one-on-one, I may also respect – even if your desire is different than mine, and why *should* it be the same? I need also to respect your process, and where you are in your process of uncovering your (let's call it) natural and authentic flame and desire, or where you are in liberating it and knowing its power. And that takes time. And that's at a certain place, that process, at any time. If I'm working one-to-one with someone, that's also part of what I need to do. So even if I sense, "Actually, this person has a lot more desire. They're, for whatever reason, not really in touch with it, or not really allowing it," I still need to respect the process there, and not push that impatiently or out of time. There are a lot of different elements to consider here, I think, certainly when we talk one-on-one, and then again when we're talking in a larger context.

So, authenticity in two respects: **(1) there's authenticity about what I desire**, which Monica asked this question. What's the difference? Again, through introspection, can I slowly learn to feel the difference between a desire that's coming, let's say, more from what we might call 'ego,' and a desire from what we might more call 'soul'? And partly, all the soulmaking teachings point to the difference. All those elements of the imaginal, etc., and all this talk about eros points to: can I discern the difference when a desire of mine is actually not authentic? And I might have been pursuing something for ages before maybe someone points out, or maybe I realize, "Actually, this isn't what I really, really want. This is not what I really, really care about."

Yes, as I said the other day when we were talking about, we get inundated with advertising and all that. But what about things like – how many people have been engaging emptiness practices diligently, diligently, and yet, emptiness and that realization is actually *not* what they really, really want? How did that happen? I think, again, what unfolds in terms of your emptiness realization depends and is determined to a large part by what exactly I'm desiring. And if I'm not really, genuinely, authentically passionate about it, it won't deliver. I'll do all the practices. I kind of do the things – but it's not your thing. So what I desire, and the difference, discerning, learning to discern the difference between what's really a (what should we say?) authentic, deep, soul-desire, and what's a more ego-desire? And what's just indoctrination and programming from cultures – the wider culture or the sub-culture, including Dharma cultures? You're in a situation where the teacher and everyone else is going on about emptiness, emptiness, and doing these practices, and people are excited, and one naturally thinks, "Oh, that's what I've got to do." And it could be *jhānas* as well. But I would say, for these things to really deliver, there needs to be this authentic passion. And the same thing – even [if] a person wants to be a writer, or a singer, songwriter, whatever it is – it's like, why? Where's the desire coming from? Is there something that *needs* that? Or is there something that needs you to do that? These are hard questions.

So, authentic about what I desire, and authentic also, as I said earlier, about how my desire burns. And those are really different soul-styles. And that, I think, really need to be respected. Some people, it's a whole, big, intense thing, whatever. And some people much less so. Some people, it's a quieter flame, but it's very, very steady, and it's not so dramatic. What's authentic to you, to your soul? And then there's another question, there's another aspect – it's like, how to be true to one's deep desires? What does that mean? What does that look like? What does it mean, really, for me to honour my

desires? For this, I need to know myself. If I say, “I want this. I’m going to do this. I will do this. I pledge myself to this. This is the thing that I really care about,” *da-da-da*. And then, you see the person, a little time goes by, and they’re not following through on it. And there are all kinds of what often to them look like good reasons: “Oh, my mother hurt her leg, or my this or that, or someone asked me to do this.” There are a million reasons.

But oftentimes it’s actually to do with self-knowledge. I don’t know – for some reason, this person is not seeing this pattern of getting very passionate about something, and not following through. It’s not steady. This is difficult stuff. This is why I say this is actually more fundamental than emptiness or *jhāna* or awakening, whatever, because all that’s going to depend on: how wise am I about my desire? And what’s my relationship to desire? And how well do I know myself around that?

It’s interesting. I think one of the gifts of modernity is that, in a way, we’re free. There’s no dominant narrative, dominant kind of view any more, in modernity, of what the most important thing is in life, and therefore what’s most desirable. So we’re not obliged to believe that this or that is the best kind of desire, and that if we were somehow wiser or better or clearer or less deluded, that would be what we would really desire. Modernity has done away with all that. And “If I were just less deluded, I would simply desire awakening, or I would simply desire this, and ...” – modern Western culture has just done away with that. It’s no longer legitimate to say to anyone else: “This or that is what makes a life really worth living, and that’s what you should really desire.”

What that does, the gift of that, is it makes us free, free to choose. Or to a certain extent, it makes us free, or more free than if that were uniformly agreed in the culture. Like in certain cultures it was always agreed: “It’s best to become a monk. If you’ve really got the desire and the spirit, and you’re really clear, you’d become a monk.” And everyone knew that, and someone who wasn’t becoming a monk knew that they were making a kind of second-level choice. But that whole view and narrative and framework has gone. There’s nothing that we can point to any more, nothing that it’s legitimate to point to in modern Western culture. There’s an absence, the gift of which is a certain kind of freedom, freedom to choose – to a certain degree, because we have to deal with all kinds of other stuff that gets in the way of freedom, or looks like freedom but actually isn’t.

But this very gift is, at the same time, I think, a huge problem, a huge problem for modern culture. The loss of any kind of objective criteria or agreed-upon, universally agreed-upon criteria to determine: what is it that makes a life really worth living? What is the good life? What is a beautiful life? What is a life most worth living? And of course, relative to *that* is: what then should I desire? All this is connected. The absence of that is the cause of huge and widespread and profound problems in modern culture, modern society, postmodern society. And these are *ethical* issues. And I think, at the root of our ethical – climate change, species extinction, racial injustice, so much of what’s going on in the world, they’re actually *ethical* issues at root. And part of the very ethical problem is this absence.

I’ve talked about that quite a lot recently on recordings, and I hope to be able to talk about it some more. I just think it’s so pressing and so important. You see how all these things are connected. We talk about emptiness, *blah blah blah*, but until the desire is there, and until that’s connected to: “Well, what actually makes a life worth living? And how are we going to relate to all this? And what is my relationship with all that?” This is huge, and I just want to touch on this, and pinpoint just – you know, again, it’s like, what’s actually significant? And sometimes we don’t realize what’s significant, because

we're certain that something else is significant. You actually have to go to another level. "Oh, there's something else here, a whole other level that I hadn't even considered that's actually really, really significant."

Okay, just following on a couple of small things about desire, just primarily for soulmakers. I'll be brief, because this is not a soulmaking retreat. If you love Soulmaking Dharma, and if you love soulmaking practices, then you should realize, if not by now, you should realize at some point that your very sense of Soulmaking Dharma will expand. It will expand into new territories that it hadn't included before. It will expand new possibilities. New realms of existence and being and of your being will get included. Right? Have you ...? Should have. Okay, well, if you haven't already, you should. More and more gets included and worked into the soulmaking dynamic. And so, what Soulmaking Dharma pertains to, and *is*, the sense of it starts to expand. And I think, at some point, most practitioners, most Soulmaking Dharma practitioners will realize two things:

(1) One is that *jhāna* practice is a kind of art, and as such, is also part of and contributes to the art of soulmaking practice. Some of you already kind of get that connection; others of you much less. Less, or it's not there yet. *Jhāna* practice, the art of *jhāna* practice, becomes or is seen to become very relevant to Soulmaking Dharma practice and skill, and skill in relationship, and all of that. Sorry – it's relevant in terms of the sensitivity and the attunement that we talked about, the magic. Some of you already get a sense of the magic of *jhāna* practice, and this magic of playing with perception. And it's the same. If you're practising Soulmaking Dharma, you're practising a kind of magic too. You start to see: "Oh, these things are really, really connected. They're really relevant, and relevant to what possibilities open up." So that's one thing that should get clear.

(2a) A second thing that should get clear is that *being able to really sustain, or the demand in *jhāna* practice to really sustain, to stay with, over and over, and for hours and hours, to marinate in, to return to the primary *nimitta*, to let that really mature that way, and the practice mature that way – that kind of sustaining needs eros.* The very way we're relating to the primary *nimitta* is, in Soulmaking Dharma language, erotic, in the small definition of 'erotic.' And to sustain, to be *able* to sustain that eros (in the small definition) is relevant to the art and skill, and also relevant to being in relationship with anything that we love.

So again, this question: how does your eros burn? What's your style? Is it, "Ooh," I get excited about this, and then a quick flame, and then I get a quick flame of excitement about that, and then a quick flame of excitement, "Ooh," this wonder opens up, and then something else? Or is it this very steady, "Just stay with one thing, stay with one thing," or what? What's the style of eros? But a lot depends on that, in terms of our relationship with *jhāna* practice, and our ability to really sustain. In the small sense, it's an erotic relationship. And again, that comes back to: what's authentic? What's the authentic way my eros burns? And a kind of contradictory question or complementary question – because of the nature of the soulmaking dynamic, there's always this double question. It's like, because of the nature of soul and soulmaking, there's always this question: what's authentic to my soul? And there's the possibility of my soul's growing and extending and learning new ways, and new ways it can burn that I hadn't even recognized were available to me, part of me. The kinds, the styles of my fire burning, of my eros. So you get a kind of complicated question there.

(2b) Second small thing for soulmakers is – I’ve said much earlier on the retreat, and this is connected to all this business about desire that I said – also **one of the most significant things, one of the most crucial elements of a fruitful practice is the view that we have of the self on the path.** And if that’s problematic, then no matter what we experience in meditation, no matter what we open to, it won’t deliver its full fruit. It can be stymied. It can be blocked. The view of the self on the path – so this is important for *everyone*. It’s not something we usually talk about. We usually expect, “No, if I just do the right practices, that will all get taken care of.” Maybe, but maybe not. Again, this is just for the people who are interested in soulmaking – we talked about, I said, a view of the self on the path can also be related to the *fantasy* of the path, and the fantasy of the self on the path. And sometimes, a person recognizes, “Oh, I really need something like this to help me sustain, whether it’s *jhāna* practice or emptiness, or just Dharma practice, or soulmaking practice, whatever it is. I need something in the view of the self.”

And if you know Soulmaking Dharma practices, I need a fantasy here to actually sustain and give, keep delivering, keep encouraging me, supporting me. So there’s the possibility of a kind of formulaic answer: “I’m, you know, the bodhisattva, and take the bodhisattva vows,” and having that kind of quasi-imaginal relationship with, quasi-imaginal sense of the self on the path. “I’m a bodhisattva. I’m doing this for all beings,” or “I’m a warrior,” or whatever it is. And all that’s okay, taking a kind of formula, if you like. But it will be much more powerful and much more soulful if it’s personal, unique to you, to your particulars – authentic, again. The word ‘authentic’ comes from *auto*, and *auto* means ‘self.’ So it pertains to *you* – in other words, if the fantasy is a particular one, not just a generic Buddhist formula or something else like that. [1:28:05]

If you are the *author* – that word ‘author’ is phonetically related to ‘authentic,’ but not etymologically related. Its etymological root is from *augere* in Latin, which means ‘to increase.’ An author is someone that grows something. But phonetically, they’re related: ‘authentic’ and ‘author.’ If you want to be a real author, I need to be authentic, and that means getting in touch with what *this* self needs, what’s personal and particular.

So how do I access that? Yes, possibly through generic, universal Buddhist formulas or whatever, or it’s accessed in one of two ways, which is out of the corner of my eye, so to speak. It’s what I mean by ‘fantasy’: it’s something we kind of see out of the corner of our eye. When I’m really in love with something, when I’m inspired, there’s somewhere – I’m not really noticing at first – somewhere is hiding a fantasy of what I’m doing, and of the self in its journey of doing what I’m loving. When I love, when I’m in love, when I’m inspired, there’s a fantasy hiding there. So how do I discover what my personal fantasy is?

(1) I kind of glimpse it out the corner of my eye. It’s not really an image. It’s a kind of background narrative image. But I can glimpse that at those times, and then I can use it. And then I can drop on it. And then I can develop it in practice, and it becomes really fertile, potentially, as a support for my desire, for my sustaining on the path, whatever path I’ve chosen. **So it can come out of those times of love. Out of the corner of my eye, I catch it.**

(2) Or it can come right in and through my *dukkha*. When I’m really struggling on the path, when I’m really struggling with a sense of the self on the path, when it’s got so heavy, so frustrating, when the longing is burning painfully, when there’s grief, perhaps, when there’s despair, right there, in

and through my *dukkha*, the very crucible of that *dukkha*, there's enough in there – I have to go into it with a lot of skill and a lot of the right kind of holding, but if I do, in the alchemy of it, of this crucible of *dukkha*, it can emerge, a fantasy of self on the path that's liberating, and supportive, and sustaining, and powerful, and generative, and nourishing, and beautiful, and endlessly fertile, as soulmaking images are. So it's exactly when I feel, really, the pain of the problem of having a goal, and my relationship with it. If I come with all the soulmaking skill that I have, and art, that's exactly when the most fertile thing can come.

Okay, last thing. That was a bit of a – not a digression. Again, I feel [it's] very important, this whole desire business, but I've talked about it so much elsewhere. It's just a bit more. Back to the realm of infinite space: same deal with mastery, same things. We're aiming for the same things. In time, when it's ready, can go there not from any *jhāna*, as I've described. Can go there either by subtle intention, just from a normal consciousness, through an insight way of looking, through this just looking at things and just 'seeing through them,' so to speak, sensing their non-solidity. Can go from not the fourth *jhāna* but the second or the third, etc. Want to play with all this and develop all that. And then, one of the things that I think gets really delightful at this point is walking in the realm of infinite space. So I mean, going for a walk on the lanes, and very interesting and very lovely experience, I would say. And then, again, with every new *jhāna*, we've added more permutations for our leapfrog ping-pong. It's because you can jump around all kinds of different places, to this one and that one.

I think that's all I wanted to say today, so let's have a bit of quiet together.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everybody. Time for tea. Are there any interviews tonight? There are a few interviews tonight, and then we'll put the updated form later on tonight. Okay, so time for tea. Enjoy.

¹ AN 9:35. Cf. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, tr., "The Cow, Gāvī Sutta (AN 9:35)," https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN9_35.html, accessed 25 Feb. 2020.

² DN 9. Cf. Maurice Walshe, tr., *Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Somerville: Wisdom, 1995), 162.

³ Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti, 1999), 320–1.

⁴ AN 5:28.

⁵ Possibly *vimutti* in Pali.

⁶ According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the first three *brahmavihāras* can only go as far as the third *jhāna* because they are "not dissociated from joy." See Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, 315.

⁷ SN 46:54.

⁸ MN 106.

The Sixth Jhāna (The Realm of Infinite Consciousness)

Before I get on to the teachings proper, I mentioned at the beginning of the retreat that in many ways, the retreat happening at all is, has been, somewhat of a miracle, for lots of different reasons, and that Robert had – we had initially gambled that his employers would give him the time off work to

come. And then it turned out that they would only give him a partial time to come, and then Kirsten heroically sacrificed her full retreat, to sit this retreat fully, and joined with the teaching. And so it's been a bit of a patchwork in that sense, but it's happening. And now, in fact, tomorrow, the time has already come for Robert to say goodbye, as his employers demand his services on Monday morning, I assume – yes, Monday morning. So he will be leaving us about lunchtime tomorrow, after his interviews. And just, again, I really want to say how grateful, how absolutely hugely grateful I am, and I think we all are, to you for being here, and using your holiday time to do that. And also to Kirsten for stepping in. The retreat couldn't have happened, so this kind of patchwork of tag team teachers was the only way this could have happened. And so we're really, really grateful to Robert, and everything that you've brought here, and your spirit, and your knowledge, and also to Kirsten, very much, that willingness to step in and offer and share and be there for everyone. So Robert will slip out quietly with belly full after lunch yesterday – tomorrow! [laughter] Too much emptiness of time. You get a little confused. (Do you want to say anything? You don't have to. You do? Good, yeah.)

Robert Brodrick: So I guess I wanted to just say that meeting with you all these last two weeks, and seeing your practice and your patience and your perseverance has really touched me, and brought much *sukha*. And now that I'm leaving, I guess my wish for you all would be, during these last few days, this victory lap of the retreat, where the conditions are so rare and so precious, that your intentions remain strong, and that the fire, what brought you here, burns ever stronger and ever brighter.

Rob Burbea: Thank you. Yeah, actually, just to echo that last point: you all probably know how it is on retreats. We have, I think, four days left, something like that, and if this was a week retreat, this would be like, you know, towards the end, the mind starts sensing it's towards the end. *Papañca* ... *ready to pounce!* [laughter] Hindrances don't give a damn. They'll be coming and going. You're up and down. You're wherever you are in your little or big wiggles. As Robert said, keeping steady, keeping going – this is so much a part of the art, the fundamentals of the art of this practice, the fundamentals of the art of any practice, the fundamentals of the art of staying in relationships, staying with a project that you love. It's so crucial. So how is your intention? How's that doing? What am I believing? Again, this thing we've come back to several times: am I buying into what the seeds of the hindrances have spawned? And then it's a story, and it's *very*, *very* convincing, and then my intention is wobbling. They're seductive, and they seduce us. The hindrances, *papañca* seduce us into believing this or that – make it sound so, so convincing. So these are precious days, these (whatever it is) four days are precious days, a precious opportunity to practise, to go further, to learn more about this territory, but also everything around this territory that we've talked about: my personal relationship with desire, and intention, and steadiness, and form, and all that. Again, once more, the invitation to work, play, enjoy, and find out.

Okey-doke, so today, we will talk about the sixth *jhāna*, which the Buddha didn't call the sixth *jhāna*, but called 'the realm of infinite consciousness' – 'sphere' or 'the base of infinite consciousness.' And hoping for him to shed great light on what's involved here, as he goes through the stages describing a practitioner practising:

The thought occurs to him [after he's gone through the first four *jhānas*, fifth *jhāna*]: “What if I, with the complete transcending of the sphere [the realm] of the infinitude of space, realizing that ‘consciousness is infinite,’ were to enter and remain in the realm of the infinitude of consciousness? Without jumping at the realm [or the sphere] of the infinitude of consciousness, he enters and remains in the sphere of this infinitude of consciousness. He sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, and establishes himself firmly in it.”¹

So it's not a lot of ... [laughs] Not a lot to go on there, other than “stick with it, develop it, pursue it, establish it.” And it's something to do with consciousness, and again, it's very, very big. [laughter] Okay, what is this? What's he pointing to here? What's involved in this perception attainment, this opening? I would say the principal, the central feature, if you like, is *awareness knowing itself*. Sometimes I've heard it described as “It's awareness knowing the infinitude of space.” In other words, it's the consciousness of the fifth *jhāna*. And there's certainly a way that it can seem like that. But I think, I've come more to think that the primary feature is just awareness knowing itself, and then there's an infinite expanse of that. But either way – (1) awareness knowing infinite space or the awareness that knows infinite space, or (2) the awareness knowing itself – I tend to think the second there, the awareness knowing itself, is primary.

I should say right now that I use the words ‘awareness’ and ‘consciousness’ completely interchangeably. Over the last thirty, forty, forty-five years or so, there have been different kind of – not really *trends*, but some people have at times drawn those two words apart, and referred to ‘consciousness’ as something that's much smaller – it's one of the aggregates, it's impermanent, it's unsatisfactory, it's narrow, it's tied to objects, etc. – and ‘awareness’ as something vast, free, even ultimate. So they give Awareness a capital A, etc. I don't ultimately buy into that. I think it's actually clearer to just use the words interchangeably – awareness and consciousness. And then we'll have to explain different senses or perceptions of the nature of awareness at different times. And they have different, we might say, ‘relative truth value.’ Anyway, all we need to know for now is, I will use those words completely synonymously and interchangeably.

So awareness knowing itself – what's happening here is there's a kind of honing in: tuning to and honing in on awareness, on consciousness. Consciousness hones in on consciousness. Awareness hones in on awareness. The Pali word is *viññāṇa*. And there isn't, by the way, a distinction in Pali between a word for ‘consciousness’ and a word for ‘awareness.’ *Viññāṇa* – I think the grammatical term in Pali – it's a ‘verbal noun.’ I think that's the correct word. It literally translates as ‘knowing.’ So ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’ or ‘knowing’ are synonymous terms. What does ‘awareness’ mean? In Buddhist understanding, it means ‘knowing.’ It doesn't mean ‘knowing something’ – “I know something; I'm clever because I know what the square root of two is to eight decimal places.” It means ‘knowing.’ It means, well, being conscious. It means the recognition of something, the perception of something.

Again and again, in this state, there's this almost *returning* to, and a kind of *locking in* on the sense of knowing. And sometimes, depending on how you access it, you can use, again, these little grains, little tinctures of whispers, internal whispers in the mind, to direct the mind and help support it to kind of lock in on that primary *nimitta*. So the primary *nimitta* is consciousness. The primary *nimitta* is

consciousness knowing itself. And you use these little tinctures, just like: ‘knowing, knowing,’ or ‘consciousness,’ or whatever it is, just to help – very, very subtle – help support the mind in its attuning to, finding, and then sustaining its focus on the sense of knowing. It’s a very subtle whisper internally to direct the attention to the sense of ‘knowing.’

I would say – this is a long, long debate, certainly in Buddhist history, in the Mahāyāna as well as the Theravāda and the Vajrayāna, etc., and it’s probably a debate outside of Buddhist history as well, Buddhist philosophy and psychology. But I would say, *consciousness of consciousness* is an integral aspect of consciousness. In other words, to *be conscious* involves the subtle, at least the subtle kind of recognition that one is conscious in the moment. Otherwise – a machine can be aware of this or that, but a machine doesn’t have consciousness. It doesn’t recognize itself; it doesn’t have that feeling of being aware. So I would say – there’s been a long debate about this, but in a way, I think it’s a little bit ridiculous. It’s just part of the definition of ‘consciousness’ that consciousness, in any moment, is conscious of itself. That’s what we mean when we say this person is conscious, or that machine is not conscious, or I was conscious, etc. Usually, that sense of being conscious – it’s very much in the mix of a moment of consciousness. There’s much more attention to what we’re conscious of – the object, this or that thing that I’m paying attention to, this or that object of consciousness. But to some degree, some subtle degree, mixed in with any [moment], *in* any moment of consciousness, and as part of what defines it as ‘consciousness’ (as I said) is some small degree of a sense that “There is consciousness right now.” And it goes with a subject: “*I am conscious. This is conscious.*”

Now, that subtle sense, that subtle portion, if you like, or strand within consciousness, can be amplified. And again, how do things get amplified? First they need to be noticed. Then they need to be attuned to. And that attuning to what we notice amplifies it. In other words, in the mix of what consciousness *is* in any moment, by noticing this sense of being conscious, this awareness of awareness, by noticing it and tuning to it repeatedly, it amplifies that sense within consciousness, until eventually, the relative balance can go from mostly I’m conscious of the object (whatever the object is I’m paying attention to), and very little sense of the consciousness of consciousness, with noticing it, tuning to it, and the amplification that will happen naturally with that, that can start to reverse. And it starts to be that eventually, all the attention, all the consciousness *is* the consciousness of consciousness.

So there’s this kind of ‘lock’ effect. You know, ‘lock,’ canals, water – when they do that? Do you have that in Israel? Yeah? Because it’s a desert. You don’t know. [laughter] Like that. Can you just either look at something right now, or feel a body sensation, or listen to the heating sound? So there’s the object, the sound, the sensation, the visual object, whatever it is. And at the same time that’s there, can you get a sense that there is awareness there? You’re conscious of being conscious. Can you be aware of the awareness there? It’s mixed in with it.

[silence]

This is a beginning of something. It’s quite a hard thing to stay with. It’s a subtle thing. As we go into the *jhānas*, everything gets subtler and subtler. But you can train the mind to pick that up, and stay with it, and amplify it. But we’re really talking about *in the present moment*: this moment, this moment, this moment of awareness, and getting the sense of *awareness of awareness* in the present moment. This is key to the whole thing. It’s subtle, and so some of you might not have been able to get a sense

of that. That would be very normal. Some of you might have practised already doing this. Either way, fine. But we're talking about a subtle sense, and therefore it needs practice to develop that – to notice it, to stay tuned to it, to kind of develop it.

And as I'll explain later, there are many ways into this, but this sense of consciousness can then expand. This lock effect, there's no other [object]. All the other objects are kind of filtered out of it, and it becomes just an infinite consciousness, infinitely expansive consciousness. And here, now, again, we're really talking about, "Wow!" It's so different a perception, so different an opening than we usually have as human beings. So I think I shared much earlier in the retreat, someone coming in for an interview and saying, "Oh yeah, I think I got into the sixth *jhāna* the other day, and it was all very like, *meh*." It can't be. We're really talking about something that's immensely striking and very, very impacting on the consciousness, on the sense of being. So it's a deep realm of existence. It's what that word *āyatana* means, as explained: a deep realm, a deep dimension of the cosmos. Something divine there, for sure – that's the sense.

It's very intense. It's quite an intense experience. Electric, almost, I would say. Consciousness, moment after moment, focusing on itself, with nothing else there, and just an infinite expanse of this. It's electric. It's compelling. It's intense, usually. And there's something in that – it's almost like it's sufficient unto itself. It's just consciousness. There's nothing else, and this consciousness just knows itself. And it pervades infinitely, and it has this kind of transcendent quality of being to it. It's sufficient unto itself. It does not need anything. Just consciousness knowing itself forever, eternally sufficient unto itself, eternally transcendent, 'eternal' in the sense of lasting forever. So again, it is, as the Buddha calls it, *nissaraṇaṃ*: an escape.² It's another dimension of the cosmos, another dimension of being. It's another realm. There is a freedom from everything else there, freedom from the phenomenal, material world. A release, a letting go of all else. There's just nothing else there but this pure consciousness knowing itself, sufficient unto itself, infinitely expansive. And the objects are filtered out. Everything else – gone.

I've mentioned a couple of times on this retreat, and I know some of you are familiar in practice with what I call the practice of the vastness of awareness. It's actually worth lingering on this and comparing the two, because they can sound very familiar. They're both infinitely vast consciousness or infinitely vast awareness, both of them totally unperturbed by the arising or passing of phenomena, of other things. Both of them, there's a sense that they last forever, that they're eternal in that sense of 'eternal,' forever duration, forever undisturbed, forever radiant, forever peaceful. So there's clearly some similarity, and people might – well, it's good to distinguish them, because we've just said there's a letting go of everything else in the sixth *jhāna*, in this infinite consciousness. The vastness of awareness, too, if we just compare, is also a letting go. It's quite difficult to pinpoint, actually, what the differences are.

But I would say that the vastness of awareness – yes, it's a letting go, and it has all those other similarities that I just mentioned in common with this infinite consciousness, this realm of infinite consciousness. But the vastness of awareness also – it more *includes* phenomena, objects, experiences. It's more inclusive. And particularly, what it does is it *includes* and is even *accessed* by way of its relationship with phenomena, with other experiences. So it's their relationship with the vastness of

awareness – that’s the key difference. That’s one of the key elements, including what we might call their ‘substantive relationship.’

In other words, as I think I mentioned, when one practises vastness of awareness, there are different stages of it. As it moves into its deeper stages, there can be very much this beautiful sense that not only (as it was earlier, in earlier stages) do phenomena seem to arise out of this vastness of awareness, this beautiful, peaceful, radiant, and divine space of awareness. Not only do they rise out and die back in, they’re born out of and die back into this source. After it gets deeper, it also feels like their very *substance* is awareness. There’s a sense that the substantial nature of all phenomena is this awareness, is this vast, divine awareness, so that the vastness of awareness also feels like a freedom, but it’s a freedom *with* and *within* appearances and experiences and phenomena. It’s a view or a way of looking or a perspective on phenomena. It’s a view, a way of looking, a perspective on phenomena, experience, on this life as we experience this life. It’s a different view, sense of this world and this life, whereas the sixth *jhāna* is something transcendent. It’s beyond. It’s gone beyond this world. The infinite consciousness is more intense than the vastness of awareness, which has a sort of almost infinitely deep ease to it. There’s a real intensity in the sixth *jhāna*, and it’s a much rarer state for people to access, for a number of reasons – sometimes because it takes a lot to sustain that intensity, or even build up enough intensity that one would find oneself in such a state.

It’s also much rarer because one can open to the vastness of awareness, or the vastness of awareness can open up for one from much more common ways of practising insight meditation. In fact, if we just practise insight meditation with a more open awareness, and then it’s just aware, and let things come, go, let things come and go, it will start to open up the beginning stages of the vastness of awareness, so that quite a number of experienced insight meditators will have opened – to some degree, to some level – to the vastness of awareness. If you’re interested in the vastness of awareness (we’ve mentioned it a couple of times on this retreat), there’s a whole chapter, I think, in *Seeing That Frees* on it.³ It, in a way, depends on maybe the three chapters that come before that, but it’s there. It should be very, very clear. Really, really worth that opening, and the modicum of trouble it takes to open is so worth it.

There are also, I think, four guided meditations (I know some of you know this) that I think I did years and years ago. They each have the title “The Space of Awareness,” and they’ve each got a different subtitle, and they’re guided meditations on different ways of opening up the vastness of awareness, if I remember.⁴ So it’s a different state. It’s not the sixth *jhāna*. You could say it’s related, definitely. Definitely worth visiting and opening to, and putting some time in there, and being touched by that, and the beauty of that, and the liberative and healing qualities of that. But the sixth *jhāna*, the infinite consciousness is something rarer. They’re also slightly different (as I said) in their after-effects on perception. Again, in the vastness of awareness, you could get up and go for a walk and see a stone, and the substance of the stone is that awareness, is the divine awareness, is this vastness of awareness. Or somehow, the appearance of the stone is the play of this awareness. It’s really hard to put your finger on, but I think it would be more accurate to say, in the infinite consciousness, with the after-effect on perception, a phenomenon or a stone or an object feels more as if it *has* consciousness – not so much that its substance *is* awareness, but that it *has* consciousness, even if it *has* consciousness as part of a cosmic consciousness. Does this make sense at all? They might sound very abstruse differences if you’re not familiar with all this.

[inaudible response from yogi] Which bit? [inaudible response] Yeah, so I would say, now distinguishing in the after-effects of perception between these two states: the vastness of awareness and the infinite consciousness. The after-effect on perception of the vastness of awareness will be something akin to that the stone, the appearance of the stone feels like its substance is awareness, or that the appearance of the stone is the play of awareness. Infinite consciousness can feel as if – the after-effect on perception is more, perhaps, moving towards, the stone *has* consciousness, and even if the stone’s consciousness is part of a much more unified cosmic consciousness or divine consciousness. So it’s hard to articulate. I’ve never really heard anyone even attempt to make these articulations, but that’s my current thinking.

Both of them, though, are undisputably mystical senses of divinity. And it’s very often the case that a person will start using words like ‘divine,’ even if they’ve never in their life used those words before – actually, at either of these two experiences: the vastness of awareness or the infinite consciousness. One really feels as if there’s something of a divine order here, or something of the nature of the divine that is being revealed to one, that’s being opened to one: “This is God’s awareness.” That can be the sense. But as we said, the sixth *jhāna*, the infinite consciousness is more purely transcendent. It’s really a realm beyond, beyond phenomena. I would say that both of these experiences are immeasurably precious – immeasurably precious, I would say.

I would also say that they’re part of our human birthright. As human beings, this is part of what is available to us, and what is our human birthright – to know this, to open to this, to be touched by these levels of being, these dimensions of being, these openings. They’re available. And particularly with infinite consciousness, with repeated exposure, it brings such a different sense of existence, such a sense of adding or opening up a sense of the dimensionality of existence, of the cosmos, of being. There are also many other – I won’t go into them now, but there are many kind of variations and sort of ‘satellite states’ around the sixth *jhāna*, especially when we practise with the eyes open, and especially in terms of the after-effects on perception.

But I just want to, again, take a slight detour – not detour, but again, just a comment about desire. It’s so, so important. I think it would be really understandable if someone – with repeated going in and out of this infinite consciousness, and really being touched by it, and opened by it, and opening to it, and assimilating that opening and that sense and that perception, assimilating that into their sense of existence – it would be really understandable if such a person were to kind of then look back and think to themselves that life *knowing* that realm is so much richer and so much richer in dimensionality than life *not* knowing that realm, what they remember from not knowing that realm. It’s almost like, “How would I not? How did I live that way?” It would be very, very understandable. And they might also think, “I wouldn’t want to live without knowing this, without that opening, without that sense of dimensionality,” that it would feel to them, in almost retrospect, as if that was a kind of impoverishment, or something was taken out of life, an impoverished life, in some sense. Or felt like life without that would, in some way – not that they want to escape there into this transcendent realm, but in some way, maybe this person would feel like life without that is, in a subtle way, less worthwhile. That would very understandable as a view or a feeling.

But it’s tricky, isn’t it? It’s tricky. I’m hesitant even saying all this stuff, and I don’t know how it lands, because it’s loaded, and it’s loaded because of many things that we’ve talked about on this retreat

so far, in terms of desire, in terms of goals, in terms of all that, in terms of what I said yesterday about living in a Western culture that, let's say, *post*–the Protestant Reformation, or starting with the Protestant Reformation, or beginning with the Protestant Reformation, there has been this kind of deconstructing and dissolution of any agreed-upon idea of what makes life worthwhile, etc. And don't underestimate how influenced we are, not by Buddhist history so much, but by Western history. Things that happened in relation to medieval theology influence us today, way more often than people realize. Something happened, starting with the Protestant Reformation, that it fractured, it fragmented and dissolved any sense of agreed-upon idea of what was holy. And that influences very much what anyone can say to anyone else about what is worthwhile or what one should desire, etc. So all this is kind of here when we talk about such states. It's loaded. It's charged, in all kinds of ways, potentially painful in all kinds of ways, etc. – potentially enticing in all kinds of ways.

So the usual insight meditation way of teaching – or at least it used to be – usual insight meditation teaching (and you've probably come across this) is not about experiences, right? It's just: "Don't try and get experiences. Just notice what experiences there are. Just be mindful. Just notice what comes up and what goes." And to say something, or this person saying, or it's me saying: "This is ..." – what did I say? Something about how precious they were. And even to say that is a little bit loaded. It's implying something. It invites, it opens the door for the pain of striving, the pain of desire that we've revisited several times on this retreat. So the usual way – or what used to be; I don't know if it even *is* any more – but the usual way of teaching insight meditation is a lot easier, because it effectively just closes the door on any kind of striving like that. It's just, "All you have to do is be aware. Whatever comes, whatever goes – it's all the same. Good experiences, bad experiences, remarkable experiences, boring experiences – all you have to do is just be aware, and when you're not aware, you just notice it and you come back." And there's such value in that way of practising and that way of teaching. It's a lot easier. It's a lot easier, I think, for both the student and the teacher. When you start saying, "Oh, this is really precious, or that's really precious, or this experience is," *then* you start running risks. But there are risks both ways. If you go just into the mode of "Experiences are not important," there are risks. There are significant risks.

And all this, again, is tied into desire, and what do I desire? And why do I desire what I desire? What's going on with me? What's authentic desire? What's deep desire? What's involved in my desire? And how we teach regarding such experiences, such openings, such perceptions – if one goes into an interview and reports such an experience, and what comes back from the teacher is a response of, "Sounds good, but it's just another experience. It's impermanent. Let it go. Don't get attached," that response itself is a kind of teaching. It's set in a framework, again, that needs to be at least semi-coherently set, nestled within a whole idea of what awakening and liberation is, and what insight is. Again, we get this tracing down or feeding down from a top-level conception into how I'm responding to this or that experience in any moment, or someone else reporting this or that experience in any moment. So if I say "immeasurably precious," it's loaded. But it's tricky. And I think it would be understandable if a person did report such a sense of almost like, "I can't almost imagine life without that, the sense of that kind of dimensionality to it." It would be understandable. They may have some work to do, but it would potentially be understandable.

So, such a different sense of existence, such a different sense of the cosmos, of the dimensionality of being that comes with this, and we, as I said, assimilate that, incorporate that into our being, in addition to the usual sense of consciousness. It doesn't then replace it 100 per cent of the time. It just becomes available sometimes, this completely other sense of consciousness, this completely other dimension. But our usual sense is still available. And the usual sense of consciousness is: it's 'mine,' and it's somehow in here or usually *in here*, in the head, and from here, in my head, it's somehow sensing out, and it's associated with this materiality, meaning this physical matter, this physical organism. That's the usual, agreed-upon idea, but also sense of consciousness in our culture. So that's still available, but other senses become available as well.

It's *not* the case that this infinite consciousness *is* the ultimate nature of consciousness. It's not. And even just labelling it as the sixth *jhāna* would strongly suggest that it can't be. Nor is it ultimately the true nature of mind, nature of awareness, nature of consciousness – nor is the vastness of awareness. So neither of these are the true or ultimate nature of awareness or consciousness. They're not the final truth regarding awareness, regarding consciousness.

Also, I don't think they really – such an experience doesn't really *prove* the possibility of a consciousness, let's say, without or not contained by matter. So that's the experience – this consciousness, it's an immaterial realm. We're now in the immaterial realms, *arūpa-jhānas*, *arūpa-āyatanas*, and there's just this infinite consciousness, sufficient unto itself, and the experience would seem to suggest: here's a consciousness without being contained in matter. To me, it doesn't prove that. So then there's a whole question of epistemology from meditation experiences, and what we can deduce from a certain meditative opening. I don't think it proves that. We would need more convincing, other kinds of experience, other phenomena, other things to happen, to be more convincing that there's a possibility of consciousness without being contained or associated with matter.

So again, how are we to regard all this? I think there's value to say: here, now, we're opening to deep, provisional truths. They're deeper truths, but they're still provisional. So we can talk about almost like a scale of relative truth, if you like. They're deeper truths – still provisional, provisional truths, experiences, openings, insights. What are the Buddha's words? 'Perception attainments.'⁵ And he talks about them in a scale of perception attainments – the attainment, the ability, the achievement to perceive this or that as a level of truth, if you like. It's still a provisional truth, not a final, not an ultimate truth. That feels, to me, really, really important.

How do we get there? How does such a place, how does such a realm, how does such a dimension of existence, of being, open up for us? There's a number of possibilities.

(1) One is simply, as usual, just hanging out in the previous *jhāna*, the realm of infinite space. Just hanging out there, really getting into it, revisiting over and over, hanging out, hanging out, and it will naturally mature. It naturally matures at a certain point from the previous *jhāna*. That would be a very normal occurrence. I think I very briefly mentioned this earlier in the retreat, though: I think (though I know one teacher who disagrees with me, and one teacher who agrees) the order of ease of access through these *arūpa-jhānas*, much as (for some) the order of ease of access through the *rūpa-jhānas*, is individually variable. So I feel, for me, I felt it was easier to access, for example, to learn this infinite consciousness than the infinite space. Other people, it might be the other way around or something. I think there's individual variation here. So one teacher I had insisted on doing them in their

numerical order, and another teacher was much less pedantic about that, less emphatic about that. But I would agree – I think there are individual variations in tendency there. But one way, as I said, is just hanging out in the realm of infinite space, and just really, really getting into it. And when the fruit is ripe, it ripens. It matures.

(2) Then a second possibility is, **to be in the realm of infinite space, to hang out there, and then at some point, when it's steady**, when you're really into it, when it's established, when you've got some mastery, then **begin becoming aware of the awareness there in that state, in that space**. There's just a subtle shift of the attention and of the *intention* to pick up on that subtle sense of awareness that we experimented with earlier today, but within the realm of infinite space. So that would be a very kind of straightforward way of going about it, if it needs a little nudging. [44:54]

(3) Third possibility is any *jhāna* – well, any of the *jhānas* up to now, let's say, better, easier to say, or even a normal state of consciousness, a non-*jhānic* state of consciousness, and actually, just what we did earlier. So can you get a sense? If it's a *jhānic* state of awareness, the object of that, the object of the consciousness at any time will be the primary *nimitta*. If it's a non-*jhānic* state of awareness, it could be any smell, taste, touch, sight, sound. Something that's quite steady, though – you don't want something flickering too much. Something quite steady, or it's probably easier if something's quite steady. So something you can look at, and it's not going to disappear on you, or a sound that's continuous. If I pick the heating, and not – well, there are no birds right now, but pick the heating; it's more of a constant thing. And so, **normal consciousness with a normal sense object, or any *jhānic* consciousness with a consciousness of the primary *nimitta*, and then noticing, tuning to, and focusing in on that sense of knowing, that sense of consciousness**. So in other words, this realm of infinite consciousness can be approached not from the fifth *jhāna*, not even from the fourth, third, second, first – can be approached from normal consciousness. It's just a matter of noticing, tuning, and then amplifying that very sense of consciousness. And then it can begin to open up and open up. So that's one way as well.

(4) A fourth way is obviously related to that (but I mentioned it I think yesterday – I can't remember – and the Buddha says it somewhere or other): he kind of classifies the *arūpa-jhānas*, the *arūpa-āyatanas*, as, if you like, perspectives on the fourth *jhāna*. So it's really that there are not eight *jhānas* but four *jhānas*, and the fourth one has five variations: the fourth *jhāna* and then the four *arūpa-jhānas*. So somewhere or other in the Pali Canon, I'm pretty sure the Buddha frames it like that.⁶ And already, we said in his description, what he emphasized in his description of the fourth *jhāna* was the pure awareness, the body wrapped in pure awareness – or he sometimes says 'pure mindfulness.'⁷ So it's right there in the fourth *jhāna*, and if I pick up on that, **pick up on the sense of presence, the sense of consciousness, of pure mindfulness, pure awareness right there in the fourth *jhāna*, the body has become that. That will open up into the infinite consciousness**.

(5) Fifth, there are **insight ways of looking that will open up the infinite consciousness**. They're actually the same as what opens up infinite space. In other words, the same ones might take you to either the infinite space or the infinite consciousness. So we mentioned them yesterday.

(6) And lastly, as always, with experience, with enough familiarity, enough in and out – part of the whole deal with mastery is eventually, we can **access these realms, or this particular realm, just by**

subtle intention, just by remembering it, remembering that realm, remember our experience of it. And that opens the doors, opens the doors to this divine awareness, this God's mind.

Again, I don't think there's any need to push or stretch it to infinity. It's more, whichever way you go, I don't think that's so necessary. It should – I think it *will*, but it *should* automatically just expand that way, partly because there's nothing else in consciousness. There's nothing in the way. There's nothing but infinite consciousness.

And again, that could be a little tincture. If it's not quite stable yet, and you're working to consolidate it, you can just drop in the 'nothing but infinite consciousness.' That kind of *primes* – it's very, very subtle. It's not like a big thinking; this is an alchemical tincture one's putting into the space, just to very gently direct and guide the mind, and support that opening out. So it should go – it probably will go automatically, because there's nothing in the way, really. There's nothing to limit it. Sometimes we just need to relax into it. So it's strange: it is a very intense state, but as you work with it, there might be times when, actually, more relaxation is needed. And other times, it's more like really honing in with the intensity on that focus on the consciousness – on the *consciousness of consciousness*. So one can just let it expand.

This 'leaning forward' business that I mentioned to you can happen, start happening, actually, sometimes in the third *jhāna*, but certainly in the fourth and later. This more relaxed approach may help with that, because sometimes the leaning forward is, again, in the usual – not just *intellectual* construal, but *sense* of attention placing its object, its mental object in front, and then just a little bit of trying, we end up leaning forward, because just a little bit of effort – we're aiming in front of ourselves. But the more relaxed approach can open it up more evenly. So it may help with that leaning forward issue.

[50:44] A lot depends on how you access this infinite consciousness, because if you're coming from infinite space, there's sort of nothing there to prevent it becoming infinite. It's already infinite, so it just kind of flips to the consciousness. If you're coming from, let's say, just a normal consciousness, then you're focusing, you're noticing the sense of consciousness, you're noticing the awareness of awareness, you're tuning to that and amplifying it, then it may well be that other objects come in and out of the awareness as you're trying to do that. And either you just stay really, really with the sense of knowing, really, really with the sense of consciousness, or you somehow see, sense the other objects as *consciousness*.

Okay, again, the Buddha talks about escape, as we said, *nissaraṇam*.⁸ Again, I still forgot to look up the word, but he talks about what's often in English translated as 'releases of awareness.'⁹ The different *jhānas*, and then particularly the formless, are releases of awareness. So again, it's a realm. We're talking about a realm here, completely free, completely free from, completely transcending the hassle and the reach, completely free from and transcending the hassle and the reach of material perceptions. Sometimes the Buddha calls the four formless realms the 'peaceful liberations.'¹⁰ That's a synonym: the peaceful liberations. And then there are passages where he talks about fully liberated beings, arahants, liberated in one way or liberated in two ways. And an arahant, fully liberated being, liberated in one way is just someone who's gotten rid of, exterminated, expunged all greed, hatred, and delusion.¹¹ They've ended their *kilesas*.¹¹ But an arahant liberated in two ways is someone who also has access to these formless *jhānas*.¹² And the Buddha has this lovely passage:

They remain touching with their body the peaceful liberations.¹³

So again, their whole sense of existence has this – they’re touching with their body something that’s beyond the body and immaterial. They remain in the world, touching with their body the peaceful liberations. And other arahants, other fully enlightened beings, don’t know these realms. They haven’t developed them. They’re not necessary. So there’s difference.

But again, experientially, the very sense of release, of a beyond, of realms beyond – that very sense can help maintain. Again, if you’re working in this space, in this realm, and it’s kind of just working to really settle it at any one time, then the very sense of release and beyondness and escape can be part of what helps consolidate it in that moment. But I need to enjoy that. In other words, the very sense of this transcendence of it, the beyondness, the release of it – they’re slightly different things, because release is “I am released” or “This is released”; beyondness, transcendence is “There is that” – but the enjoyment of that, the subtle enjoyment of that is, again, also part of the binding glue, the consolidating of moisture, liquid of the experience.

So again, such an opening, such a perception, such a revelation relativizes this world, the world that we all agree on: this world of material forms, of things, of beings, etc. Opening to that relativizes this world. It takes its place in a series of worlds, of realms. It’s not just: “There is this world and nothing else.” And then it relativizes our relationship with this world, and that could happen in different ways. It could, as we said before, become (to me, to *my* way of thinking) problematically dualistic. It can certainly become dualistic to some people’s thinking – it’s rarer and rarer these days – but to some people saying, “Dualism is not a problem at all. This *is saṃsāra*. This *is* not worth much. We want out. We want not to be reborn.” And that’s, I think, traditionally, the thrust of Pali Canon teachings. It’s much, much less common these days. [55:48] So for some people, that kind of dualism is not at all a problem. But I think it can be dangerous, that kind of dualism, because then how am I regarding this world? Am I caring for it? Do I love it? What’s my duty to this world and others in it? What’s my relationship? Has it become problematically dualistic?

It *could*. For some people that’s not a problem. I think there’s a danger and a problem there, in the way that I would see the whole movement of the Dharma, but it’s much less so, much less risk of being problematically dualistic – again, same principles as before – if we let the after-effects of perception open up, if we really explore them. What I want to emphasize in teaching all this is, as I said, the after-effects on perception are *as* significant as the pure *jhānic* experiences themselves. Why? Partly because of this dualism thing. Partly because it’s *that* that really changes, or – those after-effects on perception have a big impact in our sense of this world. So if I have the after-effect on perception and the stone has consciousness, and there’s divinity radiating from everywhere, this kind of divinity radiating from everywhere, everything is that, then the dualism, as we’ve discussed before, gets evened out. So that’s one important reason.

Second kind of level of approach in targeting or in rehabilitating any tendency towards problematic dualism is, again, understanding the dependent arising, and therefore the emptiness of perception – everything that I talked about the other day. This experience of the world that 7+ billion people agree upon, this experience of infinite consciousness, this experience of a subtle realm, world, this experience of infinite space, whatever it is – they’re all dependent arisings. They all arise dependent on certain

ways of looking. This world and that, this realm and that are perceptions arising dependent on different ways of looking. And understanding that, in the most powerful way, transcends duality and gives us freedom to be dualistic when we want to be dualistic, and non-dualistic when we want to be non-dualistic. As I said, [it] collapses any duality between non-duality and duality. And we're free – free with a range of ways of looking, free to move, free to give all a sense of equal sacredness, because we've understood something about the emptiness of it all, the dependent arising of it all, because we've played with insight ways of looking, we've played with ways of looking enough to open that whole understanding out.

So the Buddha also talks about these states and characterizes them as – they're a *kind* of equanimity. And certainly, they're very equanimous. I mean, as I said, they're completely unperturbed, completely undisturbed. In that sense, they're really equanimous. There's no push-pull towards anything, any other objects there, let's say. Actually, that's not quite true, but it's a state of very deep equanimity. Certainly, they're very calm, and they're very focused. But it's also true, I think, that again, with experience, there might be secondary background emotions. So yes, equanimous; yes, calm, and all that. But somehow it might be that in the background, one is jumping for joy at the same time. There's wonder, potentially, love, peace, ecstasy. All these can be kind of background experiences, I would say, and naturally so, rightly so. We already mentioned release and freedom.

Just like the infinite space, I would really recommend practising these with eyes open, practising this realm as well, opening to this realm with the eyes open, definitely. Again, looking at the sky, or at the space, and letting that expand. Maybe it goes to infinite space first, and then it flips. Maybe you're just beginning to get the sense of consciousness in that much bigger visual space or kinaesthetic space – or not. In other words, as we described, with a much smaller sense, not with the sky, not with the space, just with any object. Like the infinite space, profound sense and profoundly impacting sense of oneness – mystical, cosmic oneness, almost overwhelming in the perception of it. That emerges both in the *jhāna*, in the sort of pure *jhānic* experience, and in the after-effect on perception.

Again, this is why I so much emphasize the after-effects on perception, really taking that time off the cushion in a kind of much more relaxed way, walking around, cup of tea, whatever it is, and noticing the effects after formal practice on perception. Now, right now, what's happened to my perception of self, of world, of consciousness, of whatever it is, of things, of materiality – all that? And really noticing that, because that does something very profound. But oneness can be in the *jhāna* or in the after-effect on perception. Yesterday we said the primary oneness that came, that comes with the infinite space is a oneness of materiality, of material substance, this “We are all star-stuff,” “We are all the same Big Bang,” “We are really one matter, our bodies, etc.” This, in contrast, is a oneness of consciousness. It's a oneness of awareness. One can have the sense that there's not *really* – there's the *appearance* of separate awarenesses, separate consciousnesses, but actually, at another level, there's one. There's one divine consciousness of which we are part, or in which we partake.

When you get to Soulmaking Dharma, there are important variants of this. And it actually gets significantly different. And I've noticed when I'm teaching Soulmaking Dharma, and I say something about participating in God's mind, sometimes people write to me, and from what I read, from what they're saying, it sounds like they're relating or they're hearing what I said in a Soulmaking Dharma context – they're hearing *this*, this oneness of awareness. But it's actually something different in a

Soulmaking Dharma. There are more variants and more subtlety and more allowances for the individual particularity. God's awareness needs *my* awareness, *my* particular awareness, *my* particular *dukkha*, *my* particular ways that my mind works, and yours – *your* particularities, *your* foibles, *your* struggles. That's different than "It's just there is one awareness, a simple, pure, clean awareness that somehow we all participate in." So there are significant differences there, but this is not a soulmaking retreat – just for those of you who are interested.

The oneness, technically, I suppose, again, is a secondary *nimitta*. The primary *nimitta* is the consciousness. The oneness – I mean, in a way, they'll get completely fused at times, of course, but technically it's a secondary *nimitta*. So we should focus primarily, as always, on – primarily, most of the time, on the consciousness. And the oneness – it will come. It will also arise, just later, just naturally in the after-effects of perception. You can trust that. So even though, in some ways, you could say, perhaps one of the most significant, and most impactful, and most potent, and most transformative perceptions and knowings and digestions here is the very sense of oneness, still we don't need to – probably most people don't need to go looking for it. You can trust that it will arise, and it will do its work. Of course, there are always exceptions, but I would say that.

Again, same deal with mastery, all the little tricks of the trade and the little things that we play with – same deal, going for walks and all that. And just to emphasize – I don't know how all this sounds, but it's really just a matter of training. So when we talked yesterday about the fifth *jhāna*, the infinite space, or even today – you know, yesterday, with the infinite space, we said, you know, looking at an object, that we would usually sense, in the very looking at it, even though I'm not touching it, my sense in the looking is of solidity. That would be the normal sense of it. And then seeing and sensing physical objects, material objects as space, seeing and sensing them as not solid, and staying with that. So getting that sense, and then staying with that, and infinite space can open up from that, if I sustain it – what's basically then a training. There are different elements here. So I can see, what I usually sense as solid – can I flip the perception so that I sense it as space, as not solid? And then, can I sustain that? And then, can I allow that to open? These are all just elements of a training. Just what is it? Training the perception of space. I'm training the perception of space. Space is not something that we usually pay attention to. Usually, we're basically addicted or imprisoned, or habitually, we pay attention to objects *in* space. And even if an architect or something talks about paying attention to space, it's not quite the same thing. [1:06:49] What they really mean is a geometry that has shapes. But the actual space itself is not something that human beings habitually pay attention to. So we're training a perception, training an ability of what's a more refined perception.

But the point I want to make is: it's all training, just training of perceptions, and the training has slightly different elements in it. And how many suttas are there where the Buddha says, and he's describing some meditation and describing a monk doing this, and "Thus he trains himself"? And then a little bit of, "Thus he trains himself. Thus he trains himself." It's just training. And what that means is, it's possible. It's available. So again, even the thing we did earlier today: can you get a sense of the awareness of awareness? Can you become aware of awareness in the moment, in the moment? And then, can you sustain that? And can you focus in on it? And can you let it amplify? And then can you let that expand? It's all training. It's just training. And what that means to me – it's an important word, because it means it's totally possible. It's totally available.

Again, I don't know how it sounds, but we're really talking about something majestic in its grandeur, unfathomable in its beauty, and wonder, and depth, and sublimity, and dimensionality, and divinity. But also, that, in another sense, or at the very same time, is just a training. Yes, it's very rare, and even rarer, as I said, than the vastness of awareness. But it's just a training. It's rare just because people have not been taught or don't sustain their journey of working towards it, playing towards it. So it's possible and available *if* we get our desire, our relationship with desire right – all this. And that's why I keep coming back to that. I can talk about *blah blah blah blah* and all this great-sounding stuff, but if I don't understand myself in relationship to desire, I don't understand what I'm bringing in, or what is brought into my desires at different times, and how I relate to that – not just in this moment, but over time, in a sustained way, for a retreat, but also for years, months and years – it's possible and available *if* I have that fundamental inquiry and understanding and right relationship with desire, and, I think, if I bring a kind of intelligence to my working and playing.

And by intelligence, I don't mean scholarship. I've said that before. Nor do I mean something really intellectual; I don't mean that at all. I mean everything that we've emphasized: the flexibility, the responsiveness, the attunement, the coherent conceptual framework of, *what* am I doing? And why? And where is it going? And how does this fit into where I'm going? Because that larger, bigger picture conceptual framework *will, should* guide me in my momentary choices and momentary emphases. So if that's askew, or I haven't kind of got a coherent one, or it doesn't make sense, or if I'm trying to work towards this *jhāna*, but actually, I'm labouring under the umbrella of a conceptual framework that doesn't really support it, or emphasizes an aspect like "How long can I stay on one object?" – we've talked about this before – I'm emphasizing something that's actually just going to capsize the boat and not let this boat deliver me to where I want to go. So if there's the right relationship with desire and inquiry into that, that's the hard thing, you know? That's not an easy thing. That's a big ask, and it's more fundamental. And if there's this intelligent – what I mean by 'intelligent' – work and play, then these things are really possible and available. They're just trainings.

So last thing about desire, and someone wrote a note. A couple of people wrote a note, in fact. Again, it's just a small thing for people who are already familiar with Soulmaking Dharma, just very briefly. We talked about this: the importance of, the absolute necessity of having a helpful view of the self on the path, a helpful view of the practitioner self. And in Soulmaking Dharma, we talk about fantasies of the path, fantasies of the self on the path, and I've talked about that several times in other soulmaking retreats over the last years – can't remember where, but it's there.¹⁴ A couple of people were asking, "Yeah, okay, but when you're on a *jhāna* retreat, for example, or let's say it's an emptiness retreat, or let's say it's a *mettā* retreat, or it's a themed retreat, and it's not a soulmaking-themed retreat, how do I relate to this whole idea of fantasy? How can I work with the whole idea of fantasy? Because I'm supposed to be doing *jhāna* practice, or I'm supposed to be doing emptiness practice, or whatever it is." So, a fantasy is something, as I said, that's almost something in the background. It's a background kind of imaginal narrative, if you like, or semi-narrative. It, in fact, has an eternality to it, but it's in a narrative appearance, if you like. But it's the background.

And what can happen, or what we can do sometimes is, when we notice that fantasy, we can bring it into the foreground and work on it with our imaginal practice. In other words, what was fantasy in the background becomes image in the foreground, and then we work and play with that image. And of

course, it might be an image of myself. So that's what we're working with. I glimpse a fantasy, in the corner of my eye, when things are going really well, when I'm into practice, when I'm inspired. I glimpse the fantasy, and then if I want, I can bring that to the foreground and work on it in a sort of conscious, deliberate imaginal practice. [1:12:58] But then, once you've done that, it can go to the background again. So that's one way of doing it.

Or you might find there's no fantasy, actually; there's just *dukkha*. I'm just stuck here. I'm hitting my head against a brick wall. I feel completely contracted or imprisoned or whatever it is. There's no fantasy. Or what there is is a self-view that's not an imaginal fantasy. It's an impoverishment, and it's a reified self-view that's painful. Then, as I said yesterday, then what I have to do is I have to go through that *dukkha*. I have to go right to the middle of the *dukkha* and feel the *dukkha* of it and feel the pain of it. I have to hold it in certain ways. I cannot approach it just with simple mindfulness. Simple mindfulness would drain the self out and drain the story out. Very useful at times, but here we want a certain kind of crucible, a certain kind of holding which allows the self to be there, and the *dukkha*, and the story, but allows them to alchemically reconfigure or arise differently, in a much more helpful way. So through the *dukkha*, and through the very heat of the *dukkha*, and the material of the *dukkha*, in that crucible, if I hold it right in my imaginal practice, then an image of the self and an image of the path will arise. And then *that* can go to the background. If this is all in the context of a *jhāna* retreat, or an emptiness retreat, or a *mettā* retreat, and not a soulmaking retreat, it can go to the background.

In other words, we only use these fantasies, we only bring them to the foreground *as much* and *when* they are needed. Otherwise they can stay in the background. And from the background, they quietly but powerfully do their work, in their subtle, half-hidden, almost subliminal way, from the background. So you bring it forward, or you concentrate on your *dukkha* and allow the image to become primary only when you need it – a bit like using insight ways of looking on a *jhāna* retreat, if an insight way of looking is not your base or springboard practice. For some people it is, and that's fine; they're doing that all the time. For other people, it's almost last in the list of things to do when, “Hmm, something feels stuck. I try this, I try imagining, I try breathing through, I try this and this and this, etc.” – last on the list, maybe, is an insight way of looking. But I'm just taking something else, bringing it into primacy for a certain time, for the sake of lubricating and opening up the *jhānic* path now on this retreat where there's an intention, and an intention to stay constant with my intention, and on a certain path. And I bring it, and when it does its work, I can let it go again, unless it's my base practice. So we only use it when we've tried everything else which hasn't helped.

Okay. Let's sit quietly for a bit.

[silence]

Okay. Thank you, everybody. It's time for tea now.

¹ AN 9:35.

² E.g. MN 111.

³ Rob Burbea, “15: Emptiness and Awareness (1),” in *Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Dependent Arising and Emptiness* (Devon: Hermes Amāra, 2014), 192–208.

⁴ The four guided meditations, dated 9 Sept. 2009 through 12 Sept. 2009, can be found at <https://dharmafeed.org/teacher/210/?search=the+space+of+awareness>, accessed 27 Feb. 2020.

⁵ AN 9:36.

⁶ Source unknown. Rob may be alluding to the commentarial notion that the fourth *jhāna* and the four *arūpa-jhānas* are all ‘imperturbable’ (*āneñja*). Following this interpretation, one could argue that the *arūpa-jhānas* are variants of the fourth *jhāna* because they all belong to the same category of ‘imperturbable’ states. However, as Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu writes in a footnote to his translation of MN 106: “According to the commentaries, ‘imperturbable’ denotes the fourth *jhāna* and the four formless attainments. MN 66 provides partial support for this interpretation, saying that the first three *jhānas* are perturbable while the fourth is not, but this sutta does not include the dimension of nothingness under the term – or, apparently, any of the formless attainments higher than that.” See Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, tr., “Conducive to the Imperturbable: Āneñjasappāya Sutta (MN 106),” <https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN106.html>, accessed 27 Feb. 2020.

⁷ E.g. AN 5:28.

⁸ E.g. MN 111.

⁹ *cetovimutti*: *ceto* (‘awareness’) + *vimutti* (‘release’)

¹⁰ *santā vimokkhā*, e.g. at MN 69, MN 70, AN 8:72, AN 10:9.

¹¹ Arahantship (*arahattaṃ*) is defined as ‘the ending of greed, the ending of hatred, the ending of delusion’ at SN 38:2.

¹² DN 15.

¹³ MN 70.

¹⁴ E.g. Rob Burbea, “In Love with the Way: Images of Path and Self” (10 Feb. 2017), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/40178/>, accessed 28 Feb. 2020. Also see Rob Burbea, “On Blessed Ground: Fantasies of the Self on the Path” (31 Mar. 2017), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/43945/>, accessed 28 Feb. 2020.

The Seventh Jhāna (The Realm of Nothingness)

Okey-doke. So, seventh *jhāna*, which the Buddha didn’t call it that, as far as I’m aware, but it has the appealing name of the ‘realm of nothingness’ and the ‘dimension of nothingness.’ Let’s again start by checking out what the Buddha says, which is – this monk or whatever has gone through the first six *jhānas*, and then:

The thought occurs to him, “What if I, with the complete transcending of the sphere [the realm, the base, the dimension] of the infinitude of consciousness, recognizing, ‘There is nothing,’ what if I were to enter and remain in the sphere of nothingness?” Without jumping at the sphere of nothingness, he enters and remains in the sphere of nothingness. He sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, and establishes himself firmly in it.¹

[laughs] Let’s just sit quietly for a while. [laughter] But believe me, it gets worse. [laughter] Trying to put language to these – it gets worse. So, okay. Some people – again, I have no idea about statistics, but it’s certainly not unheard of for a person, even a beginner on their first insight meditation retreat, and

maybe they just went for some [stress reduction], they heard it was good for stress reduction and relaxation, and somehow, following simple instructions, etc., they're sitting there one day in meditation, minding their own business, and a huge, big, black space opens up, and they feel like they kind of fall into it: 'a void,' or 'the Void.' And they might have heard the language of the Void, and it's got charged, or it refers to certain – actually, it refers to different things in different Buddhist traditions over the years, and other traditions: *the Void*. So some proportion of people have that experience. Something like that happens.

But usually, when that happens out of the blue, so to speak, like that, and without much preparation, without much orientation, there's usually not really a discerning which, if any, of the four *arūpa-jhānas*, the four *arūpa* (immaterial) realms, dimensions, one has found oneself encountering. So the person will speak: "Everything disappeared. There was nothing there." But actually, I've heard people say that in relation to the first *jhāna*. It becomes very hard – these states, including the first *jhāna*, are so different from people's usual experience, understandably, that one struggles not only to put into language and describe to the teacher (if you have an interview) or whoever it is, or a friend, what's happened, but also to actually discern what has happened. As the Buddha said: "What's present now, and what is absent?"² So someone just says, "Everything disappeared!" Well, actually, there's still a lot of stuff. In the first *jhāna*, there's still *pīti*, *sukha*, and all the rest of it.

Here, in the realm of nothingness, there's a lot less. But usually, without training, the eyes are not used to the dark, so to speak. So there isn't this discernment: what is still there? What is not? And if you ask such a person who's fallen into, stumbled into encountering something like a void, a big, black space, ask them: "Was there a sense of space there?" They may not have had that much discernment. "Was there a sense of space, or was there not a sense of space?" So usually, if I say to you, "Imagine nothing" – maybe not for you guys at this point – just say to someone, "Imagine just nothingness," probably a person would try and imagine a big, black, empty space with nothing in it, probably. But that's not the realm of nothingness. That's probably more akin to the realm of infinite space.

At any rate, this novice meditator, or meditator without any kind of map or orientation or understanding of what has just happened, this big, dark space with nothing in it, without much discrimination, because they're not trained, and they're not prepared to discriminate the subtleties of differences in all these states, most would say, "Oh, it's a nothingness." But actually, because also of the non-discrimination, the non-preparation to be *able* to discriminate and discern, there won't be the blossoming, there won't be the full blossoming of whatever sort of potential state there is there. It's the discriminating, it's the discerning that allows something to blossom. We're back to this noticing, attuning, amplifying. 'Amplifying' means 'blossoming.' If I don't notice a difference, if I don't attune to it, if I don't notice and attune to it, then it doesn't get amplified. In other words, it doesn't blossom.

So whatever state this is (that oftentimes actually scares the living daylights out of a person, if they're a novice meditator, if such a thing happens), it's probably not really any of the formless *jhānas*. It's sort of in that territory, potentially could be any of them, but because there's not the discrimination, and because there isn't the preparation and the skill, and the subtlety and sensitivity of awareness to discriminate, because of all that, it actually doesn't really become any one of them, probably. More significantly, the person almost certainly does not understand how that happened at that point. "I was just meditating. I was just noticing things, letting go, and then this thing happened!" Almost certainly

had no idea how it happened, or *why* it happened. And they may or may not get much explanation from books, or whoever's teaching the retreat, or talks or whatever. No understanding how it happened or why it happened, so it just seems a random occurrence. And again, it might be presented as a kind of random occurrence: "What's the important thing? Two things: you'll be okay, and it's impermanent." Both of which are true, but there's no real understanding of the *why* there. And the *why* has to do with dependent origination, dependent arising, or dependent fading. [7:58]

So it probably doesn't fully blossom. Probably there's very little or no understanding of how or why that has opened or kind of emerged. And as I mentioned, probably, or often, it will be quite frightening, such an experience. One just feels like one's on the edge of an abyss or has fallen into an abyss. There will be fear with such an opening, such a deep bottoming out of experience, such a deep disappearance of the world of phenomenal reality, the conventional and accustomed world of phenomenal reality. There will be fear, usually, if there isn't a kind of series of stepping-stones to such an experience, a series of stepping-stones that one has enjoyed and learnt to trust, and delighted in, and has become a stable basis, stable stepping-stones. And what are they? Well, the other six *jhānas* – so these other six *jhānas*, up to the seventh *jhāna*, because we learn to really trust them. They're also droppings out. They're also disappearances, to some degree. They're [fadings], unfabricating to some degree. But we've got used to that. Not only have we got used to it. We've learnt that they can become stable and that they're delightful, and we trust them. There's nothing to be feared here. Without those stepping-stones, and the training and time that it takes to really establish those stepping-stones, then just being presented with this edge of an abyss, or falling into an abyss, is going to be frightening. It's a long way from normal consciousness to such an abyss. It's much less of a way from the realm of infinite consciousness, the sixth *jhāna*, to the seventh *jhāna*. It's just a step, and so there's much, much, much less likelihood for there to be fear. And then that fear can cause mayhem in all kinds of ways.

So what's going on here? And the Buddha doesn't help that much, does he, there? We're in the infinite consciousness, and it's not, then, with this next step, that consciousness is not *there* in the realm of nothingness, but the sense of space *has* gone. This is why I said: if I say to you, "Can you imagine a big, black space with nothing in it?" [silence]

Yeah? Most would have some sense of that. Okay. But we're saying that's *not* actually the realm of nothingness. Can you imagine nothingness – not even space? [silence]

Little trickier, huh? [laughs] So this has really gone quite beyond our usual sense of things. Space has gone. It's not that consciousness has gone. Consciousness is there, but consciousness is not *prominent*, in the way it was in the sixth *jhāna*, in the realm of infinite consciousness, when the consciousness and the consciousness knowing itself, or even knowing the infinite space, was the primary *nimitta*. There's still consciousness. There has to be consciousness there in the realm of nothingness. Otherwise we wouldn't have any sense of anything, any perception of anything, any consciousness of anything. But the consciousness is not prominent. It's rather that the *citta*, the mind, the heart is struck, captivated, drawn to the sense of nothingness – this sense of nothingness which doesn't even have a sense of space with it. Or it might have the last vestiges of space, but as you get deeper into it, even the space kind of – I don't know what the word is – collapses or gets sucked into itself, like a kind of black hole or something like that. And that nothingness is the primary *nimitta*. That's what the mind is drawn to, captivated by, struck by, entranced by, etc. So consciousness is still

there, but it's not the primary thing.

Later on (and I hope we will get to go into this or describe it on this retreat), we have to re-find and re-focus on the consciousness as one aspect or thread of being able to go even deeper. So at the moment, we forget about the aspect of consciousness. Later we have to find it again, as just one thread of a path that can take us beyond even this nothingness. Experientially, usually, such a state, the realm of nothingness, is basically pitch black. And as I said, we've gone beyond anything that could be described as 'space with nothing in it,' which would be more akin to the infinite space.

Sometimes, without the sense of space, it can sometimes feel as if it almost has a 'thick' texture to it, because the space sort of thins things out, and then there's no space. Almost feels thick, but I think – and this is where we get very hard language, but that probably passes. And that thickness, it's not that we've then taken a step backwards in terms of refinement. This is definitely a refinement over the last realm, of infinite consciousness. There's nothing left as a perception, nothing left as a perception *but* the perception of nothing. There's nothing left but nothing. [laughs] There's nothing left but nothingness. And that's the one thing that's striking one. It's something, again, very breathtaking. It may be, for some, even someone who's not a beginner (like the person we described, just innocently sitting on an insight meditation retreat, having never heard about any of this stuff), it may still be, for some people, an acquired taste – for some people. But I would say, at some point, either immediately or gradually or eventually, it will turn, and one will fall in love with it, fall in love with this mystical nothing, this mystical void, this mystical nothingness.

So how do we get there? How does it open up?

(1) Well, one possibility is **just letting the realm of infinite consciousness – letting that mature**, just really getting to know that, sit in that, love it, open to it, get to know it inside out, stay in it, stay in it, dissolve as much as one can, etc. And naturally, at some point, there will be an evolution, and it will sort of take a quantum leap, a quantum jump into a different dimension: the dimension of nothingness.

(2) As always, eventually, with time and the intention to develop mastery, there's the possibility of **accessing the realm of nothingness just through a subtle intention, through the memory of it**. That takes a lot of practice, as with all the *jhānas*, just getting familiar, but it's just as possible.

(3) But here (and I want to dwell on this) is where the **insight ways of looking, as a way in to this realm**, get really interesting and really important, really, really significant. So in this other sutta that we've already mentioned, the *Āneñjasappāya Sutta*, *The Way to the Imperturbable*, or *The Conducive to the Imperturbable*, it's sometimes translated.³ Here is a sutta where the bulk of it is, the Buddha is talking about insight ways of looking to predominantly the formless realms. There's other stuff in it too, but ... He's talked about up to the sixth *jhāna*, and he gives the name 'the imperturbable' to the fourth, fifth, and sixth *jhānas*. So just for this sutta, it seems to refer to those: fourth, fifth, sixth.

So he's gone up to that point, and then he says: "Then again, the disciple of the noble ones considers this." I would say, this 'consider,' again, I don't know what a better word in English would be. It's not an intellectual pondering. One employs a way of looking, and that's very light, very agile, very subtle, and very potent. A heavy pondering, philosophically, is not going to produce any meditative state and open any doors to other dimensions. Okay, so we don't really have a word in English, but the way I would definitely translate is:

The disciple of the noble ones employs a way of looking which involves a very subtle text that says something like, and understands something like: “All sensuality, and all sensual perceptions, and all perceptions of forms, and all perceptions of the form *jhānas*, the *rūpa-jhānas*, and the realm of infinite space, and the realm of infinite consciousness, all that – all sense perceptions, all form perceptions, all *rūpa-jhāna* perceptions, all perceptions of infinite space and infinite consciousness, all that – they’re all perceptions. They’re all just perceptions. Where they cease without remainder, where they end without remainder, where they no longer are, *that* is peaceful, *that* is exquisite: i.e. the dimension of nothingness. Practising and frequently abiding in this way, her mind acquires confidence in that dimension.

I’ll read the others, too, and then we’ll come back and do them individually. [pause] No, let’s take them individually. It’s better.

(1) So what’s going on here? Basically, one’s employing a way of looking. Again, if you’re not used to this idea of ‘ways of looking,’ we’re talking about something very subtle. It’s an insight way of looking. It’s a certain conception and relationship with, in this case, all those perceptions – so anything that comes up, or that might come up. One might be in the fifth *jhāna*, or one might be looking at a perception – a material, sensual perception in the world; it might be the third *jhāna*, a perception of a *rūpa-jhāna*, whatever – all those perceptions, and whatever perceptions will come up or have come up, they’re not peaceful. They’re *dukkha*, basically. So some of you know what I call the first *dukkha* practice: ‘unsatisfactory.’ Particularly, they’re not peaceful. And there’s a sort of confidence there that when they’re let go, when these perceptions fade, when they’re let go, there’s a dimension called ‘the dimension of nothingness’ which arises when they quieten, which arises when they’re absent.

So this is all a very, very – all that *blah blah blah* I just said is all right there, in a way of looking that’s just happening again and again and again – very subtle tincture in the way of looking, making the way of looking. Very subtle, not a whole verbose philosophy. And one’s applying it to whatever one is perceiving, again and again and again, sustaining, over and over and over, and those perceptions fade. And in their absence, the perception of the realm of nothingness opens up. “They’re not peaceful, but *this* is peaceful, *this* is exquisite: the dimension of nothingness.” That’s one way the Buddha describes. One could say, “Yeah, they’re *dukkha*. They’re unsatisfactory,” but particularly with this emphasis on “They’re not peaceful. *This* is peaceful.”

(2) Second insight way of looking that opens up this realm:

Then again [the Buddha says], the disciple of the noble ones, having gone into the wilderness, to the root of a tree, into an empty dwelling [or into a retreat centre in rural Devon], considers this ...

Again, ‘considers’ – same deal. It’s with an insight way of looking, very subtle, very potent. Its potency is proportional to its subtlety in the mind, to its non-verboseness. There may be words there, very subtle, but it’s talking about something very agile.

Considers this [I don't really like the word, but looks in this way]: "This is empty of self or of anything pertaining to self."

Or you could translate it:

"This is void of self or of anything belonging to self." Practising and frequently abiding in this way, his mind acquires confidence in that dimension [and the dimension of nothingness opens up].

When we read that originally, we think, "Oh, yeah. That's to do with there being no self, because Buddhists talk about there being no self, right?" I think it's actually more to do with what I would call the 'phenomenal self' – not the the personal self, but the self of phenomena: "This is a lamp. This is a piece of paper. This is a glass. This is a hand," etc. So just as habitual *avijjā*, habitual delusion takes self to be something real, a real thing, we also do that with *anything at all*: "This is a sound. This is a taste. This is a clock."

And to me, what the deep teachings of emptiness are pointing to is not just the emptiness of the personal self, but also the emptiness of the self – *selves* – of phenomena. *Everything* is empty. *All* things are empty of *being things*, of being inherently existing things. So the way of looking, "This is empty of self, this is void of self, or of anything pertaining to self or belonging to self" – I think it's referring to *that*. And the 'this' there is *anything*. Anything that's in the attention, anything that one pays attention to, whether it's this body or this ... whatever it is, it's empty of self, empty of self. It's *empty in itself*. That's another way of saying it: it's empty in itself. [23:43] If one does that again and again – and again, we're talking about something very agile. It has to make sense to me what that means: "This is empty, empty. It's empty of self or of being something that is a part of some larger self, like it's a part of a larger phenomenon, like this spring here is a part of a larger lamp, or anything like that." That has to make sense. So the insight way of looking has to make sense to me.

A way of going about it is, 'empty of self' means it's fabricated. In the way we've been talking about, it means this thing does not exist as a *thing* unless the mind fabricates it as a thing. And if the mind doesn't put in the conditions – clinging and conception and a certain relationship to it – that thing does not get fabricated or constructed as a thing. So these ways of looking have to make sense. But it would be equivalent, or one way of doing it, or a shorthand way of saying it is 'fabricated, fabricated.' But I have to have the experience of having seen things unfabricate through playing with other ways of looking in the past. I have to have enough experience of that, that when I point at something with my mind and say, 'fabricated,' it's resting on the consolidation of my previous insight, seeing things fade. I know they're fabricated. I know it *here*, in my heart. So I can just look at them as 'fabricated,' and in that one word, there's a whole – you could write a book explaining what that one word means: 'fabricated.' So it has to be there, and that's what I mean. It's very agile, because that one word contains a lot of understanding, but in a very dense way, but very light. So 'fabricated,' maybe. It's empty *in itself* or of a *phenomenal self*, which is more than to say, "It's not me or not mine," I would say. So to really point to this *jhāna*, we need to go beyond the teachings about personal self and 'not me, not

mine,’ *anattā*, and actually, to the level of the phenomenal self, the emptiness of phenomenal self, which is a deeper level.

It could also be – and some of you know this, and it’s in *Seeing That Frees*. All this stuff is in *Seeing That Frees*.⁴ But it could also be, say, “This is empty – empty of self or of anything belonging to a self, void of self or void of anything belonging to a self.” Some of you know that in *Seeing That Frees*, you can find a meditation on wholes and parts, and a way of going deep into emptiness, or pretty deep into emptiness through a meditation on wholes and parts, and their relationship, and their mutual dependency and mutual emptiness.⁵ And so, this could be referring to something like that: whatever *this* is, it’s not a part of something bigger, and it’s not a whole which has parts. The very notions are empty. So there are different ways of doing it. We don’t have time to go into detail. I’m just kind of pointing at things here, but it’s in *Seeing That Frees*, in quite a lot of detail. But that might be an option there. Okay, so that’s the second one.

(3) The third one:

Then again, the disciple of the noble ones considers [all my qualifications about that word ‘considers’] this: “I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere. Nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere.”

... Huh? [laughs] “I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere. Nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere.” It *should* make us scratch our heads. I think you have to consider also, perhaps, that the time of the Buddha, and the different religious views that were around, and the different meditative practices that were around, it’s very possible – and in fact, in the Buddha’s biographical story, there’s just this: that someone takes, for example, the realm of infinite consciousness as the ultimate reality, and everything in the world belongs to that ultimate reality. And not only is it the ultimate reality, but I, in my true essence, and you, in your true essence, *are* that ultimate reality. Your true essence, your Self (with a capital S) is that infinite, cosmic consciousness. And so this strange formula here – it cuts the possibility of viewing myself or any of the elements of myself in relation to something like the cosmic consciousness. I am not belonging to anyone, that deity, that cosmic consciousness. There’s nothing in my make-up that belongs to that. Even though I might have been attached to that view, and it might have been extremely helpful, beautiful, liberating, heart-opening view at another level, now I cut it. Remember what we said about provisional truth. I’m going to another level now: I am not anything belonging to anyone (any deity, for instance) anywhere. Nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere. I also am not taking the seat of identification with, for instance, the cosmic consciousness, or anything like that, so that all this kind of belongs to me. [30:07]

If you get to this point in practice, strange as these whole formulas sound, and puzzling and baffling and sort of arcane, it’s still worth really, really playing with. Sometimes, even when we only half understand something, they have a magical power. Generally, that has contradicted what I said earlier – it’s like, if you say, ‘fabricated, fabricated,’ or ‘empty,’ it has to really mean something to you. You have to really understand it. And, contradicting myself, there’s also the possibility: “I have no idea what

the hell this means here, but I'm just going to try playing with this," and something happens. So that's for later. And then, again, the Buddha says:

Practising and frequently abiding in this way, his mind acquires confidence in that dimension.⁶

The realm of nothingness opens up, and that whole mystical depth of that. Again, we're talking about insight ways of looking. We're not talking about pondering. We're talking about something that's very light, liquid, agile, very, very subtle, but has immense power. I want to return to those insight ways of looking and their relationship with this dimension of nothingness in a bit. But just practically speaking, in terms of technique, etc., so here we are – again, I really want to dissolve in this. I want to dissolve in this nothingness as much as I can. There will be, as in all the *jhānas*, a subtle polarity between subject and object. And 'object' here is the nothingness, but there will still be some degree of a subtle polarity, a subtle sense of separation, a subtle duality there. There's still the same thing, still SASSIE, but the **A**, again, **Absorption** – how much can I dissolve in this? Remember, it's an open direction, so it doesn't end. We're trying to absorb more, we're trying to dissolve more, but we will never totally absorb. Even if you feel like you're totally absorbed in it, it's just that you haven't noticed a subtle remnant of subject-object duality there, of subject-object polarity there. We cannot totally erase or collapse the subject-object duality without much deeper insight ways of looking.

And I know in many circles, it's very popular and very quick off the tongue to say, "No subject-object duality, and there was no self" – all this. It's very easy to say that, but again, this is why [there's] so much emphasis on subtlety, discernment, discrimination, attunement, really noticing there is still a subject-object duality here. And unless I move the insight to a whole other level (which hopefully we'll talk about in the next couple of days), that is not going to collapse. So usually when people talk about, "Yeah, there was no self, and there was no duality, and there's no conception," it's just that they're not paying close enough attention to what's going on. They haven't noticed something. There hasn't been the training in the subtle discerning and discrimination. So when we talk about non-conceptual awareness, when we talk about the total collapse of subject-object duality, we're talking about something extremely rare and extremely strange, and that takes quite a rare and sophisticated and profound and subtle insight to collapse, to go beyond.

But practically speaking, I want to keep this **A** as open-ended. I will never reach the end of **A**; it's open-ended, the **Absorption**. I just try and dissolve mind and body in this nothingness, as much as one can. And again, this forward leaning business – again, we can configure it, configure this nothingness upright, so there's less "It's in front of me, and I'm kind of falling into it, or the mind is getting sucked into it, or trying to probe it in front of me." Or I put it where the body is. There's nothingness. Where? It's *here*. It's not just in front of me. It's here, too, in the space where the body used to be. Or I configure it 360 degrees around. All this can help with that sort of strong tendency to lean that happens for many people.

Okay. Depending on how one approached it – so just like the infinite consciousness, a lot of things about working with it depend on which route one has taken into it. If one's going just from these insight ways of looking, where one considers, "*This* is empty of self. *This* is empty of anything belonging to a

self” – the *this* is really anything at all. It’s anything that arises. And it could be the perceptions of normal sensory awareness. And one starts with that *this*: the perception of my body, the perception of this pain, the perception of this *pīti*, whatever. And one just keeps training the insight way of looking on, let’s say, it starts with a pain, pain in my tummy. And I just keep looking at it with the same insight way of looking. What’s going to happen? Probably the pain fades. Probably it goes through a phase where there’s *pīti* arising, maybe *sukha*. Maybe it goes through some of the *jhānas* – quick, so maybe the train doesn’t stop there. You’re just kind of seeing the station out the window, and it goes by as it’s fading. And then it starts to open up into deeper senses of fading.

So the *this* there, from the insight way of looking, could be anything. And it might be, if one is approaching it that way, through the insight ways of looking, or sometimes, if one is approaching it other ways, from, let’s say, the infinite consciousness, it could be that still other perceptions are arising. And this is quite important, because some people say, “Oh, they’re not gone,” and they get, “Oh, they need to disappear,” and one gets into a bit of a tizzy about that – a very subtle tizzy. [laughter] If that’s happening, then what’s really, really skilful is to regard them as ‘no things.’ They are ‘not things.’ In other words, the same insight way of looking is just trained on them. Now, by that point, it might be that I don’t even need the whole, “It’s empty”; it’s just, “They’re ‘no thing.’ This thing is a ‘no thing.’ It’s a ‘no thing.’ It’s a ‘no thing.’” Or, “They’re fabrications.” Again, I need to understand what that means. This sound – I hear the plane or whatever it is – it’s a fabrication, that sense perception. I need to understand that.

Or, “They’re just perceptions,” which implies – so that’s an interesting one. The insight way of looking ‘just perception’ has many alternative subtexts. So it can mean, and I think when some people hear it, or I’ve taught it in the past, take it to mean, and it’s totally valuable for it to mean at one level, what it means is: “This is just awareness in substance. Whatever – this sound, or this pain, or this thought – it’s just awareness in substance.” So it’s taking the insight and the perception from what? From the vastness of awareness, and it’s applying it as an insight way of looking: “It’s just a perception. It’s just awareness in substance.” But here, we need to go beyond that. And if I say, “Just a perception,” it really means: “It’s fabricated.” It’s a deeper insight. “It’s just a perception,” meaning, “It’s just something that’s fabricated, as all perceptions are.”

So we might use, as our tincture, for an insight way of looking, just this very subtle ‘just a perception,’ for example, or something like that, whatever the tincture is. But it’s important to read the small print. It’s important to know, what does it mean? Because the small print will determine what happens. If I’m viewing it as ‘just a perception,’ but what I really mean, or what I really understand by that is “It’s just the same substance as awareness,” it will take me to the vastness of awareness or maybe the infinite consciousness. But if my ‘just a perception’ has the small print, “Just a fabricated perception – *all* perceptions are fabricated,” then it takes me deeper.

Or again, this is when perceptions are still arising. The nothingness is sort of there, but [there’s] stuff at the edges, and one feels like, “Oh, it’s not completely pure yet.” One, again, could regard those perceptions as ‘*dukkha* – *dukkha* because perceptions are not peaceful,’ which corresponds to the first of the Buddha’s three insight ways of looking. They’re *dukkha*. But it has to be that we’re not talking about aversion there. If ‘that’s *dukkha*, that’s *dukkha*,’ and it’s got irritation in it and aversion, that’s not going to take me deeper. It will take me *out* of the whole depth, because aversion is a fabricator, and

we're moving in the direction of less fabrication. So you have to be careful with these kinds of things, and these insight ways of looking, that aversion doesn't get woven in subtly. It has a very strong effect when it does that. So you're really trying to view, without aversion, that it's '*dukkha*.' It's 'unsatisfactory.' It's '*dukkha* because it's a perception, and perceptions are not peaceful,' as the Buddha says, but that doesn't mean there's aversion to them. So these insight ways of looking are very, very (as I said) subtle, light, agile, liquid, but very finely poised as well. Again, to the degree of their delicacy and the subtlety of the poise is the degree of their power.

Actually, what I've just described, this kind of not quite pure, *peri-jhānic* state, it's like in the neighbourhood of the nothingness. Or the nothingness is there, but the mind hasn't completely entered into it. Or it's kind of half in and half out, or mostly in, and there's a little bit there. This not quite pure (whatever we call it), *para-jhānic* state – it may be, actually, *more* useful because of the opportunity to practise those ways of looking at objects and at sense perceptions and mental perceptions, right then. Again, we tend to think, "Oh, it's not going well," or we judge it dependent on how deep the absorption, etc. But the very fact that it's kind of not quite in yet gives us more opportunity to look in a certain way at these perceptions. And that may be more useful than when it's just completely, purely emptied out, because it's *that*, it's the ability to look at, it's the ability to sense and to relate to perceptions in these ways, with these insight ways of looking – *that's* what's most liberating. *That's* what brings the radical change and the radical openings of view: our ability to be in the world of things, to engage things, knowing they are empty. So this kind of "It's not quite settled yet" state with regard to the realm of nothingness gives us the opportunity to practise ways of looking, right then, in this kind of in-between state that one might just as, "Ugh, haven't really got it" – gives us the opportunity to practise ways of looking that are, in the end, actually, more powerful.

This whole thing, this whole realm of nothingness and everything that goes with it, is an experience and/or an understanding of emptiness at a very deep but not yet total or ultimate level. So when we're talking about the dimension of nothingness, we *should* be understanding emptiness at a very deep level from it, with it, or on our way to it. Wrapped up in the dimension of nothingness *should* be an understanding, at a very deep level, of emptiness. It's not the final, ultimate, deepest level of emptiness, but it's still really important. So again, we can talk about nothingness and 'no thing'-ness, but they're really just two sides of the same coin.

The advantage, I think, of working from the insight ways of looking (as the Buddha described, and as we went through very briefly there, and is in a lot more detail in *Seeing That Frees*) – the advantage of working that way is because those insights get consolidated more. So especially number (2) and (3) – "This is empty of a self or of what belongs to a self," "I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere. Nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere" – these ones are empowering a view of emptiness with regard to phenomena, the phenomena of the world, the phenomena of our life.

The first one: "Perceptions aren't peaceful. Let me go for something without perceptions, where there's more peace." Again, you can hear the danger of dualism there, right? You can hear the danger of a dualistic attachment. In a way, what I've just said, we could say the *samādhi* here – in other words, how absorbed am I in this state? – is actually less valuable than the insight, you could say. The degree of my absorption, etc., into this state may be less valuable than the insight that comes from the state or on my way to it, or around it, or in the after-effects. I would say that the insight is actually more

important than the degree of *samādhi* here. So ‘no thing,’ or the emptiness of things, and the understanding of the ‘no thing’-ness of things, of the absence of inherent existence of things, that really, ultimately, there are no things, the understanding of that *while we’re perceiving things* – this is, as I said, immensely liberating, so freeing in its potential. It’s a very profound understanding, and it has different levels to it, lots of different levels to it, at least the way I would teach it. So an understanding, the same understanding of ‘no thing’-ness at deeper and deeper levels – that’s the usual way I would teach emptiness, is you just kind of go one level, consolidate that, and then to a whole other level of what the same thing means, what it means to say something is empty, what it means to say there are no things.

But even at not such a profound level, it can be enormously liberating, so much potency of potential freedom there. When there’s no thing, when we begin to sense that or be able to see, “There is no thing here, *really*,” then there’s the possibility that we can *be with* something with either *no* or *much less* sense of imprisonment with regard to that thing, much less sense or no sense of imprisonment in, with, or by any form, whether that form is a relationship one feels claustrophobic in, whether it’s a work situation that one feels hampered by, stuck in, constricted by, whether it’s any kind of situation, or a social situation, or an ongoing social construction that one finds oneself in, whether it’s an illness, whether it’s a retreat – the bonds of finitude. Where there’s finitude, we can feel imprisoned by those edges in all kinds of ways. You just have to ponder this and actually see: where there’s a thing, there’s the possibility of imprisonment in relation to, with, by, in that thing. So understanding this ‘no thing’-ness, being able to relate to a thing, see a thing, be in a thing (I’m using ‘thing,’ obviously, in a very broad sense now), to be able to see that way and know its ‘no thing’-ness can open up tremendous freedom, the end of a sense of imprisonment. One is free. The bars are still there. One is free.

Sometimes, you used to say to people, years ago, sometimes it’s really good, like, for example, in walking meditation, and say, “Well, can’t I just go for a walk? Same thing. I’ll walk. I’ll do it mindfully.” And I used to say, “No, walk up and down, and up and down, and up and down. You have a beginning, and you have an end – closed form.” And then, sometimes I would say to people, “And do a walking meditation period for six hours or more – six, seven, eight hours. Walk, walk, walk until you see the illusion of the closedness of that form.” Of course, I have to incline my mind to that insight. Here I’m imprisoned. I can’t be – I’m not free to go anywhere. I’m just walking up and down in this body until one sees through – sees through the form, sees through any sense of imprisonment in that form, sees the emptiness of walking.

So what we’re talking about here applies to so many other things, so many forms, so many structures, so many imprisonments. It’s an emptiness insight, and it’s related to this ‘no thing’-ness business of the seventh *jhāna*. And as I said, there are many different levels of this. But even at a more conventional level, we can (as I said), if I don’t know what all this means, just walk. Just, for example, do your walking meditation, hours and hours and hours, until you see through what looks like a restricted form, and you’re free.

So the *samādhi*, as I said, may be less valuable than the insight here. And there’s a way, as we’ve been talking about, the *jhāna* should bring certain insights. It *will* bring certain insights when one goes into this level, the dimension of nothingness. It *should* bring certain insights, but certainly the insight ways of looking will deliver the *jhāna*. So the causality, again, works both ways. But if I go, if I enter

this *jhāna* and this dimension of nothingness, if I go via the insight ways of looking, it will tend to reinforce those insights more. I will learn those insights more, because they've been part of how I've got there as well. So in the *jhāna*, as I said, you can have a sense of nothingness and a sense of 'no thing'-ness, and it can be slightly different. I mean, the actual *jhāna* is really a sense of nothingness. The insight is of 'no thing'-ness. It's the latter, the sense of 'no thing'-ness, the recognition of 'no thing'-ness that's most important for insight. Even if I (and this is an interesting one) just have an experience of nothingness, deep nothingness, to me, it *should* lead to the insights that the Buddha is talking about – emptiness of phenomenal self, etc. It *should* lead to the insight that "There are no things, really."

But again, the power of conceptual framework – because I've heard and read people talk about this, this state, and they seem to have very good absorption into it, but they don't seem to have sucked the juice from it, in terms of the most relevant and the deepest insight from it. So all very well, the absorption is good and fantastic, and you can hold your mind there, but where's the liberating insight from it? So it *could* be, again, that because of a conceptual framework which isn't relating these things to emptiness, there's actually a stranglehold on the growth of insight. It may be that the force of the *jhānic* experience anyway opens that, but I do know cases where that's not the case, and to me, it points, again, to the hidden power of conceptual frameworks, and how important it is to pay attention to conceptual frameworks, and just see: are we adopting and using and relying on the most powerful conceptual frameworks, the ones that make the most sense, the ones that point in the right direction? Are we picking the right thing from the fruit tree? Or are walking away with something else, like a twig or something, and not an apple?

So the view, then, that comes, that becomes available, and the understanding, and also the after-effect on perception here, *is* – one moves in the world afterwards, and one's clearly moving in a world of *things*, but they are, at the same time, felt and seen to be, in some very mysterious way, *not* things. It's a thing and it's not a thing, and it's hard to put that into language. But one way of saying that is, these understandings and these perception attainments – they don't make us dysfunctional in the world, like I'm now unable to drink water because I can't sense a thing there. Of course I can sense a thing. But I can also sense it as *not* a thing.

No thing – it's, as I said, related to emptiness. It does not mean impermanence. Emptiness is *way* beyond impermanence, and when we talk about the 'no thing'-ness of things, we're not saying, "There's not really a glass of water here, or there's not really a glass here, there's not really water here. What there are is the really, really rapid arising and passing of either perceptions or atoms," or whatever it is. That's impermanence. It might be super-fast impermanence. That's not emptiness. So that would be an example. If I took the insight of rapid impermanence from all this business of 'no thing'-ness and this *jhāna*, I would be taking, I don't know, a twig from the apple tree, and not the apple. No thing, emptiness – this is much, much deeper, much more powerfully liberating than impermanence.

So again, there are certain recurrent themes through all this, and still, with this level of opening and this mystical kind of revelation, really, it's still brings *mettā*. *Mettā* comes from it, just like all the other *jhānas*. The *mettā* here [is] luscious, profound, flavoured with the depth of mystery, and flavoured with the depth of the mystery of 'no thing'-ness, of thing-ness and 'no thing'-ness at the same time, of

emptiness – *mettā* at a whole other level. Again, we can ask: why *mettā*? Everything’s disappearing. There’s no thing. But there’s also, then, less emphasis on the differences. There’s certainly less emphasis on *this* self, and the interests of the self, and the selfish interests of this self over and above others.

But even more, again, there’s oneness. Just like the other *arūpa-jhānas* that we’ve talked about – oneness, another whole level of oneness, another whole level of mystical oneness opens up with these perceptions. So we had the oneness of materiality, this sort of ‘woven together’-ness of our bodies, of our matter, of all matter, with all matter in the universe. We had the oneness of awareness from the infinite consciousness, the mysterious oneness of our consciousnesses. And here we have a kind of oneness of essence or substance, but that essence is a kind of essence of emptiness. I use ‘essence’ almost in inverted commas. The substance of all beings and all things, the substance of all phenomena, the essence of all beings and all phenomena is recognized, is felt to be emptiness. But we have to use that word ‘essence’ a little carefully. And that’s a whole other level of mystical oneness that the heart opens to. It’s emptiness understood at a certain level there, or a certain bandwidth of levels pertaining to the seventh *jhāna*. So *mettā* comes, as we would expect by now, and a further opening of oneness.

Just to linger on the *mettā* piece, later, after you’ve developed this for a while, and also with the development of other emptiness practices, again, we can make cocktails. So we can mix, perhaps, certain *brahmavihāra* practices – maybe *mettā* or *karuṇā*, compassion practice – with, for instance, this sense of ‘no thing’-ness or emptiness. There is, as we talked about, the spectrum of fading, spectrum of unfabricating. And with practice, it’s possible to play with perception, which is, again, one way of construing everything that we’re doing, one way of construing what the whole Dharma is. We’re playing with perception. And play along that spectrum of fading, so that self and other fade to a great degree, and phenomena as well. There’s a partial fading of this being or that being, who one is then directing *mettā* towards. They become *extremely* insubstantial, *barely* there, because they’re faded. They’re just on the cusp of completely fading out, and diaphanous there. They’re on the verge of fading. But still they’re there as an object, as a person.

So there’s a knowing that they’re empty – they’re empty of inherent existence. And experientially, that knowing of their emptiness is empowering an insight way of looking, which is empowering the fading, down to a point where they’re just kind of ‘appearing,’ teetering on the edge – and then the love, and then practising the *mettā* or the *karuṇā* towards this empty person, balanced somewhere on a cusp of fading and appearance. So they’re barely there. They’re appearing, but they’re barely there. They’re barely formed. They’re half-faded, yet they’re distinct. They’re just about distinct as this person or that person, etc. And doing that, and then adding into this alchemical mix, adding your *mettā* towards this person, or your *karuṇā* towards this person, empowers the *mettā* or the *karuṇā* to a whole other level. And some people think, “Well, if someone’s empty, surely I’m not going to have *mettā*, because they’re empty, right?” But no. If you actually practise it, it takes the love and the compassion to a whole other level, a whole other empowerment.

And actually, this kind of thing, playing with the spectrum of fading through an insight way of looking, making cocktails, etc. – there are all kinds of options that start opening up, all kinds of games we can play and be very creative here, all kinds of beauty and wonder that can open up in this territory. In a way, one could say this is the territory, now, of tantric practice or Vajrayāna, ideally, I would say. It

comes from this knowing of emptiness, this understanding of emptiness, and this ability to actually control, if you like, or play with perception to a certain degree, so that things don't just completely fade, and then I can't do anything – there's nothing, because everything's completely gone. But nor are they, nor are things or beings reified and solid. They're in this diaphanous, divine, empty yet appearing, on the cusp of fading yet appearing – they're in that place, and it's a magical place, and it's a place of potent magic.

In the Mahāyāna teachings, it's said that only a Buddha – not an arahant, not a fully enlightened person in the Theravādan teachings – only a Buddha, a complete Buddha can both fully view something or someone as 'empty' *at the same time* that they still perceive that thing or that someone, still perceive them as someone or something. For all the rest of us, when I view X or Y, or this person or that person, or this phenomenon or that phenomenon as 'empty' – again, that makes sense to me what it means, and I'm applying it in this agile, subtle way, I'm viewing this as 'empty' – that thing will disappear. It will fade. Only a Buddha can fully view something as 'empty' and still perceive it. That's a core and fundamental but not very well-known Mahāyāna teaching, and it has enormous implications. So one way of construing what one's doing when you're practising Vajrayāna visualization practices and seeing appearances as divine (some of you will never have heard of this; some of you will have) is: you're mimicking, you're deliberately mimicking the mind of a Buddha, and that capacity of a Buddha to do that just, to understand *and* view something as empty at the same time you're actually perceiving it, without it completely fading, so that Vajrayāna and that kind of practice is just this *pretend mimicking* of being a Buddha. And if you do that enough, that's one way to *become* a Buddha: you just imitate a Buddha, and then you become a Buddha. That's all Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna teaching; I'm just mentioning it.

But a couple of things from that. And they're significant. Well, I think that's very significant in all kinds of ways, and certainly as practice options, hugely significant. And immensely beautiful playgrounds open up, immensely beautiful realms and possibilities open up there. But there are a couple of points I want to draw out from what I've just been talking about. One is about this malleability of perception with the emptiness and the fading. I'll come back to that.

The other, again, is revisiting our theme of desire. And we said there are these four *iddhipādā* that the Buddha talked about, and desire is one of them. And then we keep touching on it in this retreat. And one of the things I said, and I've said it now, I've pulled it out as something to talk about twice, and a third time now at least, I think, is: again, what is it exactly I'm desiring from practice? And what exactly is the mix of desires, the precise mix of my desires that brings me to practice, that keeps me practising, that takes me to retreats, or whatever it is? What's in there?

What those desires are has a tremendous influence on then what unfolds – let's say, on a retreat or in your practice or in your life. So if one of those desires, or even the *main* desire for practice, is to open my heart, and for the heart to be touched, and that's really what takes me to practice, and that's maybe what brings me on a *jhāna* retreat, somehow, that may seem a bit of a strange choice of retreat. You know, if you want that, why would you choose a *jhāna* retreat, necessarily? And again, talking about this, the influence of exactly what it is that I desire, the influence of that on what unfolds, and what becomes possible, because if that's my primary intention – it may be conscious; it may be semi-conscious – then it's probably not enough to sustain the intention for *jhānas* and for *jhāna* practice. I

mean, it's a wonderful intention, but it's probably not enough to actually show up, hour after hour, on a retreat like this or a longer *jhāna* retreat, to actually sustain: this is what I'm doing. I'm not getting distracted. This is the primary thing I'm doing. I'm occasionally doing something else, but this is what I'm doing. We've talked over and over about just how hard that is to sustain that intention, and also just how important it is to sustain that intention, because without it sustaining, things won't open up. They'll open up in a very limited way, but they won't unfold to these kinds of depth, or any real *jhānic* depths. Hard to sustain that, difficult to sustain that intention, a single intention like that. But if my primary thing that I'm looking for or wanting from practice is the heart to be touched or opened, then as I said, it's probably not enough to sustain that intention. It's probably not enough to keep working and playing, for instance, in the ways that we've been taught, because I'm actually interested in something else. It's hard to see the connection, and I'll be drawn to other things, because they're more in line, or they're more *obviously* in line with my desire.

So this might seem a strange thing to say at this point of the retreat, but again, partly I'm talking to the recordings when I talk. But there's a more general principle which applies anyway, and I want to really reinforce that general principle. If I'm interested in any deep practice, developing any deep practice – *jhānas*, emptiness, whatever it is, then I really have to understand (I'm saying it again) *desire*. And I have to understand *my* relationship with desire, and that has to be authentic. And I have to understand what I tend to do or not do with desire. And I have to understand what the influences are of different desires, and all of that, which is just repeating what I've said before. So it's this general principle that is really important. If there was someone listening to the recordings, who starts listening, let's say, to the recordings from this retreat, but really what they're mostly wanting is open-heartedness and for their heart to be touched or something – which may not even be something they've articulated consciously to themselves – it's probably the case that they will have given up listening to the recordings by now. But the general principle is really important – what we're talking about, about desire and really being clear about what the desires are. So that's one thing.

The second thing, I think, again, is really important, because it *is* true – most of you will have got this sense: it *is* true that the *jhānas* open the heart. Can I say that now, and you feel that that's ...? Yeah? It *should* be. You should have a real sense of like, "Wow." This *really* has an impact on the heart, the capacity of the heart to be touched, the capacity of the heart to hold ranges and depths and beauties of emotion, and also difficult emotion, and all that. *Jhānas* *do* open the heart enormously, in ways and at levels that perhaps – before really engaging in such practices, and staying with them and pursuing, and kind of, okay, staying with the intention and working in these ways – would've been undreamed of, the way the heart opened. It would never have occurred to us that the heart could open in such ways, or at such levels.

Again, though, *again*, if (consciously or semi-consciously) I have a conception or a conceptual framework or an idea or an image of what 'heart-opening,' 'love,' or even 'sensitivity' is one word that we've been using, if I have an idea, an image, a notion, a conception of what those things mean ('heart-opening,' 'love,' 'sensitivity,' for example), what they mean, what they look like, what they involve, what they need, if my idea is *limited*, then it might be that there is a limited range and possibility and depth of heart-opening, because my very conception – even it's semi-conscious – is limiting what's

possible for the heart. It's limiting the heart-opening that's possible. One remains confined in the presupposed limits. Again, they weren't even conscious, perhaps.

In fact, the danger is even more, and especially so, when we think: "But I just want my heart to open. I'm not really into a conceptual framework. I'm not really a conceptual person. I'm just kind of open, because I want my heart to be open, so I keep my mind open." But actually it's not: there's an idea there. There's a limit. There's an idea and image and notion of what 'heart-opening' or 'being touched' or whatever means, involves, needs, looks like. And that limited idea is limiting what's actually possible.

So heart-opening is endless, I would say. It's endless. There's no end to heart-opening. There's no end. It's endless in terms of *what* it is, and also what it includes and what it involves. It's endless if we *let* it be endless, meaning if we let the heart open, but also if we let the mind be *not* limited in terms of what it means.

Again, the power of conception, the power of conceptual frameworks, the power of notions and ideas, conscious or unconscious – it's enormous, really, really enormous. This is something to really explore. Again, we can talk about *jhānas* and *da-da-da*, but there are other issues, like desire and idea or conception, that have power, and have determinative power over much, much more than we recognize. And they have determinative power over what will open for us as human beings, or what remains closed. We don't even understand: why is it remaining closed? Or we don't even recognize it remains closed, until we hear other people talking about it, thinking, "Oh. Why haven't I had that experience?"

Okay, last thing, relating back to the emptiness. We talked about the *mettā* and the love, and the desire, and again, coming back to our theme of malleability of perception. So it should be, I would say, that, let's say, to the degree that one has realized the emptiness of things – and remember, that's a spectrum; it's really a spectrum. So we're talking about – the emptiness of things can be realized at a very everyday, not-big-deal level, and it's still really, really important, and it can be realized all the way down, incredibly deep, [and] everything in between. But that realization of the emptiness of things, or the 'no thing'-ness of things – for many people, it legitimizes and opens up the possibilities for playing with perception even more, for the malleability of perception. So in the opening talk, I said something, just recognizing and wanting to sort of acknowledge, together and out loud, the fact that I knew that many of you have been, for instance, very active working in activism of different sorts recently, and particularly with activism around climate change, and species loss, and the environment, and this kind of thing, and arrived at the retreat very tired from all that, and the craziness of, if you were in XR, rebellions and things – tired, wired, and grieving. So that was a possibility. And someone who did indeed arrive at the retreat, after lots of dedicated activism, wired, tired, and grieving, left a beautiful note the other day. So I'm going to read it to you, and then say a few things about it. She says:

This morning [so this is on, you know, wired, tired, and grieving from all that activism, and then on this retreat, and then], I decided to walk in *sukha* [okay, so, walk with the primary *nimitta* of the second *jhāna*], being surrounded and welcomed by it rather than walking in a *sukha* bubble of my energy body.

So the usual instruction has been to keep the *sukha*, if we're doing *sukha*, if you're going for a walk, keep it in the energy body bubble space, right? She said, "I tried something different. I want to walk surrounded by it rather than just in the energy bubble." Then it says:

For many months, I found it nearly impossible to enjoy being in nature, although I was in amazing places in the natural world. I mainly perceived it [perceived nature] as wounded, deeply ailing, dying, etc. – a perception that is not only very painful, but also, as I was very aware of, not always helpful or sustainable for the being. This morning, all was radiating or being an expression or manifestation of happiness. The very fabric of the cosmos was *sukha*. This was very beautiful and healing. Yet what was even more profound, and made me cry, was that not only was all an expression of *sukha*, but that the cosmos (or all, or it?) was delighted and happy at my activism. No matter how flawed, mad, confused it may be [the activism] at times, it [the cosmos, the world, the nature] rejoiced in it, no matter what the outcome.

I just want to analyse this a little bit – so, beautiful experience, very healing. There's the *jhānic* familiarity, in this case with the second *jhāna*, and there's at least some degree of mastery, maybe complete, or some degree, because we said the walking with the *sukha* is part of the elements of mastery. *Jhānic* familiarity, some degree of mastery, and then the choice, deliberately, not to contain it to the energy body, as would be relevant to the second *jhāna*, but to allow it to become huge and cosmic, if you like.

So the distinction I want to make here is one that pertains to Soulmaking Dharma, etc. In Soulmaking Dharma, we have this word 'cosmopoesis,' which really pertains, which really means ('cosmo,' 'cosmos,' and 'poiesis') a making or creating or an art of perceiving the cosmos a certain way, of sensing the cosmos a certain way. So there came here a cosmopoesis at first, but that cosmopoesis wasn't fully imaginal, or it could be that there's a cosmos, let's say – I'm not sure quite what the order or the pacing [was] of how things unfolded here. It doesn't matter. The point I want to make is, we can have a cosmopoesis, and as someone shared in a note the other day, the fabric of the universe being joy. So here's the fabric of the universe being *sukha*. Same – there's a cosmopoesis.

But we can have a cosmopoesis that's not fully imaginal. It's just a cosmopoesis; it's an after-effect of perception; it's a malleability of perception on what the sense of the cosmos is. Then, in this report, that cosmopoesis becomes more imaginal. Why? What's the difference? One of the differences is, the self gets drawn into the soulmaking dynamic. It's not just the universe has its fabric of joy, delightful as that is, incredibly beautiful, mystical, lovely experience as that is. When it gets to being imaginal, when we get into soulmaking territory, something else starts to happen, and the self gets drawn into the soulmaking dynamic. The self becomes image to some extent. And then from that, other elements of – we talk about the 'lattice,' the lattice of the imaginal, the nodes, the different elements of the imaginal will start to get drawn in, because the self has become imaginal. And that's very different from an experience where there's joy, the cosmos is joy, its essence, its substance is joy, but the self is not really drawn into the experience. It's prominent, it's enjoying it, it's touched by it, but it hasn't become personal in that way. So one of the moves, one of the occurrences that sends it then into imaginal

territory (and there's not *really* a black-and-white division, like all these things with *jhānas*) is the *becoming imaginal* of the self. It's not just the object, it's not just the world, but self as well.

And back to fantasies of the path, what supports our desire, what supports our intention, etc. Here, then, is the possibility: an image opened up that involved the image of the self *and* of nature *and* of the cosmos – both. Self, other, world became imaginal, but in a way, the potential here for that very image, and the delight and the happiness and the rejoicing in her activism, in the narrative of the self, in the dedication, and even the willingness of the self to do this work, mad as it seemed, ineffectual as it seemed, difficult as it seemed, painful as it seemed – the narrative and the *dukkha* of the self *become image*. They get drawn into the image. It's different than just a cosmopoesis, the fabric of the cosmos becoming joy or whatever, and the self remains very quiet, very much in the background. It's a different level.

But that possibility then can become immensely helpful in the long term, for instance, as a fantasy, as an image that really ramps up the support long term for working at difficult things, working through difficult times, whatever it is. If you're on a retreat, and it's difficult, what's the fantasy of the path we've talked about? What's the view? In this case it's activism. No matter what the outcome, the blessings of when things get imaginal that way is they get liberated. Because of the eternality of the imaginal territory, they get liberated from a dependency on the outcome. So one's free to work, free to be with the pain of that, supported by the beauty and the soulfulness and the depth of the fantasy that touches the self, and not so hampered by and worried by and limited by what the outcome might be. And yet one still is working full out for it, but supported by this whole other dimension of being, the imaginal sense. And then this support, in the long term, to be able to sustain one's soul-desires, one's deep desires, through the difficult, through the long term, without the heart having to close, without the heart having to close to grief, to pain, to possible failure and the threat of possible failure.

So it's not a soulmaking retreat, but I wanted to say this, because again, desire, and understanding desire, and understanding that has a lot to do with being able to open up to what we want to open up to, being able to do what we set out to do, and sustain that. And there's also this connection with the malleability of perception (we've talked about it from the beginning of this retreat) and this realm of 'no thing'-ness. When we talk about the emptiness of things, as I said, the legitimacy and the possibility of the malleability of perception just open up even more, goes to a whole other level. So, relevant in a few ways.

Okay. Let's have some quiet time together.

[silence]

Okay. Thank you, everybody. Time for tea. Enjoy.

¹ AN 9:35.

² MN 121.

³ MN 106. The next few quotations come from this discourse.

⁴ Rob Burbea, *Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising* (Devon: Hermes Amāra, 2014), 260–2.

⁵ Burbea, *Seeing That Frees*, 295–8.

⁶ MN 106.

The Eighth Jhāna (The Realm of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception)

So yesterday, we talked about the seventh *jhāna*, what we might call the seventh *jhāna*, what many people nowadays call the seventh *jhāna*, and what the Buddha simply called the realm of nothingness. And there's a possibility of going beyond that, too, to a deeper *jhāna*, a more refined *jhāna*. So we, not very optimistically, turn to the Buddha, and ... [laughter] So again, this situation, he's describing a monk practising, gone through these *jhānas* up to the realm of nothingness, the dimension, the sphere of nothingness.

[He] sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, establishes himself firmly in it. [And then, after a while,] The thought occurs to him: "What if I, with the complete transcending of the sphere of nothingness, were to enter and remain in the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception?" Without jumping at the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, he enters and remains in the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. He sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, and establishes himself firmly in it.¹

That's it. So, neither perception nor non-perception: what is this about? We should be very clear: again, what's primary here? There's something primary that the title, the name of this realm and *jhāna* captures: neither perception nor non-perception. I've come across writings and heard things that seem to emphasize, or make most significant, with regard to this *jhāna*, the absence of thinking, or just how delicate a state it is, in that any little thought will decimate the state, will knock you out of it, as if that fact is the most significant thing – how easily a thought will disturb it. But the title is telling us, the name is telling us something.

And so much here, certainly with regards to this *jhāna*, so much in relation to all the *jhānas*, and I would say, and maybe you hopefully are getting an inkling by now that so much in the whole of the Dharma, in the whole way we understand Dharma, and approach, and what we think we're doing with it, and what is primary in it – so much hinges on what we mean by 'perception,' what we mean by that word 'perception,' and how we understand it, and how we relate to it. *Saññā* is in Pali, *saṃjñā* in Sanskrit – what does it mean? What does it *not* mean?

Yogi: [inaudible]

Rob: Yeah, certainly as well, but what I want to say right now is: to perceive doesn't mean to label. Remember that? Remember this? Well, I think I said Sari was a pomegranate or something. [4:15] Right? So oftentimes, you'll come across that in the list of what all these Buddhist words mean: *saññā* is a labelling or a remembering. I'll put it this way: we *could* interpret it that way, but what then unfolds in terms of the whole scaffolding and conceptual framework of the Dharma will be much, much more limited. So perception is not a labelling, is not a verbal labelling of things. That would also imply that the sheep out there don't perceive. I don't think sheep have language, but they certainly know the difference between food, a human being, and a sheep, right? So they're perceiving without labelling, I would assume. So we're talking about something else here. An insect – maybe even an amoeba, in

some ways, differentiates between what's to eat, what's to – I don't know, do amoebas have sex? Do they ...? [laughter] "What do I with this? What do I do with that? Which way to go? That way or *that* way?" – without, one assumes, labelling or language.

So what is perceiving? What is perception? I'd say it's probably most helpful, most congruous with a whole conceptual framework and scaffolding and understanding of the Dharma that will be most helpful and most liberating, if we think of 'perception' as meaning something like 'the forming or constituting or fabricating of an object for consciousness.' Do you understand what I mean by that? I think it would be most helpful and most liberating and most congruent with a really liberating and far-reaching conceptual framework of the Dharma if we define this very basic term, 'perception,' as something like the 'the forming or the constituting or the fabricating of an object for consciousness.' This is so, so important.

So we do that when there's no – if you're really telling me that you notice, as you walk from here to the dining room, everything you notice, there's a verbal label going on ... [laughs] Sarah's shaking her head. There isn't! You're still perceiving. Sometimes they call it 'recognition,' as if it's based on memory. That's another interpretation. I 'recognize' an object. We can also perceive an object that I don't recognize what that object is, I don't recognize it, or just that it's some kind of object – all this is perceiving. We could say 'perceiving' is 'the act of forming, constituting, fabricating an object for consciousness,' and 'perception,' as we defined earlier in the retreat, we're using that word synonymously with ... [inaudible response from yogi] Ah, thank you. 'Experience.' Other words? Experience, phenomenon, appearance – object, even. Object, experience, appearance, and phenomenon. 'Phenomenon' is just a Greek-derived word – *phainómenon* or something in Greek means 'appearance.'

So I would use those words interchangeably: 'perception' to talk about the object, the experience, the phenomenon, the appearance; 'perceiving': the act of, again, constituting, forming, fabricating that object for consciousness. When we say 'playing with perception,' we're playing with both: we're playing with the forming and the fabricating and the constituting. Of course, that does form and fabricate and constitute a different object, or a changed object, an altered object, a more or less fabricated object for perception.

Sometimes it's interesting. It's like, what a difference in terms of defining terms makes. Defining terms in this way or that way can make, then, for the whole possibility of what the Dharma can be. Something to really reflect on. And if you're really keen, you could actually trace it. Have two different definitions of 'perception': for example, perception understood as mental labelling, and perception understood in the way we've just talked about, and see what kind of Dharma is possible from both. That would be a really, really good exercise if you're up for it. Based on that, the whole interpretation of the Dharma opens, or goes in one direction or the other, or closes, or gets limited. Other terms take on certain meanings which end up being very significant, very liberating, or not particularly.

Anyway, so everything, to me, hinges – certainly in this *jhāna*, because it's just in the name of the *jhāna*, 'neither perception nor non-perception,' certainly in *jhāna* work in general, and even more significantly, in the whole of the Dharma. So in the realm of nothingness, the *jhāna* before this one we're talking about today, the primary perception, and actually the only perception left, so to speak, because all the other perceptions of *pīti* and *sukha* and space and all – they've gone. The only

perception left is this strange perception of nothingness. The only perception left is nothingness, and that's a perception. And as we said, try to imagine that. We're not talking about a very, very big space with nothing in it, which is what most human beings would think of when they say, "Can you imagine nothingness?" We're talking about something even beyond that. It's *nothingness*. But that's the only perception, and that's the primary perception in the realm of nothingness. So that's strange enough. And now we're going to go even beyond that. [laughs]

Neither perception nor non-perception: we're not even perceiving nothingness, because nothingness, a 'nothing,' is a kind of object, is constituted. In the realm of nothingness, nothingness is constituted as a kind of object for consciousness, for attention, for the *citta*. It's some kind of a very strange thing that's a 'nothing.' It's a 'thing' there. It's a 'nothing.'

Here, in the realm of neither perception nor non-perception, without being unconscious – in other words, without being totally non-percipient – the *citta*, the consciousness is, we could say, not landing on any object at all. Well, we could almost say that it's not landing on any object – not even the strange object of nothingness. It's not landing. So when there's a nothingness – or let's say, easier – when there's whatever *jhāna* you're up to, and there's your playground, it forms an object. The primary *nimitta* forms an object for consciousness, and the consciousness wants to really get into it and enjoy it, and *yummy yum*. There's the subject and the object. Now, object is the primary *nimitta* or the *jhāna* itself, and that's an object for consciousness. And you could use the language, the consciousness is 'landing' on that object. And that's partly what 'attention' means.

Here, it's not landing on any object – not even the object, the strange object of nothingness. And it's not landing in that way, moment after moment. And that's what makes it a *jhāna*, the sort of constant burning. This *not landing*, this sense of not landing on any object, is the primary *nimitta*. [laughs] In other words, in some strange way, the state itself, the sense, the fact of neither really perceiving (which means, again, neither really construing, constructing, fabricating, forming an object) nor *not* perceiving at all – that state, that fact, the sense of that, the sense of the mind kind of – would we say 'doing' that, or 'not doing' that? Anyway, somewhere in between. That's the primary the *nimitta*. And you could say a secondary *nimitta* is the sense of liberation with that, because when the mind doesn't land on something – like when you throw a hook, and the hook lands in something – it's just not hooked by anything. It's unhooked – not *completely* yet; I'll come back to that. It's not completely unhooked. But that sense of not landing – there's a kind of liberation in that. If I use the word, if I use the language 'unhooked,' you can feel the relative liberation in that. A hook is a kind of tether, a fetter, an imprisonment. [14:33] So perhaps, we could say, the sense of liberation with that, the sense of freedom that comes with that, is a secondary *nimitta*.

Who's old enough here to remember *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*? Oh, good. So for those of you who don't know, it was a series of books. I think I must've been a young teenager when it came out, and it was very funny sort of – what would you call it? Funny sci-fi, I guess, yeah – funny science fiction, yeah. And so I think this was from *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It could be from somewhere else. But there were instructions on how to fly. Do you remember this? And it was a two-step instruction. [laughter] So the first step was: fling yourself at the ground. The second step was: miss. [laughter]

So in a way, that's what's going on. In a way, that's what's going on in this *jhāna*. Now, that's not

really going to – well, later on it might help you as an instruction, but probably at first it won't. But what the 'ground' translates as here, if we take the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* instructions, what the ground translates as is *anything* and *nothing*. Anything and nothing will constitute a ground that you want to miss. You understand? [laughter]

Now, there is a sutta in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* where the Buddha gives an analogy. I think he's talking to Ānanda, and he's giving the analogy of consciousness being liberated, unhooked, completely unhooked. And the analogy he gives is sunlight rising in the east, and coming into, well, what starts off as a house in the analogy. And he says to Ānanda: "The sun rises in the east. Where will the sunlight [which is consciousness, an analogy for consciousness] land?" And Ānanda says, "Well, on the western wall." And the Buddha says, "Well, what if there isn't a western wall?" What if there isn't an object for it to land on? And then Ānanda says, "Well," I think he says something like, "It will fall on the ground outside there." And [the Buddha] said, "Okay, what if there isn't a ground outside?" And then Ānanda says, "Well, it will fall on the water," which I guess is the water under the ground in some kind of cosmological system. He [the Buddha] says, "What if there is no water?" And Ānanda says, "Well, then it wouldn't land." And he [the Buddha] said, "Just so, that's consciousness liberated."²

Now actually, there the Buddha's talking about the Unfabricated, which is a stage ahead of even this *jhāna*. But the analogy works very closely. We're almost there in this *jhāna*. There's something almost but not quite analogous to the Buddha's analogy of *nirvāṇa*, of the Unfabricated, of what remains beyond cessation.

We could language it "it's not landing on anything." We could say we're not fabricating. There is not the fabrication at that time of any perceptions, or all other perceptions have been unfabricated, *except* two perceptions: one is the very state, this sense of not landing, this sense of not quite perceiving, and yet not quite not perceiving. That's sort of a perception. It's a sort of remnant, or just on the edge, the very perception of not really perceiving but not really *not* perceiving. So that's one perception. The other perception that remains is time. Now, I'm *telling* you this, but it may or may not *occur* to a meditator in this state that that's still there as a perception. There's a sense of this 'not landing' happening in time. It happens in this moment, and implicit in this moment – even if I'm so, so in this moment, there's still, implicitly and experientially, a past moment and a future moment. So this not landing and this state is ongoing in time. And that's a very secondary perception. Probably most people wouldn't even notice it as a perception unless you compare it with a totally timeless sense, which comes later. So I'm kind of telling you that now: there are two perceptions, we could say, remaining there. No perception of anything, not even 'nothing' (a 'nothing' would be a kind of 'something'), no perception of anything except the state, this strange 'not landing,' this strange 'not really perceiving, not really *not* perceiving,' and secondarily, that *that* is happening in time. And it's this latter aspect, as well, that's – actually both of them, but the latter aspect, the happening in time, that I would say is a fundamental difference between this eighth *jhāna* and a state of cessation or complete unfabricating. Actually, they're both significant, but I want to point to that.

So in this state, in this *jhāna*, another way we could just phrase it, there's a sense of something so, so ultra-refined, it's really on the edge of perception. And that's one way of sort of seeing what's happening: it's something so ultra-refined, we can almost barely say it's a thing to be perceived, it's an object, a phenomenon, an experience, an appearance. It's so ultra-refined there's almost nothing left of

perception as we construed it earlier. And as we said, secondarily, there's a sense of release, of being released from perceptions.

Ajaan Lee – I mentioned him at some point earlier in the retreat. He was the teacher of the teacher of one my teachers, a Thai monk in the twentieth century, the early twentieth century. And he kind of phrases it: the *citta*, the mind and the heart, are kind of in this state – the *citta* is struck by its inability to decide if it's a perception or not. It's absolutely right, but to me – maybe it's the translation – it just sounds all very clunky, like one's sort of, “Hmm, I don't know. Is this ... uhh ...”, and it's sort of pondering like that. Something *extremely*, really subtle is going on. But it does capture something of it.

Again, we can think of this business – ultra-refined – and we can connect that, as we have so far on the retreat, with the whole spectrum of refinement, which I talked about. That's a very fruitful way to understand what's happening through the eight *jhānas*. They're really a spectrum of more and more refinement, which is just the same thing as saying it's a spectrum of progressive removal of what is gross, right? Because that's just what 'refined' means: to refine some things, which just the same thing as saying it's a progressive non-fabricating, a progressive unfabricating, because we would expect the grosser thing to be what's most fabricated. Don't fabricate that; it gets removed; the thing's more refined, and then the next gross thing – don't fabricate that; that gets removed, gets yet more refined.

So if we think in detail, let's just say, the first *jhāna* is a refinement. What's been removed at the first *jhāna*? The hindrances, yeah? We could say the grossness of the hindrances – they're gross, they're gross phenomena. In the first *jhāna*, the grossness of the hindrances is removed. There's that kind of refinement. We could just say, to say the same thing, the hindrances are not being fabricated. In the second *jhāna*, we could say there's a removal of thought (and we had this problem with *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and how you're going to translate those terms), certainly discursive thought. That grossness is removed. It's not being fabricated. In the third *jhāna*, what is removed? What is not being fabricated? *Pīti* is not being fabricated. *Pīti* is removed. Relatively subtle compared to the hindrances, compared to the gross body sense, but actually, now the most gross thing there. It's then not being fabricated. In the fourth *jhāna*, even the *sukha* is not being fabricated. So that's being removed. That's the gross thing being removed. But actually, that's something very, very subtle at that point.

In the fifth *jhāna*, even a subtle sense of materiality – remember we talked about these three levels of being. There's gross materiality, the *kāma-loka* world. There's the world of subtle materiality, the world of the *rūpa-jhānas*, the 'subtle form,' what's called in Buddhist cosmology. But even the subtle form is removed. So even subtle materiality is not being fabricated. Even that relative grossness, which is actually very subtle, is being removed in the fifth *jhāna*.

And we can keep going, etc. In the seventh *jhāna*, space is not being fabricated. In the eighth *jhāna*, not even nothingness is being fabricated. So you see how this refinement, removal of the gross, not fabricating something all goes together. And then what happens after this *jhāna*? Now we're not even fabricating nothingness; now we've gone beyond that. Is there some further non-fabricating that's possible? Which hopefully we'll get to.

So this refinement is really a sort of very remarkable feature of this *jhāna*, very remarkable. And in practice, it can help you come to find or notice or tune to, focus on, if you like, the most refined perception. So again, you could do this in the state itself, before it's quite consolidated and come together – just tune to the most refined there. Keep tuning to the most refined. That will help

consolidate it. The most refined – we could say ‘perception,’ but it’s not even quite a perception. The most refined ‘thing,’ ‘object’ – that doesn’t really do it. The most refined sense, the most refined level – I don’t know. Words really start to fall apart at this level. It gets really hard to put things into language. But the tuning to whatever is most refined there can help consolidate it, if it’s not already consolidated in a session. So we can kind of refine the whole experience and move it into the more pure realm of neither perception nor non-perception by very gently, very gently looking for, very delicately looking for, listening for, attuning to, putting our antennae out for whatever is most refined. And that’s a very subtle, sensitive, as I said, delicate and gentle process.

And one can even, perhaps, start doing that in the realm of nothingness. When that’s established, when you’ve got some experience with that, then maybe kind of looking for what’s the most refined in there, ultra-refined. And again, it *may* start – what would we say? – maturing, purifying from that, moving on from that, just from that attending to the most refined level, and that amplifies it, as we’ve talked about all the way through the retreat. So with experience, that may work that way, and may take you to the realm of neither perception nor non-perception.

So, I was trying to find the sutta, and well, anyway, I couldn’t find it. But again, the Buddha – this is an *escape*. It’s an escape, *nissaraṇam*.³ It’s a release of awareness. Again, he uses this language a lot. It’s almost a total release from perception, almost a complete not being hooked, not casting out a hook and finding an object, almost a total release from perception, while there is still awareness. So we’re not talking about general anaesthesia or anything like that here. What I was looking for and couldn’t find is, there’s some languaging – so remember we talked about, the Buddha talks about the *jhānas* as ‘perception attainments’? Do you remember this? I couldn’t remember if, then, he says the highest perception attainment is the realm of nothingness.⁴ In other words, this one, because it’s neither perception nor non-perception, actually doesn’t qualify as a perception attainment. I couldn’t remember, or if he counts this one as the highest perception attainment. It doesn’t really matter; the principle is the same. I do think, somewhere or other, he calls this one (neither perception nor non-perception) the ‘summit of perception’ or the ‘limit of perception,’ I think.⁵ But then we can go beyond this, and hopefully we’ll get to that tomorrow. We even go beyond this, this much unfabricating, this limit of perception, this summit, this perception attainment, if that’s what it’s called.

There is, again, with the sense of refinement there, and somewhat akin to the fourth *jhāna* and some of the other *jhānas*, there’s a real sense of purity here. There’s something in the very refinement itself, in the stillness, extremely pure. Again, these words don’t quite capture – the experience itself is so different than normal experience that words which we use for normal experience get quite clumsy at this point. But I think that’s quite a good word. There’s something very pure about it. It feels very pure. Refinement, purity, release – these are all part of the texture, let’s say, of this realm. And there is something, I think – and then these words start to sound really ridiculous – amazing and jaw-dropping. So it is amazing and kind of jaw-dropping, but the whole thing is, at this point, very, very delicate. Because of the refinement, it’s very, very still. It’s almost like one is awestruck, with very little reverberation going on in the being, because that would disturb things. So if can have one’s jaw dropping without much reverberation, one would. But in the refinement, in the purity, in the release, there is something really amazing there, I think, exquisite, beautiful. But these words don’t really capture it. [30:53] It’s very different, as I said, from normal experience. We’re really talking about

something quite different. And in some ways, I think, in a lot of ways (at least that's my sense), it's quite different even than other *jhānic* experiences. There's a kind of larger quantum leap here, I think.

The after-effects on perception – one of them could be that, with regard to what's going on in the inner and the outer worlds (how my mind is, how my body is, what I see out here, what I sense out here), there can be just a sense in the after-effect on perception, it's just what's happening in the realm of perception. All this stuff – “My mind is foggy. My mind is clear. I've got a pain in my tummy. I've got a headache. There's this perception, that perception” – it's just appearances. It's just what's happening in the realm of perception, which is very different than “This is what's happening.” It's just what's happening *in the realm of perception*. So in that way, there is this kind of even deeper relativizing of our phenomenal experience – internal, external. And so with that, through this relativizing, comes this kind of really effortless equanimity with regard to the things of this world: the eight worldly conditions, praise/blame, pain/pleasure, headache/no headache, whatever it is. Effortless equanimity comes, partly from the after-effect on perception. It's just what's happening in the realm of perception. It relativizes it.

Or these are ‘just perceptions.’ They're just perceptions, whatever I'm perceiving – my tummy ache, my headache, my foggy mind, this or that in the world. They're just perceptions. It's not that things are ‘really otherwise,’ like ‘I have a foggy mind, but *really* my mind is clear,’ or ‘really it's *this* or *that* other.’ But they're just perceptions. So it's not that another perception is true instead.

So how do we open the door here? How does the door open for us? **(1)** Again, one way, and perhaps the safest and best way, is **just letting it naturally mature from hanging out – as fully as one can, as wholeheartedly, as attentively, as absorbedly as one can – in the realm of nothingness.** And in time it will mature. So that's one way. I think SASSIE probably has to become ASSIE at this point, because suffusion really pertains to the energy body experience. Maybe there's a way we can talk about a different kind of suffusion, but in a way, the others are more important: **Absorbing** into the nothingness, **Sustaining** the attention, **Sustaining** the sense of nothingness, the **Intensity**, which is not so important, and the **Enjoyment**, which is very, very subtle. So the ASSIE rather than SASSIE, perhaps – working with that, getting into it, hanging out, over and over and over, and at some point, it should mature.

(2) Second possibility for getting there is, again, from that same sutta, the *Āneñjasappāya Sutta*, where the Buddha is describing **insight ways of looking that lead to the immaterial realms, the immaterial dimensions.** And basically, he's gone through his ones that we talked about yesterday, with regard to opening up the dimension of nothingness. And now he says:

Then again, the disciple of the noble ones [again, there's that word] considers [employs, engages subtly an insight way of looking] thus: “All sensuality, all sensual perceptions, all perceptions of forms [which includes the perception of *jhānic* forms and *jhānic* experiences], [perceptions of the fifth and sixth *jhāna* – in other words, perceptions of infinite space, perceptions of consciousness, *and*] the perception of the dimension of nothingness: all are perceptions. [All of that are perceptions.] Where they cease without remainder: that is peaceful, that is exquisite, i.e. the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. Practising and frequently abiding in this way, his mind acquires

confidence in that dimension.”⁶

In other words, it's just the same thing: “Perceptions are not peaceful.” It's just the same thing as the instruction for the realm of nothingness that we talked about yesterday. I've just included the perception of nothingness. **I've just extended it to include the perception of nothingness.** Again, very, very powerful. If you can get the hang of these kinds of insight ways of looking, very, very powerful. I don't need to repeat: we're talking about something very agile here, and not a whole big thinking thing, not a whole big philosophy. It's a very light tincture in the way of looking that one's employing again and again. 'Way of looking' means 'way of relating, way of sensing.'

Now, one could do that, this “Perceptions are not peaceful; I want something peaceful. All those perceptions are *not* peaceful. I want this, what is exquisite, what is peaceful: the realm of neither perception nor non-perception.” One could do that *in* and *from* the realm of nothingness. One could start doing that in the realm of nothingness, start employing this insight way of looking. *Or*, actually, you can do it from anywhere. You could do it from right now. Just whatever's in front of me: foggy mind, etc. And again, you know, as I say, I contradict myself, say so much, “Oh, this *jhāna* will depend on the one before it, and that will depend on the maturing of the one before,” etc. After you've got a hang of all this, sometimes, there will be plenty of times when you sit down and *ughhh*, body feels funny, mind feels *bluhhh*, and you just start on that very discomfort of body and non-settledness of mind and non-clarity of mind, and you just start employing an insight way of looking like that, and lo and behold, you end up in the eighth *jhāna*.

So it's all in the art, in the trust, in the confidence – primarily in the art. Also in the familiarity – that's much more likely to happen if you have some familiarity beforehand with the neither perception nor non-perception. But it's definitely not going to hurt to try such a thing. Don't get too locked on where it might end up. It's still practising a very powerful insight way of looking, and see what happens. It will be, as we'll return to, it's going to be connected with the whole spectrum and the whole process of unfabricating. So whether I actually end up in the eighth *jhāna* is, again, less significant than what I learn through employing insight ways of looking and seeing what they do, and understanding what they do, and adding two and two together and getting four. That's much more important than whether I have achieved eighth *jhāna*, and I get my eighth *jhāna* badge.

(3) It could also arise, or it can also be helped by a similar reflection: “Just a perception, just a perception,” which again, was very similar, was exactly what we listed, included in the list we gave out yesterday. “It's just a perception.” And again, that could be *in* and *from* the realm of nothingness – “This too is just a perception, this perception of nothingness,” and “just a perception” there means, again, “fabricated.” “It's just a perception” means “It's fabricated.” That's the small print for ‘just a perception.’

Or again, you can do that from anywhere. Again, I start from my *ughh*-feeling body. I'm not feeling so good, and the mind is *nuhhh* – “Just a perception.” Whatever comes into consciousness, whatever perception there is: “Just a perception, just a perception,” meaning “It's fabricated, it's fabricated, it's just a perception,” and that will start, if I'm doing it right, if I've got the art right of that insight way of looking, it will unfabricate. Because all this is related, on the spectrum of unfabrication, it may open up the realm of neither perception nor non-perception. So I could do that from the realm of nothingness, or

actually from anywhere, from a very ordinary state of consciousness – even from the midst of the hindrances.

(4) There are also plenty of **other ways of looking that one could kind of adopt or train on the object of the realm of nothingness**, but I’ve talked about them elsewhere; I’m not going to mention them.

The slight risk in those last three I’ve listed – so either the “Perceptions are not peaceful, perceptions are not peaceful” (that one), or “Just a perception” (that one), or other insight ways of looking – is that they might, they could be sometimes so powerful that they even overshoot the eighth *jhāna*, and you get even more unfabricated. It’s possible. So there are those four.

(5) Remember I said (I think it was very near the beginning of the retreat), I talked about, the *jhānas* end up being – the sense we can have is just that they’re *there already*. They’re in the air. They’re frequencies. They’re radio frequencies, and we can just tune our dial and find that frequency. So similarly with **this neither perception nor non-perception – it’s kind of like a radio frequency or radio station, and** when we have a memory of it (in other words, when we’ve gone in and out lots of times, and really gotten more familiar with it), **we can, from memory, just tune to that frequency again**. And of course, that’s very related to just the whole mastery thing, and opening the door to this realm, opening through subtle intention – very similar.

(6) Someone told me a little while ago that their way of working was, their way of moving from the realm of nothingness to the realm of neither perception nor non-perception was, **in the realm of nothingness, to just introduce a little, very subtle sort of thought or intention, really: “Might there be perception without this object of nothingness?”** And it was just a kind of invitation: “Might there be a kind of perception without this nothingness as an object?” And that would help open it up for them.

(7) It might be, also, that some people are kind of able to **find or then tune to and open to – I don’t know what to call it – a level of the mind or a part of the mind, part of the *citta* that already, right now (or so it seems), is not perceiving but not non-perceiving**. It’s already neither perceiving nor non-perceiving. Sometimes that’s possible. And then it’s possible to find the ‘now’ in it, make that very alive, present, *now, now, now*, the sense of that happening *now*, and refine it in that way. So there’s a part, or it can seem there’s a part or level of the mind that is even now not engaging in perception. It’s free of it. Or it’s not interested in perceptions. It *wants* to be free of perceptions, perhaps. And again, unhooking from perception. Or perhaps it’s already unhooked. There’s a very subtle, sort of hidden dimension, but finding that, and then that can be amplified, perhaps. For some people, that will work. And again, that’s something that could work from any state of consciousness, from a normal state of consciousness. Of course, the grosser the state of consciousness, the more turbulent it is, the harder that will be to do. But you know, sometimes, you get surprised with these things; you get very, very surprised at what’s possible.

So these last three that I’ve mentioned – either tuning to it from memory, or the subtle intention, or this kind of very subtle question: “Is it possible to perceive right now without this nothingness, without this object of nothingness?” (that one), or this kind of finding a level of the mind that’s already neither perceiving nor non-perceiving – all of them imply and need, I would say, some confidence that there is this possibility of neither perception nor non-perception. And the confidence helps these methods to

work, so that we can kind of fish for it, and we have confidence in our fishing. And by ‘fishing,’ I mean an ultrasensitive, subtle receptivity and attunement. And through that, it can emerge.

Again, though, there’s an issue here with some of these methods. So if I employ an insight way of looking – “Perceptions are not peaceful. They’re not peaceful. I want what’s peaceful. Let me ... That’s not peaceful. Any perception is not peaceful” – if I employ that method, if I employ this tuning to a part of the mind that’s actually not engaging in perception or interested in perceptions, and maybe some of the other methods, is there the possibility of aversion? Is there the possibility of aversion to perception, which means aversion to experience, appearance, objects? Yes, there is. So what we’re talking about here (again, so important to emphasize in these insight ways of looking), if there’s aversion mixed in with it, it sends the whole thing in a very different direction. It stirs things up in a very different way. So what we’re talking about is an insight way of looking that doesn’t have aversion in it. The aversion needs to not be there.

So you know, the Buddha, when he talks about insight, on several occasions, and the way some streams of practice mature, when he talks about the way some streams of practice mature, he uses the word ‘disenchantment,’ and that the practitioner ‘becomes disenchanted’ with everything, actually, with the whole world of phenomenal experience, inner, outer. There’s a disenchantment with sense objects, disenchantment with mental objects, disenchantment eventually with the *jhānas*, disenchantment eventually with the formless *jhānas* – all that. So that word occurs relatively frequently. Some maps of the way insight progresses, or the stages of insight, really emphasize this quite a lot, and emphasize that a practitioner practising very deeply goes through a period, or even recurrent periods, of extreme ‘disgust’ and ‘repulsion’ at everything: the world of appearances, inner, outer, states, mental objects, physical objects. The whole [world] is disgusting and repulsive to them. And there’s a lot of agitation, often, with that.

It *may* be that someone experiencing that sort of thing – it *may* just be that aversion and neurosis have gotten tied up in their practice, and one is deciding to view it as being on the edge of awakening, etc. But actually it’s just aversion. I’m aversive to my body. And it’s not great insight into Dharma or something. It’s just, there’s aversion there. Or there’s a kind of neurosis. Sometimes there’s a lot of encouragement for very high energy, high intensity, high intentness in practice, with a kind of micro-sharp focus, all these things (intensity, energy, micro-focus) building up, with this teaching about disenchantment given primary place – actually, aversion gets mixed up in there, and the whole thing just spawns cycles of *dukkha* that may have very, very little to do with liberating insight. But one might have *heard* that they have to do with liberating insight, and so one just goes round and round in that. Are they liberating? Is it liberating? Or are they dependent arisings? There’s a whole thing about playing with perception: if I look a certain way, I get a certain result. If there’s aversion in my looking, I get a certain result. If there’s neurosis and repulsion, I’m going to get a certain result, a result *in* my perception, *in* my sense of things. In some circles, this is a really, really important thing to consider.

I have to understand dependent arising, the dependent arising of perception. And if my whole mode of working in insight is not taking the inquiry into the dependent arising of perception, is not taking that as central – I’ve just got an idea: “I’m going to laser-beam through this, and whatever I hit is closer to the bottom layer of rock, and that’s the truth, and eventually I’ll reach that truth or reality,” and I’m not inquiring into dependent arising. Do you understand what I mean by this? To me, this is *the* most

important thing. If I'm not thinking that way – I go back to what I said at the beginning: what's the conceptual framework? And is the conceptual framework set up to really liberate? Or is it set up to take me in directions where I don't understand fully what is happening, and what my experience is, and why this experience arises now, and why *that* experience arises at another time, and why this experience arises or doesn't arise? So we can certainly set up (and people do) a whole process of insight and stages of insight, and there's very, very little consideration of dependent arising. It's almost like it's just a thing on the side. To me, dependent arising and emptiness are almost synonymous, almost synonymous. Practically, until the very last levels, they're synonymous. So if I'm not inquiring into that, if I'm not including that as the central theme and scaffolding of my meditative inquiry, then it's possible that whatever insights I have have very little to do with emptiness – as I would understand it anyway.

So I think (I remember coming across it once, and I can't remember where it is) there is a sutta in the Pali Canon (I *think* in the Pali Canon) where two old monks are talking, and it's not the Buddha; I can't remember who it is. Two old monks are talking, and they do describe a process of these stages of insight that go, and they go through something like disgust, etc. There's no place I'm aware of where the Buddha describes that, but it may well be one of things, again, that's very, very emphasized in certain texts like the *Visuddhimagga* or the *Abhidhamma*, and then that gets – like, this one instance of these two old monks talking becomes, in some paradigms, in some models, “This is *the* way insight unfolds. These are *the* stages of insight,” as opposed to, “This is what will happen if you look this way. This is what will happen if you conceive this way and if you look this way. And if you conceive another way, *this* is what will unfold,” etc. So *the* stages of insight – it's a possible model of stages of insight, *if* I look a certain way, usually prioritizing impermanence and micro-focus, etc. So I'm mentioning this because I know some of you have run into this, and some of you probably have no idea what I'm talking about. It may or may not be useful at some point.

It is true, somewhere or other, the Buddha says, basically, there are four ways to liberation: **(1) you can choose the path that is pleasant; it's a pleasant path, and it's long. (2) Or you can choose a path that's pleasant and short. (3) Or you can choose a path that's unpleasant and short. (4) Or you can choose a path that's unpleasant and long.**⁷ [laughter] But I actually think, what I'm trying to say now actually goes beyond that, because to me, if it doesn't include this inquiry into the dependent arising of my experience now, dependent on my way of looking – if that's not in my inquiry, the question would remain (I'm not saying it's impossible, but the question would still remain for me): does that path open up a full understanding and a really deep understanding of dependent arising and emptiness? That would be a question I would have.

I would say, most definitely, that insight and practice and the path can be mostly fun. I would absolutely, definitely say that: mostly delightful, mostly characterized by a sense of release and relief and some degree of liberation *now*, as I'm practising. I would say that. And it's part of what I mean when I say, can we bring some intelligence to this? Can we bring some intelligence to these sort of very basic questions, or intelligence to “How am I practising?” It's really, really fundamental.

And we talked very briefly about, what's a definition of insight? Well, we can define insight in all kinds of ways, and people do. Listen even just to enough Theravādan-based Dharma, there are lots of definitions of what insight is. But one way, and the primary way I find helpful – well, I would like to

keep a few ways open, but one of the ways that I would particularly like to emphasize is: ‘insight’ means ways of looking that reduce clinging, which means increase letting go in the future, for the future, but also now, right now, and even primarily now. That’s what insight is. It’s adopting ways of looking that liberate and that primarily liberate right now. All these insight ways of looking that we’re talking about, that we’ll give examples of, and there are loads more we could talk about – they should feel liberating. They should feel like there’s a relief, a release, a delight, a beauty, an opening, a peace, a joy that comes with them. If they’re not, then they can still be insightful, but they’re not the kind of insight that I would like to emphasize – put it that way. So if we define it that way, and we kind of use that as, let’s say, the primary understanding of what we’re doing, then the whole path just – it does not need to be this whole contracted thing of sitting through pain and all these eruptions of difficulty.

[57:08] So again, some of these themes carry over from these different *jhānas* – in a way, there, with that insight way of looking that the Buddha gave here: “Perceptions are not peaceful. I want what’s peaceful. *That* is peaceful: the realm of neither perception nor non-perception.” Other times, the Buddha says – I couldn’t find the whole quote, but it’s very common, almost stock formula: “Perceptions are *dukkha*. Perceptions are a hassle.” He doesn’t say quite that word, but ... “Perceptions are a boil.” You know what a boil is? Like a big, painful pimple, big zit, you know? “A boil, a dart, an arrow, a cancer, a disease.” And he goes on. “This is what perception is.” [laughs] It’s extreme language.⁸ Or even when we just say, “Perceptions are not peaceful,” again, there’s the danger of that tipping us towards, leaning us towards a dualistic conception, a dualistic philosophy, but also a dualistic *sense* – more than just an abstract intellectual philosophy – a dualistic *sense*, or a dualistic lived preference, even, away from this world.

The world *is* perception. What else is the world if it’s not perception, phenomenologically speaking? Appearance, experience, objects, phenomena – the world is perception. So if I start to say, “Perceptions are a boil, a dart, a cancer, are *dukkha*,” it’s basically saying the world is. So we might get again, here, a tipping, a dualistic preference and tipping away from the world, and in preference for this subtler realm, free of perception. Even the idea or the way of looking, “Perceptions are fabricated; they’re empty” – if we don’t fully understand what we’re doing there, and what it means, fully, to say that something is fabricated, there’s a danger, too, of dualism there.

‘Fabrication’ is an interesting word, because in English (I don’t know how it is in other languages, but in English), a ‘fabrication’ is also a ‘lie’; we say it’s a fabrication. I don’t know, is it the same in other languages? [inaudible response from yogi] Yeah, okay, in some languages. Thank you. In some languages it’s the same. So the word ‘fabrication’ is very interesting. It connotes an ‘untruth.’ I use it partly because it connotes that. It’s just that if we really take it deeply, we go beyond that notion of untruth. We take it, but we hold it provisionally, and we go even beyond it. So it has a derogatory connotation: ‘fabricated, fabricated, fabricated.’ There is this derogatory connotation. If I’m adopting an insight way of looking and saying, “It’s just a perception; it’s fabricated,” it has got this slightly dismissive – “It’s a lie. It’s not true.”

But I need to understand more deeply. I need to understand dependent arising and emptiness more deeply – not just intellectually, but through the lived meditative exploration. I really need to feel this, see this, sense this, watch it work in action, and feel its effects: “When I do this, this happens, and it feels like this,” and the intimate experience of that. If I take that far enough, it goes beyond. I would

say it definitely goes beyond any notion of duality or hierarchy there. When I explore it that way, the whole understanding of what it means to say something is ‘empty’ or a ‘fabrication’ – it’s not dualistic. It’s almost the opposite end from dualism. We could say, we get a sense of being so profoundly intimate with the world of experience – that doesn’t even come close, this language; the word ‘intimacy’ doesn’t come close; something even more intimate than the word ‘intimacy’ can possibly connote. We participate in the co-fabrication of the universe, of the cosmos, of the world, of things, of life. But even *that* doesn’t quite do it, because we have a certain notion of what the word ‘participation’ means. We participate in the magic, the dance, and the co-arising of subject and object. We participate in a way that’s – again, there’s no word for the depth. ‘Participate,’ ‘intimate’ – they come sort of close, but it’s even deeper.

Language is based on notions of subject and object, and when they start falling apart or collapsing into each other – not into some oneness; they’re neither one nor two, subject and object; nor nothing; nor many things. They’re not zero, one, two, nor many. Language is based on “There’s this and that. There’s a subject and an object.” So the whole language of ‘intimacy,’ ‘participation’ – language cannot cope at this deep level. But if we say the profound sense of participation in the magic of the co-arising of subject and object, the magic of the co-arising of the appearances and awareness, the appearances of appearances and awareness, of self and the world, the magic of that, the beauty of that – somehow we’re completely implicated, interwoven with that, in the most gorgeous and blessed ways. This is very far from dualism, if one goes deep enough, again, just into this same investigation into fabrication and dependent arising; I don’t lose sight of that (hopefully we’ll get to this tomorrow). If I just a *little* bit investigate fabrication, a *little* bit investigate dependent arising, I’m not going to get this gorgeous, full blossoming of all this.

And again, similar themes – it should be the case with this realm of neither perception nor non-perception, and it should certainly be the case that the more we understand, and the more we open to the emptiness of the world, it should be the case, and I would say it *is* the case, that – *if* our conceptual framework doesn’t get in the way, remember? How much depends on that. I can have all these wonderful, wonderful experiences, or frightening experiences, or amazing experiences, or strange experiences, but if I’m not taking care with my conceptual framework, my big picture, my understanding of what I’m doing and what’s going on, those experiences can deliver very, very little, or actually deliver what is really not helpful. [1:04:55] So even more than the experience, the understanding – *and* the understanding of the conceptual framework. But it should be that experiences at this level, of this *jhāna*, and deep emptiness, etc., that the emptiness of the world – one sees that, but they actually somehow open up even further, increase our love for the world, our love and compassion for the world. It should be, it should work like that.

The heart opening in that way, sensing things in that way, touched in that way, becomes tender, open, at a whole other level, is wonderstruck, touched (I would say) with a sense of the profound blessing of the magic of appearances, profound blessing of that, whatever the word is that’s more than ‘participation,’ the profound blessing at the mystery of things, the mystery of appearances.

I think ... let’s stop there, actually. So let’s maybe sit together for a bit.

[silence]

Okay, thank you, everybody. And it’s just about time for tea, so enjoy tea.

¹ AN 9:35.

² SN 12:64.

³ E.g. MN 111.

⁴ At AN 9:36, the term ‘perception attainment’ seems to include the first seven *jhānas*, not the eighth.

⁵ Source unknown. The term ‘summit of perception’ (*saññagga*) appears at DN 9, which contains a discussion of the first seven *jhānas* but not the eighth.

⁶ MN 106.

⁷ AN 4:162, AN 4:163.

⁸ The five aggregates are frequently described as “inconstant, *dukkha*, a disease, a boil, an arrow, misery, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, empty, not-self” (*aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato*), e.g. at AN 9:36.

The End of Time (The Cessation of Perception and Feeling)

I remember saying at the beginning, the whole retreat was Kirsten’s idea. And when the opportunity came up, because of the building work, I’m pretty sure I asked, “Can we have a month?” And for whatever reasons, they said, “Well, this is what we’ve got, just over three weeks.” So I feel a little bit like how you feel – desperate to go home. [laughter] And get out of here. But in a way, I feel like I’m sort of rushing at the end, and running out of time, and not quite having time to say certain things. I certainly wish very much that I had had more opportunity to meet with you individually, interviews and things, and Q & As and things, but like I said at the beginning, in many ways, just the fact of this retreat has been a miracle, the fact that the conditions came together to allow that, this. So we’re doing the best we can, and that’s good.

So a little bit rushed, and I’m partly wondering how you’re doing with especially these later talks, when I’m not really talking at the level – I’m not really talking about your playgrounds any more, your learning edge playgrounds. How are you doing? How do they land? As I said, in our modern or postmodern society, however you want to see that, it’s completely okay if this kind of stuff, like these deep, deep mystical states, and these kind of openings, it’s really okay – and I really feel this way, as well, genuinely feel – it’s really okay if you’re not interested. That’s a perfectly valid sort of relationship to have with it.

Of course, some people will be absolutely very interested, and fascinated, and drawn, and allured, etc. But it’s really okay if one isn’t. Someone might be, or some people might be thinking, “I don’t feel interested now, but it’s probably because of my psychological *dukkha*,” or whatever it is. “Once I’ve got over that, then I’ll be interested, I imagine.” It may be the case. I would kind of tend to more guess that if you’re not interested anyway, you’re just not going to be interested, or if one isn’t interested in this kind of thing, one will never probably be interested. It’s not like a certain amount of healing has to happen, or psychological clearing of the path, and then one will get interested. So these things are interesting to some people, and really passionately interesting to some people, and not so much to others.

The technical information I've been putting [out], or the information about technique I've been putting out in these last talks, you know, because we're not really talking about your learning edge playground, for most of you, almost all of you at this point, not really talking about your learning edge playground, the technical information is really for later. As far as I can tell, it's being recorded by, like, three or four different recorders. [laughs] So it should be somewhere. [laughter] Unless there's a worldwide internet crash, it should be accessible to you, if and when the time comes that these territories *do* become your learning edge playgrounds.

But the big picture stuff and the conceptual framework stuff will also be very relevant then, when you come to this stuff. *And* it's absolutely relevant now. So the big picture stuff and the conceptual framework stuff is not stuff that you have to write down. In a way, it makes more sense for you to write, as you're taking notes, to take notes on the bigger picture/conceptual framework stuff than on the little tricks of getting from the seventh to the eighth *jhāna*. I mean, you're obviously welcome to write whatever you want, but again, I just put so much emphasis on understanding the big picture and the conceptual framework. That's relevant now. What's also relevant is when we've dipped into talking, several times, or drawn into the conversation and the teachings the reflections on desire, and the inquiry into desire, and the inquiry into intention, and the relationship with "What is it to keep my intention on something that I desire? And how am I with desire? And what happens with me with desire?" Those things will be relevant then, when you're working on the eighth *jhāna* or whatever it is, but they're relevant *now*. And as I said, these things – big picture, conceptual framework, desire and intention – these things are, if you like, more fundamental than "Can I move from this *jhāna* to that *jhāna*?" But sometimes human beings have a habit of listening with the wrong set of priorities, or not quite a developed sense of actually what's most important. I've said all this before. Understanding the big picture, understanding the conceptual framework, is actually rare. It's very rare, and I've said that before.

So yesterday we talked about the realm of neither perception nor non-perception, and today I would like to talk about what's beyond that: the Unfabricated, the Deathless, the *asaṅkhata*, or *asaṅkhata dhamma*. (*Saṅkhata* is related with *saṅkhāra*; it usually gets translated as 'condition,' 'conditions,' or 'conditioned.' *Saṅkhata* is to be conditioned or fabricated.) So the Unfabricated, the Unconditioned. Now, all this business about we're being quite rushed is *that's* not the end of the story to me. Opening to, realizing the Unconditioned, the Unfabricated, absolutely wonderful and important as that is, it's not the end of the story. For *some* people it is, or for some maps of the Dharma it is. But even that is becoming actually quite rare in the Dharma world. Even any kind of importance given to this – I don't even know the word for it – the realm of the Unfabricated, or the Unfabricated, this complete fading – that's actually getting rarer and rarer in a lot of Dharma worlds; I think in the Insight Meditation world, certainly.

But in my book, it's extremely important, extremely touching, beautiful, liberating, but it's kind of like half the story, if you like. And the other half has to do with emptiness, which goes even deeper than the Unfabricated. Now, the Unfabricated is important for emptiness, but emptiness, in its full understanding, goes even deeper. I have written about and explained all this elsewhere a lot, and I'm not going to do it again today. This business about going *beyond* the Unfabricated is in *Seeing That Frees*, in the chapters kind of leading up to and then after the bits about the Unfabricated, in a lot of

detail – in a lot of practical detail, and also conceptual detail. I’ve written and spoken about it, as I said, in a lot of detail, about the Unfabricated, about how that opens up in practice, about what it means to go beyond it, and how that opens up in practice; about the relationship of both of those stages to emptiness and liberation; and about the whole philosophy, or the kinds of philosophical questions that are implicit in all that, about reality, and how we know what’s real, or how we can trust what’s real (so ontology and epistemology).

I’ve, as I said, written and talked about it a lot in where you’d expect to find it, in *Seeing That Frees*, a book about emptiness, and talks about emptiness, etc., but there’s also a lot of that material, and a lot of different approaches and even further kind of elaborations to that material, in talks about soulmaking, in Soulmaking Dharma talks, because it’s actually woven into all that, and it has a lot of implications philosophically for all that territory.

So I got a note saying, “Is there any space in tonight’s talk to be able to distinguish the terms ‘dependent origination’ and ‘emptiness’? Maybe also ‘co-dependent arising,’ ‘the lack of inherent existence.’ I, anyway, thought of them as synonymous.” So the short answer is no, unfortunately. There isn’t quite enough time. I can say something very brief now. But it *is* all in that material. It’s all there. I think it’s really, really clear. I really took a lot of trouble being really, really clear. Every word means something, implies something, certainly in the writing. Obviously the verbal teaching is a bit more loose. But it’s there. So, briefly, for this. This isn’t a talk about emptiness, primarily. It’s a talk primarily about the Unfabricated. But briefly, in terms of this question:

Part of the problem is terms like ‘dependent origination’ and ‘emptiness’ get used in a lot of different ways in the Dharma. Even in the Insight Meditation world, we could list I don’t know how many different ways they are used, and, I would say, the same term, understood at *very* different levels, which a person using it at a certain level might think, “Well, that’s the total thing. That’s the final level of understanding.” But someone else might, or as I would, rank those kind of as provisional levels of understanding. So it gets quite tricky trying to untangle all that.

But briefly, dependent origination, we could say, “Okay, this book is a dependent arising,” which means what? “Well, someone sat down and spent a lot of time writing it. The paper had to come from trees. Someone had to cut down the trees, and take it to a paper mill, and make paper out of it, and then there was the ink. And whoever, the person, the author, had to practise and study a lot. The book arose dependently on all those conditions.” That’s all really, really important, and lovely, and can give a nice sense of interconnectedness with everything, but it won’t do *that* much for liberation, okay?

So the primary emphasis I put on understanding dependent origination is ‘dependent on the mind,’ ‘dependent on the way of looking.’ So we’ve seen this when we talked about working with pain on this retreat. Here’s the pain. It *is* a pain. It seems to – I’ll weave in the other word – it seems to *inherently* exist. It just exists. It is what it is. It’s a pain, and it hurts. When I play with perception, and I look at it in a different way, I find that, oh, it’s become a pleasure. It’s become *pīti*. It does not exist inherently as pain, okay? It doesn’t exist ‘from its own side,’ the Tibetans say. It’s dependent. It dependently arises, it dependently originates, primarily – the most important thing for liberation, I would emphasize – it dependently originates on the way of looking in the moment.

We could say much, much more about these terms. ‘Co-dependent arising’ is, let’s say, for now, just the same thing, and I’ll weave it in later in the talk. ‘Lack of inherent existence’ is, at one level,

synonymous with emptiness or dependent arising. In other words, to say that this pain lacks inherent existence is, as many of you have seen for yourselves and felt for yourselves in meditation already, to say that this pain lacks inherent existence is just the same thing as saying: without my looking at it in my normal, habitual, reactive ways, it does not arise and exist for me as pain. It lacks inherent existence, or, we say, lacks an independent existence. And that's just the same thing as saying it's empty, and it's just the same thing as 'it arises dependently, dependent on the way of looking.' So, very brief answer for that.

Okey-dokey. In order that you don't get quite confused, or rather, *more* confused than you may already be [laughs], you should probably know that *this* way, as I'm about to talk today, and the way that I've written about and talked about other times, this way of talking about the Unfabricated, and this way of talking about the fabricated, and this whole idea of insight ways of looking – ways of looking, ways of relating in the moment that reduce clinging, and, through reducing clinging, fabricate less, and the implication, from that, that a thing is therefore empty, to a certain extent, and a dependent arising, and with the implications about its reality – *all* of that (the way I'm talking about Unfabricated, fabricated, insight ways of looking, clinging, unfabricating, emptiness, dependent origination, and the implications about reality), all of that together is rare in the Dharma world. It's not like you can just expect it to mesh neatly or nicely with other things that you will read and hear. So I'm just saying that. I'm not saying it's better or worse. You're welcome to prefer whatever you prefer, or make more sense. Just that, if you're approaching something else with the idea, "Well, they must be saying the same thing," you're liable to just get very confused. That's all. And then completely up to you to gravitate to what you gravitate to, explore what you feel drawn to explore, etc. But if you know that from the start, then you won't just kind of be trying to mesh things together which actually don't really mesh that well.

So it's rare in the Dharma, this way of talking about these things, and this way of explaining things. And it's very rare, the whole conceptual framework that ties it all together – certainly with the soulmaking, but even all that tied together. And as I said, the understanding is very rare. So it's very rare for people to really understand this – *yet*.

There's a passage in the Pali Canon where the Buddha and Ānanda are sort of hanging out. And Ānanda, remember, he was the Buddha's attendant. So he probably heard, let's estimate, maybe 90 per cent of the Buddha's teachings, something like that – talks to monks, talks to nuns, talks to lay people, talks to kings and queens, talks to individual wandering ascetics, question and answer sessions, one-to-one interviews, etc. – over I don't know how many years, but a long time. He was just there all the time, pretty much all the time. And he wasn't a thicko. After the Buddha died, he became an arahant, so he wasn't someone incapable. They're hanging out one day, and the Buddha says something about dependent arising, and Ānanda says, "It's so clear. It's so clear to me. It's wonderful, this dependent arising. It's just as clear as clear could be." And the Buddha turns to him and says, "Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. We're talking about something really profound here – profound as a teaching, profound in its manifestation."¹ So just to contextualize this a little bit.

This is an interesting thing as a teacher, because I feel I'm talking to someone, and they're like, "Oh, I don't understand. I don't understand." And then there's the self-judgment: "I'm so thick. I'm lost. I'm confused," and all this stuff. And actually, they *do* understand. They *do* understand, very well,

the beginnings of this thread. Remember I was talking about this whole thing – emptiness, fabrication, dependent arising? It's just a thread. It's the same understanding I'm taking from the most basic level that my mother could understand, who has not meditated for ten seconds in her whole life, and is not interested in anything. She can understand when she gets into *papañca* compared to afterwards, "That was fabricated. *That* was less fabricated. There was something unreal there, and there was something" – she would just say 'real' – "here." It's the same thing. *Papañca* compared to normal consciousness, and you just keep following that thread. A person says, "I don't understand, I don't understand!" Actually, you *do* understand. You're on the right thread, and you need to *know* that you understand and keep going.

So there are some people like that, and they need encouragement: "Actually, you *do* understand. Just keep following. Same inquiry. Just keep going. Don't freak out." Other people are a bit more like Ānanda: "Yes, yes, yes, I understand completely. I get it. It's wonderful." And I feel like saying, "You *don't* understand!" [laughter] "You *don't* understand!" So the question is, which one are *you*? [laughter] And are you *able* to know which one you are?

So, again, put this in a little context. I would say one doesn't understand dependent arising and emptiness and all this business unless one understands that what dependently arises does not arise. And one understands that that is the case for many reasons. What dependently arises does not arise. What is unfabricated is not unfabricated. Unless one understands that, one hasn't really understood all this business. What is unfabricated is not unfabricated. Unless one has also understood that when we talk about this fabrication business and ways of looking, we're not talking about, "Ah, yes, it's because the brain processes things like *this*," or "These are the neural circuits," etc., because we're *not* talking about something based in materialism or physicalism. Brains, neurons, neurotransmitter molecules and atoms, they are empty too. Neither are we talking about the kind of complement in philosophy from materialism, mentalism: "Everything is projected by the mind. The mind is somehow real, and everything is projected by the mind."

So unless one understands all that, one doesn't really fully yet understand this dependent arising business. Unless one understands:

why there is no trauma. There is no trauma, but we can respect and care for trauma and heal it. But there is no trauma;

unless one understands why there are no ways of looking, but at the same time, it's impossible to exist, even for a moment, without a way of looking. But there are no ways of looking;

unless one understands that things are not impermanent, but nor are they permanent;

unless one understands that there are no moments, there are no moments of time, one hasn't understood all this yet;

unless one understands that there are many things, and at the same time, there are no things, and, in a way, there's one thing only, or there are many kinds of versions of one thing only, or there are infinite things – all these are true: many, none, one, infinite. And none of them are true;

unless one understands that there is no suffering, and there is no liberation;

and unless one understands that emptiness, too, is empty, one hasn't yet fully understood dependent arising.

So if you're one of those people who *think* that you have ... that's great. [laughter] I could go on. We could go on adding to this list. We're talking about something very profound, and I'm not going to be able to explain it all today. Everything there, if you really read and listen – and practise, obviously – it should actually all completely make sense in the heart, through practice.

So this talk, I'm not going to go into the whole emptiness thing. We don't have time. In a way, it's only half – as I said, I'm just going to talk about the Unfabricated a little bit, and it's only really a little of what's really a huge area and profound area of understanding and practice. I'm really going to talk about the *jhānas* in relationship to the Unfabricated.

And one more thing. Some of you are a bit new to this fabrication and fading thing, so we should be clear: one isn't going to understand this business about fading and dependent arising and emptiness without practising what I call insight ways of looking. One is not going to understand that without practising, *really* practising, those insight ways of looking, like a lot, and getting into them, and really grappling with that, and letting the beauty of that open up. So *jhānas* are really not the best way to understand fading and emptiness. They're really not the best way to understand fading and emptiness. However, emptiness and fading is part of the best way to understand the *jhānas*. That's not quite a contradiction, what I said. *Jhānas* are not the best way to understand fading and emptiness, but fading and emptiness are part of the best way to understand the *jhānas*, along with what we talked about – development of sensitivity, and attunement, and deep resource, etc.

So partly the reason I've been going on about emptiness, and all that, and ways of looking, is because it forms the best and most coherent way of understanding the *jhānas* and placing them coherently in a much bigger picture of the Dharma – a picture which makes sense of a lot of possibilities, including Soulmaking Dharma, but even without Soulmaking Dharma.

Okay. So that was all before I even start. It's interesting: whether people *use* the word or not, 'fabrication,' I would say that certainly most Insight Meditation teachers use the *idea* of fabrication. They may use that word or not use that word. So when people talk about *papañca*, whether they use the word 'fabrication' or not, they're suggesting that it's what we call a fabrication, in both senses. It's something that the mind has just concocted. That's another word: it's a concoction. It's a construction. And with this double meaning that we have in some languages, it's also a lie. And that contrasts with what, usually implicitly, is something *unfabricated*; something real, or reality; something true, or truth. Even if a person isn't using that concept, it's there, woven into most Insight Meditation teachings.

Fabrication is a construction, a concoction by the mind, and what is not real. It's a lie, in some ways. So that *unfabricating* the fabricated, or *not* fabricating, is just part of practice. It's part of what is kind of conveyed in actually any Dharma teaching, let alone just Insight Meditation teaching. Not fabricating, or unfabricating the fabricated, is part of practice. And more than that, implicitly or explicitly, there's an ontology woven in. 'Ontology' means a view or philosophy or belief about what is real. So when people talk about *papañca*, even if they don't use the language 'real' or 'fabricated,' the way they talk, and the jokes, and the humour of it, it's like, "Wasn't that funny, because it was completely not real?" So even if a person doesn't pull all this out, there's fabricated and unfabricated as notions.

So there's an implicit ontology, implicit view of what's real, and there's an implicit ontological hierarchy. Sometimes it's drawn out; it's made explicit. More often, it's implicit. It's not actually talked

about in this way. But sometimes it is. In other words, clearly the ‘real’ is better than the ‘unreal,’ is preferable, right? That’s woven into it as well. And wrapped up in all that, there’s a value judgment involved: it’s better. “This is a waste of time. This is ridiculous. This is worthless, or even harmful,” etc. Most of the time, that’s just sort of spun into the rhetoric, into the teaching rhetoric – sometimes verbally, and sometimes not verbally. And it’s not just in Insight Meditation. It can also be in kind of pop versions of Zen: if you get a bit conceptual, you just get hit on the nose with a stick or whatever. And it’s conveying something about what’s ‘real’ or ‘not real,’ because ‘reality’ is what’s not bound up with concept in this. Very rarely is there actually a big probing of the philosophical questions and psychological questions here. It’s usually conveyed – not subliminally, but non-verbally, non-philosophically, usually. Whatever kind of Dharma we’re talking about, not just Insight Meditation, that’s an observation.

So what is this Unfabricated that people may be suggesting, or pointing to, or kind of is there, implicitly, without being named, and what is the fabricated? (Again, whether they use those words or not.) So Unfabricated may be – we’ve touched on this – it’s basically what is not *papañca*, as I just said. So when there’s the absence of *papañca*, we’re not fabricating. Or mindfulness reveals what is not fabricated. Mindfulness – less story, less view, less reaction, less conceptual sort of involvement, and that mindfulness or bare attention reveals the Unfabricated, even if one doesn’t use that language. It cuts fabrication. Or you may have heard someone say, “That’s not an emotion. It’s just some sensations. *Really* it’s just some sensations in the chest.” And again, there’s the ‘really,’ the ontological question, the hierarchizing, all that.

Or, “There’s not *really* self and story. All there *really* is is the process of the five aggregates in time, including those sensations arising and passing in the chest area or whatever.” Or this vast, primordial, impersonal awareness is regarded as what’s real, and the whole concepts or stories of self are regarded as not real. So whatever language one uses, there is this kind of, as we’ve said, something that’s fabricated, something that’s not fabricated, some ontological distinction and hierarchy there, and a value judgment is woven in with all that.

So when I use the word ‘Unfabricated,’ I certainly don’t mean what is revealed by ‘bare attention.’ I certainly don’t mean what is there, visible to us, sensible to us, when there is no thought. I certainly don’t mean what’s sensible to us, perceivable to us, for us, when we’re calm, without *papañca*, without making a fuss in the world. More, I would say, it’s what appears, or what opens, when there is no *intention* whatsoever and no *conception* whatsoever. I could also say no *perception* whatsoever. But I have to explain those words, because I don’t mean by ‘conception’ *thought*. So when I say ‘non-conceptual,’ I mean much, much more than non-thinking. So ‘concept,’ to me, is a much deeper and subtler thing, much more deeply woven into consciousness. And I’ll come back to that, hopefully, in this talk.

And when I say ‘no intention,’ I certainly don’t mean – or I mean much *more* than – “I’m just sitting here, being. I’m just being right now,” or “I’m not doing,” or “I’m not making any effort,” or “I have no plans,” or anything like that. I mean something much, much more, again, subtle than that, much more deeply intricate (if that’s even a word) into consciousness and how consciousness works. I’ll come back to that later.

But let's go back to what I said before. In whatever Dharma we're teaching, there is, woven into this, some kind of idea of the fabricated and the Unfabricated, with all these ontological hierarchies and judgments. The question is: where are we limiting the process of unfabricating? So for all these Dharmas, there is a practice that involves unfabricating. The question is, where are we limiting that? Where are we limiting this practice of unfabricating? Where are we drawing the line and saying, "Ah, that's it now. Done. I'm done with fabrication," or "That was a moment of unfabricating"? Where are we limiting it, and *why* are we limiting it *there*, or *here*, or wherever we are? Where and why? And why not leave it as an open question? So these are real questions. In other words, someone needs to come up with a really good answer for these questions, I would say.

So I'm meaning something quite different by 'the Unfabricated.' We'll return to those questions at the end. I think they're very, very important. But there are lots of texts where the Buddha describes the Unfabricated, at least to my reading of them, that sound like what I'm talking about. I'm not going to be able to find them. [shuffles papers] I'm not going to hunt for them right now, but there are texts where the Buddha's describing a state where all perception has ceased. So not even what we were talking about yesterday, the neither perception nor non-perception. All perception of a subject, all perception of *any* kind of object – not even nothingness; not even a state of neither perception nor non-perception – all sense of time, all space, not even a present moment – all of that, not there. And there are many texts in the Pali Canon. It's interesting. A while ago – I don't know whether it's still the case – some people would say, "Oh, there's only one place in the Pali Canon where the Buddha talks about such a thing." It's not true. There are many, many places, and they're all different. It's not the same little passage getting reprinted. It's lots of different texts pointing to the same experience. I should find one. Let's see. Okay. This one will have to do for now:

That sphere should be understood [should be known, that dimension, that *āyatana* should be known, that realm should be known] where the eye ceases and perceptions of forms fades away. [There's no sight, no visual objects.] That sphere should be known where the ear ceases and the perception of sounds fades away. That sphere should be understood [should be known] where the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and perception of tactile objects fades away. That sphere should be understood where the mind ceases and perception of mental phenomena fades away.²

By 'mental phenomena,' it doesn't just mean thought. It means *any* mental perception. So a perception of a *jhāna*, perception of the neither perception nor non-perception, perception of nothingness – any perception at all. So we're talking about something completely beyond the perception of matter, completely beyond any kind of measurement, completely beyond any kind of perception, any subject, any object, any sense of time – even a present moment. No space, no nothing.

So, as I said, there used to be – I don't know if it is still; I think it probably still is the case – there are people who say, "No, there's only one passage." But actually, it's in *Seeing That Frees*, if you're interested – there are many, many passages that, in different ways, describe such an opening and such a realm, place, whatever we want to call that. Some people really don't like that, and some people really oppose such a teaching. That's always quite interesting to me. Some people use some of those

passages, or use words like ‘the Unfabricated,’ but if you listen to what’s being said, or if you follow the teachings, they’re actually using ‘Unfabricated’ synonymous with ‘awareness,’ often ‘vastness of awareness,’ and claiming *that* is the Unfabricated, *that* is the Ultimate, or *that*’s the nature of mind, or whatever. Occasionally, very occasionally, someone – it’s usually people who haven’t been practising that long, certainly not teachers; I don’t think I’ve ever heard a teacher say this – but occasionally, again, someone construes the Unfabricated as just ‘things as they are,’ as seen, or as sensed, as revealed with ‘bare attention’ or mindfulness. So sometimes people use either parts of these quotes or the word ‘Unfabricated,’ but in quite different ways.

So very briefly: if yesterday’s language, you know, stretched language to the limit, here it’s really gone beyond the pale. The Buddha sometimes talks in positive language here. There is, as I said, something – that passage we just read: “This should be known. That dimension should be known.” It’s as if it’s a *something* that should be known. And there’s another passage I’ll read where he says,

Here, with regard to earth, the perception of earth has disappeared. With regard to liquid, the perception of liquid has disappeared. With regard to fire, the perception of fire has disappeared. With regard to wind, the perception of wind has disappeared. [In other words, with regard to materiality – that was the physics in their days. With regard to materiality, the perception of materiality has disappeared.] With regard to the realm of infinite space, the perception of the realm of infinite space has disappeared. With regard to the sphere of infinite consciousness, the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness has disappeared. With regard to the sphere of nothingness, the perception of the sphere of nothingness has disappeared. With regard to the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, the perception of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception has disappeared. With regard to this world, the perception of this world has disappeared. With regard to the next world, the perception of the next world has disappeared. Whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, or explored by the mind, the perception of that has disappeared.

Absorbed in this way [*samādhified* in this way], one is absorbed dependent neither on earth, liquid, fire, wind [dependent neither on perception of materiality] nor on the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, this world, the next world, nor on what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, or explored by the mind – and yet one is absorbed. And to this one, absorbed in this way, all the gods pay homage even from afar:

“Homage to you,” they say, “you of whom we don’t even know what it is that you’re absorbed dependent on.”³

So it’s something so beyond. These gods are gods with very, very refined, subtle perception. It’s gone even beyond that. The point I want to make, though, is the Buddha’s talking about it in sort of positive

language. It's a *something* that we can perceive, in a way. It's a something; it's *as if* it's an object that the mind can know. The mind knows this object, *as if*, in that language. Other times, he talks about it as if it's a subject, as if it's consciousness released. And there was that analogy I talked about yesterday of the sunlight not landing anywhere – it's completely released. So in those terms, talking about it in subjective terms, if you like, he talks about what remains with the cessation of the six sense consciousnesses: sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing (the five senses), and mental consciousness. When that all stops, the cessation of the six sense consciousnesses, and their respective objects of knowledge smells, sights, tastes, etc., thoughts, or anything perceivable in the mind, what remains is:

Consciousness without attribute, without end, luminous all around. Here water, earth, fire, and air [materiality] have no footing. Here long and short, subtle and gross, pleasant and unpleasant [all kinds of discrimination, or measurement, or relativisms], and *nāmarūpa* [*nāmarūpa* is perception, attention, contact, feeling, and body, awareness], all are destroyed. With the cessation of consciousness [i.e. those six sense consciousnesses], here each of these is destroyed.⁴

The first phrase there, “consciousness without attribute” – the Pali is actually *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*. And actually, a better translation, I think – *nidassana* is to point to something, or to show something. And so it's ‘consciousness that does not point to anything’ – again, ‘does not land,’ as we were talking about yesterday. So it's a consciousness completely released from any kind of object.

There he's talking of this Unfabricated in kind of subjective terms, as a kind of awareness beyond any kind of sense of awareness that we might have. Remember, the sixth *jhāna* is awareness aware of itself. Here it's not even that. It's not awareness aware of itself. It's not awareness aware of nothingness. It's not neither perception nor non-perception. It's gone beyond. It's totally released.

So sometimes he talks about it as a kind of object. Sometimes he talks about it as a kind of subject. But often he talks in negative terms, what in the Western theological tradition is ‘apophatic’ terms, or the *via negativa*: you can't say this, you can't say that. Nothing, no attribute you say about it will be true. And the Buddha says,

Where all phenomena are removed [where there's this complete fading of all phenomena], all ways of speaking are removed as well.⁵

All possibility of speaking about it is removed as well. So more often than not, the Buddha talks about it in negative language: it's the cessation of *this*, it's the fading of *that*, it's the Unfabricating of *this*. And the whole thing is pointed to apophatically, negatively, this mystery, what is totally beyond what the mind can grapple with or even understand in any kinds of conceptual ways.

So this experience, this opening, this realization is possible for us as meditators. I'm absolutely not saying it's easy, but it is totally possible. We're still left with other interesting philosophical questions though. One teacher said (I wasn't there; I heard it secondhand), “Well, you can't go from meditative experiences to epistemology and ontology,” meaning just because you've had a meditative experience, it doesn't mean that what you've experienced in your meditation is anything real, or is anything that

you should trust in any way. Just because you've had a nice meditation experience, it doesn't prove anything about anything; you just had a nice experience – so what? I think it's an important point. Just because I've had a meditation experience, what does it prove about the reality of what has opened to me in my meditation? How can I be sure that that points to anything real, that I can trust epistemologically – I trust that knowledge, that it's pointing to something ontologically real?

What *I* would respond, rather, is: fair enough. That's true. I cannot 100 per cent guarantee an epistemology based on meditative experience. No one can. What are you going to argue? How are you going to construct a philosophical argument that would do so? But the question *I* would have is: okay, but where does *your* epistemology come from, and how will you prove *your* epistemology? Meaning, what are you believing to be valid knowledge about reality? That's what 'epistemology' means. It's connected with ontology, what is real. Are you going to say, "This world of matter that everyone agrees on – *that's* real"? You still have to prove that. And you just need to pick up a few books on physics in the twentieth century, and begin asking, "What do you mean by 'matter'?", and the whole question, or the whole assumption that matter is something real, starts to get very, very shaky indeed.

So now, post-Scientific Revolution, we understand matter as Descartes and Newton understood it (most people on the street, let's say). But come, for example, the quantum revolution – Niels Bohr, one of the fathers of quantum physics, he said, "Everything we call real, everything we think of as real, is made from things we cannot call real." This is what quantum physics seems to have shown us. So if I ask this person who says you cannot go from meditation experience to epistemology and ontology, claims about reality, I would just say, "Well, what is your epistemology?" And if they say something like, "I believe in the reality of matter," I'd say, "What do you mean by 'matter,' and have you really gone into whether that's real or not in the way that you think?" Or is your epistemology, is your idea of what is real and what's trustable as knowledge, is it just socially agreed-upon views? "Well, it seems like most people in my society agree on this view. Therefore, it must be right, because our society is very smart, and we make all the right choices." Right? [laughter] You guys haven't read the news recently. Or is it just the most common view that I choose as my idea – it's just what most people believe? Or, if it's Descartes, again, you know, that was a long time ago, and Western philosophy has *really* moved on. There are quite sophisticated, profound critiques of Descartes, this idea of "there's mind and there's matter" or whatever.

So I wouldn't *disagree* with this person who says you can't just automatically, unquestioningly jump from a wonderful meditation experience that you really enjoyed to claims of ontology and epistemology, but I would just turn it around and say, "Okay. Where is yours coming from? What are we going to do?" And some people say, "All that talk about epistemology and ontology," which I've talked a lot about in recent years, "we don't do that any more." That's quite a popular view in modern philosophy, modern Western philosophy. It's a post-metaphysical, "we don't do metaphysics" kind of thing. Actually it's impossible. It's impossible to live in the world and be in the world without some view, some belief, about what is real and what is not real, and what constitutes valid knowledge or valid judgment about that. It's impossible to be a person, and function in the world, and make choices – even walk from here to teatime, or go to the toilet – without some ontological/epistemological view going on, even nowhere near any kind of philosophy or whatever.

So there's always some epistemology, some epistemological position, view, etc. It's unavoidable, and similarly with ontology, with claims about reality. That's really, really interesting, okay? It's a very complicated area. I think, if you really, really care about all this stuff, you cannot get away from such questions. So someone who says to you, "Well, you can't just glibly jump from your meditation experience to claims about reality, or this thing that you've opened to is real" – *they're* in the same boat about whatever *they* believe. They're just glibly jumping, and it's easier for them because they're not questioning or not even realizing what they're assuming, or it hasn't been brought into question. But there are profound, difficult questions here about epistemology and ontology.

What is the reality status of this Unfabricated that we might open to in meditation? What is the reality status of all this? [knocks on something] I'm mentioning that. I'm not going to dwell on it now. I've talked about it a lot elsewhere. Question, though, meditative question: how does this most wonderful of wonderful openings open? How, as meditators? The Buddha says it's a fruit of *gnosis*. It's a fruit of deep insight. In other words, it comes about only through deep insight. We're not just talking about a state of *samādhi* or concentration. So you can get to the eighth *jhāna* just by concentrating. I start with my nostrils, whatever, if I'm doing that method. I just concentrate, concentrate, concentrate. The first *jhāna* opens. I let that mature, let the mango ripen. The second *jhāna*, third, fourth, fifth, *da-da-da*, all the way to the eighth. I haven't done any insight at all. I *could* have, as we said, and the more I get into it, there are more insight ways of looking that open up these *jhānas*. But for this one, the Unfabricated, I *cannot* get there without insight. It's not just a natural state of concentration that will open. It's not just a *samādhi* that will naturally ripen.

And again, this is all in *Seeing That Frees*, and explaining what kinds of insights, and how we go about that. I'm going to give a very brief sort of tour of a few possibilities, and take them from the Buddha, instead of what I've said in *Seeing That Frees*.

The first example is from Ānanda, and he says,

There is the case where a monk enters and remains in the first *jhāna*. He notices that this first *jhāna* is fabricated and willed [it has intention in it]. He discerns, "Whatever is fabricated and willed is inconstant and subject to cessation." Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the effluents.⁶

The ending of the effluents is just another word for complete awakening, complete enlightenment – ending of greed, hatred, and delusion.

Or if not then, through passion and delight for this very phenomenon of insight [in other words, one is kind of clinging to one's insight], and from the total ending of the first five fetters ...

In other words, the experience, the letting go, through seeing that it's fabricated, the first *jhāna*, takes this person to the second highest level of awakening, but they're still clinging to the insight, and that's keeping them from full awakening. So they're a non-returner, and therefore,

he is due to be reborn in the Pure Abodes, there to be totally unbound [to reach *nibbāna*], never again to return from that world.

And then he repeats it. Ānanda repeats it with the second *jhāna* all the way up to the realm of nothingness, and also with states of deep *brahmavihāras* – *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. So these states, these very stable states, are used as objects for insight ways of looking. And here, particularly, it's saying 'it's fabricated, it's fabricated,' with the implication 'therefore, it's *dukkha*, it's unsatisfactory.' And because one is regarding it that way, in that moment there is the reducing of clinging, and because there's reducing of clinging, there is less fabrication. Yes, there is value judgment in that moment. In other words, it's fabricated, it's unsatisfactory. There's a kind of dismissing – *neti neti*, if you know from the other Indian traditions. I'm not wanting what's fabricated. This is all the subtext, the subtext of 'fabricated.' I'm not wanting what's fabricated; I'm looking for the Unfabricated. I want what's Unfabricated and therefore not *dukkha*. This is all implicit in the way of looking.

So here it emphasizes what is fabricated is impermanent. The Buddha talks about three kinds of *dukkha*:⁷

(1) There's *dukkha-dukkha*, which means just what's painful. It's *dukkha* because it hurts, this backache.

(2) There's *anicca-dukkha*, which is *dukkha* because it's impermanent. So even this happiness, even this joy, even this love is unsatisfactory, is *dukkha*, because it's impermanent. It can't fully, forever, satisfy me.

(3) The third one is something like *saṅkhāra-dukkha* or *saṅkhata-dukkha*. It's *dukkha* because it's fabricated. Now, that means *more* than to say it's impermanent. Because of everything we've been talking about, it's fabricated – it's something that doesn't have inherent existence, and therefore, in some way, or viewed from a certain perspective, it's *dukkha*.

Okay. So this is one method. You take a *jhānic* state, up to the realm of nothingness, or you take a nice, stable *brahmavihāric* state – *mettā* or whatever – and you view it as fabricated, in the moment, again and again: fabricated, and therefore unsatisfactory. Because of that, there's less clinging, and because there's less clinging, there's less fabricating, and see where it goes. The instruction here from Ānanda – and if you really develop this practice, it can go deep, deep, deep, deep, deep. Maybe all the way.

Okay. Second example. The Buddha says,

I tell you the ending of the effluents [again, the ending of greed, aversion, and delusion, meaning total awakening] depends on the first *jhāna*. [I tell you total awakening depends on the first *jhāna*.]⁸

Then he gives an analogy, which is probably a little bit confusing, so I'm going to leave that and just read what he says technically:

There is the case where a monk enters and remains in the first *jhāna* [and he describes the first *jhāna*]: *pīti* and *sukha* born of withdrawal [withdrawal from the hindrances], accompanied by *vitakka* and *vicāra*. He regards [the monk regards] whatever phenomena that are connected with form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness [in other words, the five aggregates: form, *vedanā*, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness. He regards them] as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, a void, not-self.

Okay? So here's the *jhāna*, and now one is looking at the elements that make up the *jhāna*, or some of the elements. Actually he's looking particularly at the *jhāna* factors here, right? We said there are five factors in the first *jhāna*, and one's looking at them – insight way of looking, in the moment – and looking at them in these ways.

Now, **all that list of adjectives there** – they're "inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow," etc. – **we can actually put them into four baskets**. There's a lot of repetition there, basically. We can put them into the baskets of the three characteristics, and one of emptiness, voidness.

(1) So the three characteristics are ***dukkha*** – it's unsatisfactory. It is, as I said, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, stressful, etc., all that. They're just similar words for saying it's *dukkha*, it's unsatisfactory. So it's the first characteristic.

(2) The second basket is the second characteristic: **impermanent**. And here we have words like "inconstant," "a disintegration," etc. So it's the second characteristic as an insight way of looking, and looking at the *jhānic* factors, right here, in the *jhāna*. So I have to have enough sensitivity, enough malleability, enough attunement of mind to be able to know the *jhāna* really well, and then kind of look at the individual *jhāna* factors with these insight ways of looking.

(3) The third basket is the third characteristic, what's known as the third characteristic, and that's that it's **not-self** – so when he says it's not-self, and also when he says it's alien. It's not-self. It's not me, not mine – none of this. The *pīti* is not me and mine. The *sukha* is not me, not mine. The *ekaggatā*, the concentration, all the rest of it is not me, not mine. We're looking at it with the insight way of looking of *anattā*: "It's *anattā*, it's *anattā*," again and again.

(4) The fourth basket is **a void** – not 'avoid,' but 'a void.' Two words: a void. I think this points to the understanding they're not just not me, not mine, they're not just *anattā*, but they have no phenomenal self. They are empty of having a phenomenal self. The *pīti* doesn't exist inherently. The *ekaggatā*, the whatever, it's void. It's empty of inherent existence. Void and empty are interchangeable words. And that's an interesting word. *Suñña* is the Pali. Sometimes people occasionally say to me, "The only place the Buddha really talks about emptiness in the Pali Canon is two suttas with 'emptiness' in the title." But actually there are all kinds of teachings about emptiness of phenomenal self – not just this *anattā*, not me, not mine, emptiness of the personal self. There are all kinds of teachings about this emptiness of phenomenal self in the Pali Canon, and different ways the Buddha uses the word 'empty.' So here's one: they're a void, they're an emptiness.

So there are four ways of looking there: the three characteristics (unsatisfactory/*dukkha*; impermanent/*anicca*; not me, not mine/*anattā*), and void or empty (*śūnya*, *suñña* in Pali). The *jhānas*, because they're stable objects – *jhāna*, partly the etymology can be, I think I said, traced to a candle

that burns steadily. So because of the steadiness of a *jhāna* (and remember, it's our two S's in the middle of SASSIE), because of the steadiness, they actually form really good objects on which to practise these insight ways of looking – also because they're clear, the *citta* in a *jhāna* is clear and subtle and malleable. It's an optimum – what do they say? “Location, location, location.” [laughter] They're really good spaces, places to practise this. But all this stuff we're talking about is after you've really mastered and become familiar with a *jhāna*. Then you need to practise with your insight ways of looking. So all this we're talking about, it's a long, long process of development of practice, but incredibly beautiful, and incredibly freeing and gratifying. But it takes time, you know, to develop all this.

So earlier in the retreat, we said, “Why is it such a great place to do this?” Yes, a stable object. Yes, a clear and subtle *citta*. But already in the *jhānic* state there is a little less fabricating. We've almost defined the whole *jhānic* spectrum that way. And that means the self is less fabricated at that point, and what do selves do? They go “me, mine, me, mine, me, mine, me, mine.” They appropriate. So the habit of “me-mining” is already a little bit less. It becomes easier than usual, in that space, to just see things as “not me, not mine.” The *anattā* practice is easier. It's easier to let go because of the well-being, and especially if you're confident that you can get this *jhāna* back – it's not just, “Oh, my God, I had this amazing experience once, and I just need to cling on to it, because ...” Once you've gone in and out a lot, you don't get attached to *jhānas* any more. You know. I used to say it's like, in this country, thank goodness for us, I'm not going to get super attached to water. I mean, there's water *there*. I actually don't know old that is! But if I want water, I know I can go to the tap. It's just there. When I *don't* know that there's a tap there that I can turn on and off, then my relationship with water gets very attached and difficult, and understandably so. When one's in and out, in and out of the *jhānas*, we can actually let go quite a lot in the *jhānas*, because it's a well-being that we're less attached to, we're more used to. We trust it can come and go. And it's easier to let go there.

And also, as I said, impermanence becomes obvious. That's also one of the reasons why they're prime spaces. Here it says – who is this talking? This is the Buddha. He's talking about,

I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first *jhāna*.

Then he goes right through all the other *jhānas*, up to the nothingness. But I would say *probably* it will get easier with the third *jhāna*, just because there's much more stillness there. What we're talking about at this level is really something that takes quite a lot of stillness and spaciousness and kind of subtlety. If there's too much *pīti* bouncing off the walls and kind of making things turbulent, this kind of thing can get a little more difficult. But theoretically, I think it's possible. It's probably much easier from the third *jhāna* onwards, but not past the realm of nothingness, because in the neither perception nor non-perception, you need to actually perceive things here. You need to perceive what the *jhāna* factors are. You need to be able to almost make clear things. And in the neither perception nor non-perception, that's partly what defines the state – it's almost like I'm not quite perceiving anything. Again, it's said that only a Buddha can do this in the realm of neither perception nor non-perception – not an arahant, not anyone else.

So he goes through the same thing with all the *jhānas*. Actually, I've missed a bit out:

He regards whatever phenomena that are connected [with the aggregates there] ...

This one is concerned with the aggregates, not with the *jhāna* factors, so the five aggregates that are present in the *jhāna* factors (body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations/fabrications, and consciousness). And he regards them in one of these four ways: *dukkha*, *anicca*, *anattā*, or *suñña*. Yeah? And does that, and then

He turns his mind away from those phenomena [because there's a letting go], and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness [the *amāra*, what is deathless, this Unfabricated]: "This is peace, this is exquisite – the resolution [the ending] of all fabrication; the relinquishment of all the paraphernalia of being; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding [or *nirvāṇa*]."

And again, it says staying right there – in other words, staying right there, he reaches total liberation, or, if he/she/they are a bit attached to their insight there (which is, after all, quite an extraordinary level of insight), if they're a bit attached to it, then they get only as far as the non-returner, and they're, according to this,

reborn only in the Pure Abodes [the heavenly realms, the highest heavenly realms, and in those realms, they will come to full awakening], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

So first *jhāna* up through nothingness, and then he says,

Thus, as far as the perception attainments go, that is as far as gnosis-penetration goes.

In other words, it's what I said before: you can only do this kind of insight way of looking up to the realm of nothingness, because from there, you're not really perceiving anything to get enough of a handle on it, the aggregates.

Okay, third passage. Here the Buddha's talking about Sāriputta, one of his chief disciples. He says,

Monks, Sāriputta is *paṇḍita* [which can get translated as 'wise'; it can also get translated as 'skilled.' He's wise or skilled]. He is [the translator here has] of great discernment.⁹

It's actually *mahāpaṇṇo*, of great – you could say wisdom; you could say discernment; you could say insight. You could also say, and what I'd like to put the emphasis on because that's what the passage is talking about: Sāriputta has great skill in insight ways of looking. That's exactly what the passage is talking about.

Monks, Sāriputta is wise and skilled, of great insight, of deep insight, of wide insight, of joyous, rapid, quick, penetrating insight.

Note the ‘joyous,’ yes? Joyous. This insight way of looking approach, as I said yesterday, it’s a joyous way of practising insight. There’s no way it *can’t* be. I mean, maybe a little bit here and there. But basically because you’re looking, because you’re relating in a way that unbinds right then, you feel that, the taste – you feel it in your body, in the consciousness, of some degree of unbinding, some degree of release from suffering, and therefore it is joyous. Beautiful spaces open up.

So why is he all that? Because

There is the case where Sāriputta enters and remains in the first *jhāna*. Whatever qualities there are in the first *jhāna* [and then he lists again the *jhāna* factors, the five *jhāna* factors, which we’ve had, and then he lists things like] contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire [‘desire’?], persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, attention [the list could go on a little bit] – he ferrets them out one by one. Known to him they arise, known to him they remain, known to him they subside. He discerns, “So this is *how* these qualities, not having been, come into play [come into being].”

‘*Evaṃ*,’ ‘this is how,’ ‘such is the way.’ Remember we had this brief discussion? I think Andrew asked about the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and how it can so easily be read and heard and translated as teaching on impermanence. Missing this ‘how.’ This is *how* these qualities, not having been, come into being, and how, having been, they vanish.

He remains unattracted and unrepelled with regard to these qualities, independent, detached, released, with an awareness rid of barriers. He understands, “There is a further escape” [there’s a further *nissaraṇaṃ*], and pursuing it, he confirms that there is.

That further escape is the second *jhāna*. And then he goes through the same thing, all the way up to the realm of nothingness. Here’s a *jhāna*; what makes up this *jhāna*? So sometimes, when we’re practising *jhāna*, we, for the most part, want to not differentiate, not deconstruct it. We want to see it as one homogenous yumminess, and I’m just throwing myself into that vat of homogenous chocolate yumminess. That’s how we want to relate to it. I don’t want to be deconstructing it, seeing its gaps and impermanence. I don’t want to be deconstructing it in terms of its constituent elements, *unless* I’m doing that so I can work on one of them, like my – I have to switch the analogy now – like my wattle and daub building has got a bit of a hole in it, and I need to sort of focus on that bit, and kind of push it back or bring ...

I’m *not* deconstructing it if I’ve got a *samādhi* intention, unless it’s for the sake of shoring it up for the *samādhi*. But now we’re in an insight way of looking, we are really interested in the discerning, in seeing: what’s going on here? What are the elements here? And bringing into play an insight way of looking which changes my relationship with those elements very, very powerfully, very potently. All

this is extremely subtle, but it's absolutely doable with practice. That's why I put so much emphasis on this sensitivity, attunement – taken to extraordinary levels, but absolutely possible. And if I can do that, then the whole thing begins to unfabricate, unfabricate. In this example, he's going stage by stage through the *jhānas*. I think I said the other day, what might happen – it's a bit like an elevator shaft. Sometimes the elevator will just go *foooooof*, and you're just at a floor, or in the area of a certain floor: somehow, somewhere, I'm around the seventh *jhāna*, whatever it is. Sometimes it goes all the way. Here there's a kind of stage by stage – he's stopping at every floor.

So this word 'void,' I've already explained that. There are many ways of understanding emptiness, as we said in response to the question on the note earlier. So we can understand, if I'm looking at a *jhāna* factor, or something like attention, or even the intention to pay attention, or something like *vedanā*, or something like consciousness, there are many ways to understand its voidness, its emptiness. In other words, there are many possible subtexts if I'm using that way of looking: 'empty, empty.' One of them, though, could be 'fabricated,' which one might have already understood. I see that when I practise letting go, *this* fades; therefore, it's fabricated; therefore, it's empty of inherent existence.

But the key thing is here, as we've said, it's the *how* – *how* something arises, *how* these elements arise. Not just the *jhāna* itself, but the actual elements. How is it that consciousness arises? How is it that consciousness fades? How is it that a sense of contact, or a perception – which, remember, means experience, or appearance, or phenomenon – *how* is it that it arises, and how does it fade? This is the deepest level of dependent arising. And as I said, dependent arising is a teaching you can take on many different levels. At a certain level, it begins to deconstruct, which is why I could say at the beginning, what dependently arises does not actually arise. At the deepest level of understanding dependent arising, what dependently arises does not arise. But there's a whole range of levels.

At the deepest level, where it kind of still just about makes sense to talk about 'arising' – let's see if I can explain this very briefly. Again, it's in *Seeing That Frees* in quite careful detail. So a very deep meditative state – we don't even need to put a *jhāna* name on it; just somewhere in that territory where there's a lot of fading. No sense of my story. No sense of my personality, and all my neuroses, and the big, complex 'me.' There's just the simplest possible self. What might be the simplest possible self? Just a sense of consciousness. No story, no personality, just an awareness. Just 'subject,' in the barest, most basic sense. Everything has faded, and that's all that's left. And with that, all that's left is, let's say, a very, very simple object. Now, it could be the realm of nothingness. It could be something in that territory – some very, very empty state, in terms of object or what's being fabricated there as an object. Subject, at its most basic level, we might say. Object at its most basic level, we might say. And there's a third element that goes with these, that *always* goes with these. No subject, no object. No object, no subject. But they need a third element to stand together, to construct something: time.

'Time' doesn't mean, "Oh, yes, I remember when my ...", or "What I'm going to do after the retreat ..." No. Completely beyond all that. It means just a sense of the present moment. Just a sense of a present moment. Now, implicit in a sense of a present moment, I would say – implicit, without any thinking – is a subtle sense of a future moment and a past moment. It goes with our sense of time. So this is the most basic tripod. Three legs propping each other up. They need each other. Take away any

one – generally speaking; there are always exceptions, but generally speaking – take away any one of these legs, and the other two come tumbling down. The other two get unfabricated.

So this is the most basic perception. This is way down there at the low end of unfabricating. Here's this thing about conception and intention. I would say this bare, barest subject, this most subtle subject, most unconstructed subject, with an extremely unconstructed object, and the *barest* sense of time, it still has, pregnant within it, conception and intention. There is the sense – a subject recognizes a something *other* than it. And subject, self, by *saṅkhāra*, karmically, is invested. None of my big story; none of that. There's an investment. This subject, this thinnest subject, is invested, in some way or another, with this object: I like it. I want more of it. (This is not linguistic.) I want it to stay around. I want it to increase. I want it to decrease. I want it to go away. I want to keep it just as it is. There's an intention on the subject's part, in relation to the object. It's what subjects *do*. This is karma. This is *saṅkhāra*. This is the wheel of *saṃsāra* at the most basic, basic level.

There's a conception of time. I'm not *thinking* about time. And there's a conception of an object. I'm not *thinking* about an object or a subject, but it's woven into the very perception: there's a conception of subject, object, and time. And woven into that, there's an intention – some intention or other, to do with what happens in time; some investment on the subject's part, to do with the object, about what then happens in the next moment. So implicit in a sense of a present moment, the barest sense of time is implicit, a sense of a next moment, and there's investment in what will happen in the next moment for this subject.

So there's already clinging there. It's wrapped up in the most subtle intention and the most subtle conception. This is this most basic tripod. This is propping up *saṃsāra*. We say these three arise together. Going back to the question on the note, they dependently co-arise. It's not like *first* there's a subject, sort of sitting around, drumming your fingers, waiting for an object and waiting for time. [laughter] Or that there is time waiting for [a subject and object] – which is also quite interesting if you know something about very recent developments in physics. They arise together. Even saying “they arise together,” we're really at the edge of what language and conception can ... ‘Arising’ is something that happens in time, and now we're talking about the arising of time. They arise together. They go together. Language – exactly at this point, this is the limit, I would say. This is the limit of conventional language in terms of how deep we can go with understanding the arising and passing of things, and dependent arising.

They arise together. They are not separate. Subject, object, time – they're not three things. Nor are they one thing. Nor are they nothing, no-things. Nor are they many things. And nor are they infinite things, *really*. You could see them in all those ways, but *really* they're not any of those.

So typical *avijjā*, typical ignorance/delusion, believes in this conception: “There is a subject. There are objects. And there is time.” That basic conception is *avijjā*. Out of that basic conception comes, inevitably, these intentions, in some way or another, for the next moment in regard to this object (or I want a better object, or whatever it is). Not talking about any thinking at all. It's so, so subtle. That's basic *avijjā*, propelling *saṃsāra*, propelling the wheel of dependent origination at the most basic level. In the conception, in this most basic conception, is the *avijjā*. Out of that most basic conception – not even *out of* it, but *wrapped up* with it is this stream of *saṅkhāra*, intention, intention as what fabricates: I'm invested, I'm clinging, I'm pushing, I'm pulling, in the most, most subtle ways.

When we understand what's happening here – understand they're not three, understand they're not one, understand it's not nothing – when we understand how this arises through this conception and through the intention and the clinging, at the moment we understand that ... Or rather, let's put it this way: when I am meditating, and I bring that understanding, and I use it as an insight way of looking – I take this understanding, “This is what's going on here. There's a conception of subject, object, time, and it propels, it's wrapped up with, or wrapped up with it is this movement of intention, of clinging – very, very subtle.” When I understand that, and I plug that in as a way of looking, I understand what's going on: “Therefore, these things are fabricated. Subject, object, time are fabricated. They're not unfabricated. Time is a fabrication,” and I understand how they arise together, then, we could say, okay, at that moment, *avijjā* is much, much, much less, in that moment of employing *that* insight way of looking. *Avijjā*, the foundation or the first link of dependent arising, we've just decreased it radically at that point, and so we're not pumping into the wheel of dependent arising. We're not pumping the liquid into *saṃsāra*. *Saṃsāra* means ‘to flow,’ *sāra*, ‘to flow,’ into that flow. We're not pumping the liquid in, because the *avijjā* squeezey liquid box thingy has got no liquid in it, or very, very little liquid in it.

And then our tripod collapses. Unfabricating. Total unfabrication. No time, no subject, no object, no present moment, no awareness in the usual sense of what we mean by ‘awareness,’ or in any big vastness of awareness or something like that.

So, as I said, we're talking about something very, very subtle, but actually very, very doable, if I approach it in the right way. “Thus he trains himself.” That probably takes a while, but it's really, really possible. So the Buddha said – I'm paraphrasing; he probably said it much more elegantly – but something like,

No matter how long your legs are, and how long you walk for, you'll never reach the end of the world. No matter how long, even if you lived forever, you'd never reach the end of the world. But without reaching the end of the world, you won't know liberation.¹⁰

Without reaching the end of the world, you won't know liberation. He's talking about this: the end of the world. Other places, he defines ‘the world’ as basically the six senses, what appears in the six senses, including the mind.

So you could say, philosophically speaking, all this has relevance as what we might call a ‘phenomenological’ approach, a radical phenomenological approach, in philosophical language. And yet, it's still the case that a person might go through all this business, and open to the Unfabricated as an experience, and yet, not take it, or decide not to take it, as implying anything at all with regard to the world. It only implies something about the mind's *relationship* with the world, the world of experience. So they maybe conclude that “I experienced the Unfabricated, and therefore there's no rebirth, because I've severed my infatuation and my ties and my clinging with the world. There's no rebirth in the world.” And from *that* kind of understanding, it's possible to get a very dualistic, “There's the Unfabricated, and there's the world,” and not much more is understood about the world from that viewpoint.

So one could view it that way. One could also hear all this – and I think sometimes people *do*, or partially, or partially read about it and view it as a kind of, what they call in philosophy, mentalism. In other words, all this world – there is no materiality; materiality is an illusion, and what's real is the mind, and the mind projects this world. But we're going beyond that. There are lots of critiques I could say of that partial understanding. The mind, awareness, consciousness, and all the elements of the mind that make up the mind too – they are empty too. One can come to see that they are empty too.

All of them – all the world, and the mind, and the elements of the mind, and all this – Sāriputta gives an analogy of two sheaves of corn or wheat, like in a field after the farmers do their harvesting. They might prop two sheaves of wheat, leaning on each other. The whole thing – mind and world, awareness, the elements of the mind – they all prop each other up.¹¹ That's also partly what it means, dependent co-arising, like the tripod. They're not really separate things. They're empty of being really separate things. But they're not one thing.

Some people, this, what I've described here very briefly, kind of rushing through, what I've described here is not only beautiful as a practice, but profoundly liberating for their life. Maybe, let's say, *most* people. We go back to the epistemology question. I'm still left with, "Well, how do I know I can trust this, what this means?" I'm not going into the epistemology thing right now, but for some people, it's convincing enough. That's totally convincing, and that does it for them. There will be people who don't like this approach for different reasons, or when they hear about it, they just don't find it convincing – this whole idea of less fabricating, and exploring that, a meditative journey of less fabricating. So there are other approaches to emptiness that are possible, and again, I've written about them in *Seeing That Frees*. They're what I call analytical meditations, or what are called analytical meditations – very different from this business about insight ways of looking and fabrication. Through these analytical meditations, you can come to understand: it's impossible for something to have inherent existence. It's just another way into emptiness.

Okay. So going back to something I said at the beginning, if a person, again, says 'fabrication,' whether they use that word or not, 'fabrication,' what we mean by it is an important concept. Fabrication is an important concept. For example, seeing *papañca* as fabrication, and then, you know, "I see you, Māra" – seeing it's fabrication, letting go of it, and then, you know, that one's with the unfabricated. So *papañca*, in the common sense of the word – actually, when the Buddha uses it, he means something much more subtle, I think. But anyway, we'll keep it at that.

So, "Fabrication is an important concept, because we see, for example, the difference between the *papañca* mind and the mindful mind, or the mind of bare attention. Fabrication is an important concept. But I'm not really interested in all this mystical, deep talk of the Unfabricated, etc.," or "Yeah, but that's all irrelevant to life. What's that got to do with life, this kind of thing?", or "It's only for some people, that thing," "Fabrication is important as a concept for everyone, but this business about Unfabricated? It's only for some people." I would say: are we not, then, making an artificial distinction, or drawing an artificial and arbitrary line between everyday life and the mystical? Because again, as I said at the beginning, why? Why have I, why have you, why has a person drawn the line about what is fabricated *where* they have drawn it? Why there? First of all, *where* exactly have you drawn it? And *why* there?

The principle of fabrication, as I said – the principle of fabrication, the principle of clinging, the principle of the relationship between clinging and fading – it’s the same, and it’s one spectrum. As I said, my mum can understand: there’s *papañca*. I’d have to explain to her a bit what ‘clinging’ means at that gross level, and she’d understand, “Oh, yeah, when I just calm down a bit and relax a little bit, then it all fades.” It’s the same principle: there was the fabrication, then I let go of the clinging, and the fabrication, the *papañca*, faded. It’s the same principle. It’s one spectrum, all the way from *that* to what we’ve been talking about this evening. It’s one spectrum. It’s one principle – actually, a really, really simple principle – running all the way through.

It’s only, perhaps, that preconceived, unquestioned ontological assumptions, assumptions or views about, beliefs about what is real, are somehow dragged into what’s actually one spectrum, what’s actually a coherent system, and then these preconceived assumptions about reality just make a division in that spectrum, and I end up dividing the spectrum and actually making it a bit incoherent.

Okay, last thing. Again, someone might say – and we talked about this yesterday a little bit with the realm of neither perception nor non-perception – “Well, what’s this totally transcendent Unfabricated got to do with me? What’s it got to do with life? What’s it got to do with *my* life? It’s so transcendent, so removed. Life is contact. Life is experiences.” Remember, that’s what ‘perceptions’ mean. “Life is the senses and what comes to us in the senses. Life is emotions. It’s heart. It’s story. It’s self. And even if it’s not self, it’s at least the flow of the aggregates, right? That’s life. What’s this got to do with life? What’s it got to do with me? Why should I be interested in this?” Already in the fourth *jhāna* we talked about the quietening of emotions, and they’re part of life. In the *jhānas*, we’re getting used to this unfabricating. Again, it’s one way of understanding what’s going on. It’s probably the most helpful way of understanding what’s going on in the *jhānas*. They’re not – for the hundredth time on this retreat – states of deeper concentration and ability to keep your mind unwavering on one object, etc.

So already in the fourth *jhāna*, there’s a quietening of what we might view as life, and there’s, hopefully, a kind of opening to the beauty of this which is sort of halfway or a lot less like life than we think, than we’re used to thinking. So what’s it got to do with me? And again – we’ve talked about this before – it may be that a dualistic understanding and a dualistic sense of the world and sense of things comes out of all this: “There is the Unfabricated, this wondrous, mystical release and opening, and something that is completely beyond conception, completely beyond perception. There is the Unfabricated, and there’s the world of the fabricated. And they’re really different, they have no connection, and *this* is clearly better than *that*, and I don’t want to be reborn. I just want to – whatever the word is – dissolve, unbind.” *Nirvāṇa* means ‘unbind.’ That’s one of the etymologies – *vāṇa*, like a vine, like you wrap things in vines. “*Nirvāṇa* – I just want to unbind in that and not be reborn.”

So it could lead to a kind of dualistic understanding. Absolutely. Could. Doesn’t have to. Sometimes what happens for a person who opens to this kind of experience, and then it’s as if that Unfabricated then can be – at least at times – a sense of it shining through the world of experience, the world of matter, the world of phenomenal reality. The light of the Unfabricated shines through. The song of the Unfabricated blows through. It casts a light on this world. It casts *its* light on this world, or it is the light behind and through the phenomenal world, or it gives a kind of space and context to this world, and the comings and goings, and the ups and downs of this world.

So that's much less dualistic. Have to be careful, though, because remember we talked about the after-effects on perception? By now, it should be clear there are *many* possibilities for what could be perceived as shining through. It could be the joy of the second *jhāna*, as some people have reported very beautifully. That can shine through, or the third *jhāna*, or the realm of this or that. So there is this possibility, I think, of a sense of the Unfabricated shining through, but we have to be careful in our discernment: is it the Unfabricated, or is it something else?

But a third possibility is, again, what I've touched on before, and I think we talked about it yesterday again: it's like, through all this, I go further. I go further than the Unfabricated. I *don't* stop there, wondrous as that is, and I go further in my understanding of emptiness and dependent arising. And I realize through that, I sense through that, in my being, in the fibres of my being, in my consciousness, I sense through that this – again, we run out of language – whatever the words might be for a participation so profound that it's beyond the word 'participation,' for an intimacy and an involvement so intimate, and involved, and close, and deep, that it's beyond what we usually mean by words like 'intimacy' and 'involvement.' Participation, intimacy, involvement in the mystery of things, in the mystery, in the magic of appearances. And then there's sacredness everywhere. There's holiness everywhere. There's this beauty of emptiness everywhere, without any duality.

So people take this different ways, but there are possibilities here, different possibilities. Okay. Let's have some quiet together.

¹ DN 15.

² SN 35:117.

³ AN 11:10.

⁴ MN 49, DN 11.

⁵ Sn 5:6.

⁶ MN 52.

⁷ E.g. in DN 33, SN 38:14, SN 45:165.

⁸ This and the quotes that follow are from AN 9:36.

⁹ This and the quotes that follow are from MN 111.

¹⁰ AN 4:45.

¹¹ SN 12:67.

Going Forwards

Thank you, Sari.

So hopefully you could get a sense of, you know, what you've put into the time here and to your practice, and hopefully you could get a sense of really appreciating that. It's really, really important to have that sense of appreciation, almost independent of how you assess the results from the perspective of the mind state right now. The mind state, with the hindrances, not hindrances, and we judge this or that, how it's going, how I am, how my practice is, etc., success, failure. But just independent of that, to really be able to appreciate the efforts, and the dedication, and the consistency.

So I know, certainly, as Robert said before he left, and Kirsten before she went on retreat, and Sari and I – we really, really appreciate what you’ve put into your practice and the efforts you’ve made, your willingness to work and play, your love of exploration, all that. And I hope that you have got a little taste, a little sense of the beauty of this kind of practice, and a little sense perhaps of its possibilities, the possibilities here, and the kind of art and magic that can be involved. I think, I know at least some of you have that sense. So I hope you got a little taste of the loveliness, and I know that, for everyone, it will have been difficult, and it has been difficult and challenging in lots of different ways at times. And that’s also part of what we need to appreciate in ourselves: our willingness to just keep showing up, and keep working and playing when it’s difficult in all these different ways. And we’ve talked about the difficulties that come when we have a desire or desires, an aim, a goal, a direction; the difficulties that come when we want to stay steady with a certain intention, over not just an hour, but over days and weeks and then years or whatever. The inner critic, the self, you know, the propensity in our culture for self-measurement, self-judgment – this is all part of the difficult terrain that we have to kind of somehow navigate, somehow relate to wisely with these kinds of practices. So really, thank you for all of that. It involves a lot, you know? It’s a big deal.

[3:56] So transitioning out of the retreat – you know, you’ve all done lots of retreats before – is a little bit different, this retreat. It’s different than, say, some retreats where you’ve really closed the senses, and you’re really looking, really narrowing down to a microscopic attention. Usually, the transition from that kind of retreat is quite, can be quite jarring – needs a lot of care, and if you’ve been really slowing down, etc. But here, because we’ve had this emphasis on more openness of awareness, more inclusion of appreciation in the senses, that sort of trauma of sudden sense stimulation is usually not such an issue on this retreat. It shouldn’t be such an issue. What may be asking for a little more care is the heart. Again, on this kind of retreat, the heart becomes very open, very sensitive in lovely ways, and so that needs some care as you move, take your journeys home, wherever you’re going, as you encounter friends and family again, as you move through the coming days. Do you know, do we know how to take care of our heart? And what does that really mean? That’s a huge subject. What does it mean to take care of the sensitive heart?

Actually, I don’t know – how was breakfast for you with the ... [laughs] Were some of you a bit buzzing after that? Maybe. Maybe not. Yeah, it depends, again, on what kind of retreat, but that’s quite a lot of sense stimulation – suddenly talking, and the roomful of people talking, probably a lot of energy gathered over three weeks, etc., and quite loud. So what does that kind of buzz need, if there is such a thing? And in terms of the caring for the heart, you know, when you go wherever you’re going, caring, caring for the heart, caring for your relationships, the relationships with the people in your life, and your loved ones, which means also caring about what you share, or *how* you share, or *when* you share, and with whom. So you might be super excited about what you’ve uncovered, discovered, or you might just want to vent after the retreat or whatever it is, but who am I sharing with? And is it the right moment? Are *they* in the right space? Am *I* in the right space? Why am I sharing? What am I looking for here? So of course, sharing’s really, really important, but sometimes, like everything, we need to be attuned, because if it’s not the right time for this person, or they’re not really a person who’s actually that interested, or I’m wanting something, and I’m not fully conscious that I’m wanting something from this sharing, and I’m not clear with the other person, “This is what I want,” “When I share, I

would like you to listen this way,” or “I would like this kind of interest or that kind of interest,” or whatever it is. That’s also, you know, to care for that, which means to enter into that with awareness, responsiveness, attunement. This is also really, really important in terms of caring for the heart.

So hopefully everyone’s going back to a full and engaged life of practice, both informally and formally, in terms of daily practice. So this is mostly what I want to talk about now. I feel that most people do better if they have periods in their life where they’ve kind of decided to explore a certain practice or a certain element of a practice. So just as we have here – we’re doing *jhānas*, and we talked about a playground and all that. This could apply to any practice. So you could go home now and decide, “Well, actually, I want to do *mettā* practice,” or whatever it is. But just the idea of having a period – a week, a month, six weeks, three months, whatever it is – some delineated period where I’m intending to explore *this* in my daily sitting, perhaps also in my informal practice off the cushion, and I have a playground. And then after that period is finished, after a week or whatever, then I review: “Oh, I’m really learning a lot. I want to keep going. I’ll do another week or another month” or whatever it is, or “That was good, but I want to do something else now,” and then you set another period. Again, the intention is steady, and there’s a playground, a learning playground. Not everyone, but I tend to feel that people learn and develop much, much better that way. And within that, within the playground, there needs to be creativity, experimentation, playfulness. You need to actually play in practice. So with the steady intention, with the playground, then I just have fun, and I try this and I try that, and I’m doing different things – a lot of them really small, small little things. So this applies to all practice. We’ve talked about it a lot on this retreat in terms of *jhānas*, but actually it applies to all practices.

Oftentimes people find, “I sort of only really make progress on retreat, and outside of retreat, I’m just kind of treading water. I’m just kind of putting my time in in the practice, just kind of ... or maybe even falling apart.” And usually it’s because they’re not allowing themselves to play. They’re not allowing – I’m not allowing myself to be creative within this steady intention and playground. And, of course, it dries up – there’s no juice there. There’s no creative, playful input. So we can think of, and I think it’s a really good idea to think of the kind of different practice – I don’t know – *streams*. A lot of stuff comes up in our lives, at home and at work and whatever. And sometimes, it can be just like, “Oh, this has come up, and now this has come up,” and so, “Pff! Okay, this is what I’m trying to deal with, this is what I’m trying to sit with, this is what I’m trying to meet,” and there’s a place for all that. But we could also have this idea that, “Now, *this* is what I’m exploring. I’m exploring *this* practice. I’m exploring *that* practice,” and then this or that comes up at work, or in relationship, or whatever, and because I’m exploring this practice right now, then that suggests certain ways of working with what’s coming up, as opposed to “I’m just putting time into sitting,” and then kind of trying to cope with what comes up in my life. So just as on this retreat, we had a certain preference in terms of how we would work with emotions, right? If it was a different retreat, if it was a retreat *about* emotions, that preference would be reversed, and we would be doing lots of different things. But the practice determines how I am with what comes up.

[11:20] So if we think of different practice streams, you know, you’ve got the whole insight ways of looking thing, you’ve got *samādhi* and *jhāna* practice, you’ve got Soulmaking Dharma, you’ve got *brahmavihāras*, you’ve got emotions, emotional awareness, emotional skill, the whole realm of psychology, and inquiring, and being skilful with one’s psychology. One could take just the element,

some of the elements of Right Speech, and have periods where I'm just exploring the expression of what is difficult, of what is hard for someone to hear, and that's what I'm doing. That's what I'm most interested in in the next few weeks. Or I'm exploring generosity. Having a theme and really, really exploring that. There are many, many possibilities – the four foundations of mindfulness, or one foundation of mindfulness. Or, if one's going back to a life of activism and engagement, how to really make that practice. That's very hectic and very intense. And within these different streams of practice, we have our different playgrounds. Within *jhāna* practice, we still have our different playgrounds. Within insight ways of looking, we have the different playgrounds.

Someone was asking, is it possible to explain – you know, I've talked in the past about skilful fabrication, and now we're talking about unfabricating, and what's the relationship between those two, and then what's the relationship between those two and *jhāna* practice, and emptiness, and soulmaking? And I've talked about that elsewhere. It's complex, but it's really, really important to understand. I think for now what might be important is just to think in terms of these different streams of practice, where my playground is, and listening and reading in collaboration with whatever my playground is, so that, in time, I begin to understand more the conceptual frameworks of each practice, and how each relates to the other, etc. Then we can have a big *maṇḍala* of different practices, and it fits, like a *maṇḍala*, it fits very coherently together to make something very beautiful.

So it might be periods, for example, *jhāna* practice, and you might feel after this retreat, “Oh, that's what I want to do,” but it doesn't have to be. And just to say, as well, if you choose insight ways of looking, if you pick up on this idea and you want to choose something like insight ways of looking, then how much? It's really good to do *samādhi* practice or *brahmavihāra* practice in combination with, or to balance out the insight ways of looking. How much, what the ratio is – whether it's 50/50, or even 80/20, or 20/80, or whatever it is, you can experiment with that. But it also doesn't need to be in the order. Like I said, “First I do my *samādhi* and calm my mind down and get my focus, and then I do my insight” – it doesn't have to be that way. “I'm feeling wretched, and restless, and agitated, and pissed off, and confused” – I could do my *samādhi*. I could bring an insight way of looking to that, and if it's working, as we've talked about, because there's the release of clinging there, etc., it should calm things down, and then open things up, and *then* I can go to my *samādhi*. Really get out of this whole idea of there's an order: “First I prepare my mind with the concentration, then I do my insight.” It doesn't, it really doesn't need to work that way.

And of course, if you're choosing different themes, I'll come back to this later, but there's the possibility of working together, making groups, connecting with each other, and having themed groups, where you practise together with a certain theme for a while. Like, for example, Right Speech, or an element of Right Speech, or generosity, and you go out and you play with something in the week with generosity, and you come back, and you compare notes. And you really see, “Wow, the power of that,” and you learn from each other. And of course, there may be groups where there is a teacher and things like that. One of the things I hope, before I die, is that I will be able to – I don't know what the word would be – but make it clear in these different streams of practice, like who's a sort of qualified teacher in this stream of practice or in that stream of practice. I'm hoping that that will be possible. I've only made very little headway with that, but I'm really hoping that that will be possible, so you can kind of know where to go, if you want to explore this practice or that practice.

In the meantime, though, there is already running an emptiness group online that meets every two weeks, I think.¹ Sari is teaching with Nathan, and Juha hasn't started yet, because he's been on retreat for three months, but he will be one of the teachers, and Susy Keely, who most of you probably don't know, and Yahel, who's a teacher in Israel. So that exists in the meantime. And very lovely, from what I've heard, and for people who want to explore emptiness, you can learn a lot there and share together and benefit from that. So I think Nathan will put up some info for that on the board afterwards.

[17:27] So just in terms of *jhāna* practice, the arising of *jhāna*, or the arising of *samādhi*, depends on a lot of conditions. A lot of conditions need to come together. It's very, very, very possible off retreat. So it's not something that needs to be confined to retreat. If it is, if you find it's confined to retreat, then the question is, "Why is it confined to retreat?" It's dependent on conditions, okay? Someone asked me, "Do I have to avoid orgasm in order to practise *jhāna*?" Absolutely not. Where does this idea come from? Or I have to avoid sex, or I have to have a special diet, or something like that. What is it we have to not have? [yogi inaudible in background] Yeah. Entanglement. Entanglement in the hindrances – it's not even that we need to not have the hindrances; it's *entanglement* in the hindrances. So 'withdrawn' – when the Buddha says 'withdrawn' or 'in seclusion' from the hindrances, it means withdrawn from entanglement, not entangled in whatever's going on in my life. That's the condition – that more than anything else. So it's not that, "Oh, I've got a busy job," or this or that, or whatever, or "relationship's tricky at the moment," it's how much the heart and mind are entangled. That's what makes the difference.

So it's certainly not true that one has to be celibate, or not have sex, or only practise sort of Taoist non-ejaculatory orgasms or whatever it is. There is that teaching out there, and that has its place, and whatever, but sometimes people who are into that get a little bit limited in the view. So whether an orgasm brings energy or depletes energy, again, is dependent on a lot of factors. So we're lay people, and if that's part of your life, you have to really explore this. You know, whether sex and orgasm depletes energy or actually allows energy depends on things like what was the quality of love, what was the quality of soul-connection involved, or how about the openness? That's much more significant, regarding energy, than the fact of orgasm or something, and much more significant in terms of *jhānic* availability and that sort of thing. And similarly with diet. We can get these ideas. We have to find out for oneself. And I speak as someone who's got an absolutely tormented digestive system for the last thirty-five years or something. Find out for you what works. Just don't buy the theories: "Don't be within 150 metres of a clove of garlic." Find out if it's true for you or not. Sometimes we get – what's it, the Ayurveda? Sattvic? Is that the ...? [yogi inaudible in background] What's the first one – the high, the pure one? Sattvic. Yeah. So don't get the sattvic neurosis about all this. Experiment, play, creativity, you know, willingness to play *in* practice, but also *around* practice, with stuff like diet and whatever else. It's really, really important.

[21:16] So you can discover a lot, a lot, a lot on your own, a lot about all these kinds of things. And, all being well, the recordings from this retreat should be available sometime, and they should be, I'm hoping they'll be very, very helpful. And helpful now, as soon as you get hold of them, and helpful for, in fact, years to come. There's a tremendous amount of information on them. You may not realize, but it's probably almost impossible to pick up all that information just in this three weeks, in your first

listening. A lot of the questions, naturally, you would have, were, in fact, already there, already given out, and it's just too much information. So it's there, and they should be helpful, I hope.

And in terms of *samādhi* practice, don't forget about things like we had the ... do you remember right on the opening, we did that counting with the breath? It takes a little while to get used to, but for some people it'll be a really potent practice – really, really useful. It can feel really awkward at first with the long breath and the counting, whatever, but something like that – really worth developing. So think about all the tools that you might have.

I think one of the lovely things about *jhāna* practice, especially if we do it this way, where there's a kind of emphasis on marinating and mastery, is that you could go away and not do any retreats for a year, and then come back on retreat, and it's a bit like putting a bookmark in a book and leaving it on a shelf for a year, and you open the book again, and the bookmark is in the same place. Your playground, your edge playground, is pretty much in the same place – *if* I've practised in this way that we've emphasized, with the mastery, and the marinating, and the staying, and not just rushed through. So that's a very lovely thing. In other words, you don't need to be in a rush and kind of slightly tight: "I need to keep up my *jhāna* practice, otherwise next time I'll go on retreat it won't be there." It doesn't need to be like that. There is this kind of mysterious bookmark magic thing as well.

But I hope, too, you know, we've talked about – it was clear that it was really important to talk about other, larger questions: meta-questions about desire, for example, and the relationships with desire, and what goes on for us with desire, and what's included in my desire, and what exactly *are* my desires; meta-questions about desire and about conceptual frameworks. I hope that you're beginning to realize that these things are important, and that those questions become actually part of your practice – the exploring of the relationship with desire, the exploring of the relationship with conceptual frameworks, and the exploring of conceptual frameworks. So even understanding that conceptual frameworks are important to understand, that's already something that's really, really major. Huge. I think I've already said, but without it, without a conceptual framework, dramatic experiences can just be like, there's a "Wow!", but they don't actually liberate very much, or they're not very transformative. They're not very helpful. They're not as opening as they could be. It's the conceptual framework that gives power to the experience. Or it may be, without a conceptual framework, or with a conceptual framework that isn't quite coherent, or that's a bit kind of incongruent, it doesn't really fit together with itself, or it doesn't fit together with the way I'm practising, this can just actually create confusion or a kind of myopia in practice, where one's just looking at the experience that I've just had, and is sort of a bit mesmerized by the experience, but it doesn't really reach out and spread its effect in the life. Or, even more problematic, there can be, because of that, a kind of narrowing of what our practice is. Sometimes I have known people doing the same practice for twenty years. Why? Because there are no conceptual frameworks, and even they're not quite sure how that practice fits in with the rest of the Dharma or other practices. So the whole Dharma can shrink, and the whole sense of what practice is can shrink.

So I really hope you feel that you've learnt not just about *samādhi* and *jhānas* and that sort of thing, but also about desire, and your patterns with desire, and having goals and an aim and a direction, and staying steady with intention. All that stuff mirrors our life. So whatever we've bumped into here around desire, around feeling confined in a certain intention – "I want to do this, I want to do that,"

feeling restless within it – whatever patterns around that, whatever problems we experience when we set a goal or an aim, or a fear of doing so, all that, on retreat, it just mirrors life. Same, the same thing. Inner critic, the difficulty to sustain, you know, singleness of intention, the wobbling, the ambivalence: “Am I in the right place? Am I doing the right thing? I should be somewhere else.” The doubt, the hindrances becoming *papañca*, and then becoming so convincing – this is life stuff; it’s not just retreat stuff, meditative stuff. It’s life stuff. Feeling imprisoned in a form, in an intention, in a group, in a relationship – this is life stuff, all of that. So, you know, I hope that you – because we’ve talked about it, we kept returning to this – I hope that you can really see that these elements are really, really important sort of meta-elements in relation to practice, but, of course, in relation to our life. Of course. And as I said several times on retreat, they may end up being much more important than whether I attain this or that *jhāna* – how I am with these things, what I learn with these things.

[28:02] So, there are all kinds of streams of practice, and within that there are different playgrounds that one might have. As I said, there are groups, and sometimes, really, we learn better with each other. Then we might find a group where there’s a teacher or teachers or whatever, and that’s great, but also peer groups, you know, working together, as I mentioned before. I was thinking about this – I’m not sure if *jhāna* practice would work so well as a peer group. Maybe it would. I’m not sure, but my sense is it might be a little more tricky with people being in different places, or progressing at very different rates or whatever – again, because of lots of different conditions. But it might. Something to find out. Something like emptiness, or studying emptiness, or soulmaking, for example, may work much better in terms of Saṅgha groups together, study groups, practice groups together, peer groups together. And it might be that *jhāna* practice is more of a solitary endeavour. I don’t know, but if you want to experiment, find out.

But again, it’s interesting with regard to groups, because, as we stressed so much, about the necessity of clarity with regard to, “What is the precise mix of my desires?” So for my practice, for my life, for this retreat, or for a group that I go to, that I form or I’m part of – what exactly am I wanting? What are the confluences of my desires and my intentions? So on a soulmaking retreat, for example – many of you have been on soulmaking retreats; some of you have been on soulmaking retreats – you know, there’s lots of dyad practice or triad practice, relational practice in the retreat, lots of sharing of images and experiences, lots of intimacy that way, lots of relational practice. But then very easily it might be that, of course, one feels very touched by that sharing and by that intimacy, and without realizing it ... You go and form a soulmaking group. “Oh, let’s form a soulmaking group together.” But actually, I’m not careful. I’m looking, “Oh, actually my desire is really for the sharing and the Saṅgha primarily, and less for the soulmaking. What I really want is the sharing and the Saṅgha,” which is a fantastic desire. It’s a really, really important desire. “I want connection. I want intimacy with other practitioners. I want that sharing.” But if I’ve set up or going to a soulmaking group, and actually without realizing it, and without the others realizing it, I’m actually wanting Saṅgha primarily (I might still want soulmaking – maybe it’s just secondary), then, because of the importance of what I actually desire, because of the determinative effect of what I actually desire in the mix, the soulmaking will not blossom so well, because I’m actually coming at it wanting something else.

So groups can fall apart. I’ve seen groups trying to set up, trying to set up, not really happening, not really happening – what’s happening? People are not clear about what they’re going for, and so it’s not

really getting off the ground. Or you set up a group about a certain theme, and it somehow just becomes a general Dharma group or a general, “Let’s just sit together, because it’s nice to sit together, and then we’ll kind of share about whatever.” All of that’s great. If that’s clear, then that can be the primary intention. The point, the larger point, which I’ve said so many times on this retreat now, is about the importance of being aware of what my intention is, because that will determine what unfolds.

So if some people are in the group wanting soulmaking, for example, and some people are just wanting Saṅgha, or primarily wanting Saṅgha, that group is going to be frustrating – probably for both, but certainly for the people wanting the soulmaking. As for just staying with that idea of soulmaking, it’s certainly true that soulmaking practices will build and grow the sense of Saṅgha – absolutely they will, for sure they will, because of all that lovely intimacy and sharing. But it’s the primacy of intention and our intentions and desires, and what they are, the primacy of that in determining what’s possible and what unfolds in a group. Or again, it could be that we have a group, or even just my Dharma practice, and the intention is, “Oh, it’s because I want to kind of rectify my energy problems or my energy constrictions,” or “I want to heal my energy blocks,” and not whatever the group was set up for – Soulmaking Dharma, or this or that, or even just Dharma in general. And again, that lack of clarity or lack of honesty about what the intentions are will have an effect. Same, same issues.

[33:43] So this is all stuff to think about going forward. It’s all, I feel, really important stuff. But let’s end now. I wanted to say thank you to my three helpers. So I see Nic here and Laurence, but I don’t know if Lea is here ...? [inaudible in background] She’s not here. Thank you to Nic, and Laurence, and Lea, who’s not here, because I certainly wouldn’t have been able to get here every day. [laughs] We wouldn’t have been able to do this without you guys, so it’s really hugely appreciated. And thank you to Sari, and to Kirsten, and to Robert, who’s left – again, just so valuable, your help and your input, and being there and working together. It couldn’t have happened without you guys.

[34:57, dedicating the merit begins]

Okay. Let’s just take a moment to dedicate our practice together. So just as Sari led us beautifully before, see if you can open to connect with a sense of appreciation for your efforts. Just bypassing the whole question of success/failure, and how well you practised, or what you achieved. It’s actually impossible to know quite what the fruits of our practice are and will be as time unfolds, as conditions meet other conditions, as what has ripened and matured and been worked on here ripples out into the world in so many different ways. It’s impossible to know what the fruits are. It’s impossible to assess, measure or judge that.

Know that you have shown up. Know that you have been willing, repeatedly, to work through the difficult, through the challenging, through the lovely, that you’ve been curious. Can you see in that the beauty of your intention? Over and over, the beauty of your intentions, countless moments of intention. Countless, countless. Rain into the sea – all those raindrops of beautiful intention, of willingness, of courage, dignity, nobility, effort, wisdom, responsiveness.

All that makes karma. It has effects we don’t know. We cannot know all the effects. In the wide, wild mystery of things, we cannot know the course of all that water, all the rippings out, but somehow, in the mystery of interconnectedness, in the mystery of dependent arising, may the goodness and

beauty of our intention, of our work, of our efforts, may it be for the benefit of those near and dear to us, those who are close to us in life. May it ripple out to touch them, to bless them, perhaps in obvious ways, perhaps in not obvious ways. May they receive the fruits and the blessings of our practice.

And all those beings whom we don't really know, but whom we encounter in our everyday movements in the world, living their lives, struggling as we do with body, with mind, with relationship – we don't know them; brief encounters here and there – somehow, may they, too, receive the blessings and the fruits of our practice.

For all beings we will never meet face to face, we will never encounter directly, and again, somehow, perhaps in obvious, direct ways, somehow in the mystery of things, in not-so-obvious ways, in indirect ways, may they, too, be touched, be blessed by the goodness and beauty of our intention. May they receive the blessings and the fruits of our practice.

For those whose lives are caught up in war, living in fear, not in safety, may they receive the fruits and blessings of our practice. For those tormented in mind and heart, not at ease, may they receive the fruits and blessings of our practice. And those in the world living in areas of famine, of shortage, of scarcity, may they receive the fruits and the blessings of our practice. And for all those beings, human and non-human, whose lives have become hounded by ecological devastation, who have to flee their homes, their homelands, may our practice be of benefit, be of support.

May all beings, everywhere, without exception, receive the fruits and the blessings of our practice.

[47:30, dedicating the merit ends]

Okay, so thank you, again. Go safely, wherever you're going, and practise with intelligence, with playfulness, with love, and with enjoyment.

[inaudible in background] Sari and me blow out the candles? Sure. Like birthday? [laughter] I hope I'm getting a cake. [laughter, blowing out candles, applause]

¹ "Emptiness Drop In Group," <https://dependentorigination.org/group/>, accessed 22 Feb. 2020.

PS - Playing in the In-Betweens

Hi, everyone. I'm recording this from home. I got home and realized there were a few questions that I hadn't had time to respond to that I think would be helpful for people at later points in their practice. There were a few other technical instructions that also, I think, would be helpful for most people at some point or other, as they go forward with *jhāna* practice, and a couple of general things. Most of what I want to go into – not all of it, but most of it – kind of falls into the category of working in sort of grey areas, *jhānic* grey areas.

So, as I mentioned, sometimes when a *jhāna* opens, for the first few experiences, it's very intense, very clear, seemingly effortless. One's very much *in* the *jhāna*, and might feel like there's nothing to do, nothing to improve on even. And as one gains more experience in and out of that *jhāna*, and gets more familiar with that particular *jhānic* territory – whichever it is, whatever *jhāna* we're talking about – then there *do* appear times, or it becomes apparent in one's practice, that sometimes it's very clear,

very pure, if you like, a pure *jhānic* experience. Other times, we're sort of in the *jhānic* territory, but not quite; sort of para-*jhānic* territory, or kind of half in and half out, or on the edge. Or, as I mentioned, I'm mostly in, but some very subtle hindrances are kind of yapping quietly at the borders of consciousness, or there's an area of the body that won't clear up, or these kinds of things. There are many things, but it falls into that kind of territory, the grey area, working in the grey areas or transitional states. Not everything, but a lot of things.

Before that, though, there are a couple of general things, and then something about soulmaking in *jhāna*. So let's see how we do. The first general thing is, again, to make clear that I would say it's more optimal, for the way we're practising *jhānas*, to not fall into a sort of strict, unbroken rhythm of formal practice: sit, walk, sit, walk, sit, walk, forty-five minutes, forty-five minutes, one hour, one hour, however it's divided up. Of course, sometimes that will feel like it's the most helpful rhythm at that time, but the key thing here is: does it *feel* like it is? Again, am I listening? Am I being responsive? Am I being attentive? Am I tuning my practice rhythm at the moment, right now? Not for this retreat, but right now, for this morning, or whatever it is, or this afternoon, or this evening. Am I tuning it to what feels best, what feels like it's actually most fertile?

Sometimes if you sit, and the *jhāna*'s coming, and it all feels really good, you can go way beyond one hour – way, way, way beyond. Just sit in an unlimited way. You run out of batteries, try again. Try to get the *jhāna* again, without getting up, maybe two or three times. Sit as long as you can – not with any forcing, but just sit as long as it works, as long as it feels good. And the same with walking practice, and the same with standing practice, unless for some reason you only have twenty minutes, or forty minutes, or whatever it is: “I know I'll just go forty minutes to walk now,” or whatever. That's all fine. But basically there needs to be this responsive attunement of the rhythms of our practice, and we're really finding out, feeling into, getting a sense for, and finding out what's the most helpful right now, and breaking out of a kind of rigid, tight, predefined, preset mould of a rhythm for practice, for different postures. This is also part, as I mentioned, because the day needs to breathe, and there needs to be space for appreciation, and beauty, and a little bit of exercise, and open-heartedness, and all that.

So I'm reiterating that, but I also want to say that when some of you will start exploring insight ways of looking, as a sort of huge stream of investigation in your practice, and when that opens up, I would say the same principle applies there. You can have times where it's sit, walk, sit, walk – very rigid and predefined. That's absolutely fine. But you also really want times where it's this more fluid, attentive, open scheduling that's much more responsive, because again there, in the way that I most commonly teach insight practice (which is through different insight ways of looking, learning them, employing them, seeing what happens with them), again, we still want the day to breathe. We still want space in the heart and the soul for appreciation, and beauty, and to be touched, and the open-heartedness.

We also need space to notice the after-effects on perception. So whether we're doing *jhānic* practice, as it goes deeper, and they become more common, and we know to look for them and look out for them, very gently, without pressure, but also in insight ways of looking practice, again, potentially very powerful, very noticeable after-effects on perception there as well. But there's another reason, when we come to insight ways of looking, practising insight ways of looking: partly the way that process works, in *this* way of teaching insight meditation, is *not* through the continuity, through the

accumulation of a sort of power of mindfulness through just being completely continuous with the mindfulness as I sit, walk, sit, walk, unbroken, go to lunch, continue the mindfulness. Great way of practice, and a certain intensity in this continuity of mindfulness will be developed, hopefully, that way, and through that continuity of mindfulness, it can illuminate certain things. So that's great.

But an alternative way of going about things is actually deliberately practising different insight ways of looking. Then I actually need the comparison. So I need to practise this insight way of looking, and then, actually, in a way, let it go, and compare the difference in perception when I let it go. Now I'm just back to a normal consciousness. Of course there's a way of looking, because there's *always* a way of looking, but I'm not particularly trying this or that way of looking. And it's through the comparison that I learn about the dependent arising. So I'm not trying to accumulate so much mindfulness that I then perceive 'The Truth,' because there isn't one truth. I'm practising a way of looking, and then I let go of practising that way of looking, because then, when I practise the way of looking, I notice what it does to perception. I notice the sense of things. When I stop practising, I notice there's a different sense of things. So in a way, we actually *need* a looser, or rather, less continuous schedule of practice, or intention of practice. Again, it can be continuous for a long period. That's absolutely fine. But it does need some kind of coming out of the insight way of looking, and maybe just going into a more normal consciousness, without a deliberate intention, so that we can see, through comparison, the effect of the insight way of looking. It's not that it *always* has to be like that, but sometimes that's part of it, too. There's less of this emphasis on continuity. I see, when I practise this insight way of looking – I *should* see, in ten minutes, in twenty minutes, in an hour, whatever it is – it should be obvious what's happening there, obvious its effects on perception.

Okay. So that's one general thing. A second general thing is about posture. I mentioned on the retreat, eventually you can kind of access *jhāna* and stay in a *jhāna* in almost any posture. Posture becomes very, very not important. But before that time, before the practice has really ripened to that stage, posture is actually very important, particularly at the beginning. I was encouraging, in some of the early guided meditations, etc., really to sense into the poise and the balance in the posture, and see if you can get a feel for, a sense for the beauty in the posture – the beauty, the dignity, the nobility that is reflected in the balance between the *citta* qualities that the posture manifests, expresses, reflects, between openness, relaxation, softness, and between brightness, alertness, poise of intention on the other hand. But also just the sense of actual balance in the posture, and the actual way that the mind, when it encompasses the whole body in and includes the whole body space in a very alert, open, receptive, sensitive way, that the posture is actually very, very subtly affected, and subtle changes in the posture can affect our ability to have that kind of pervasive energy body awareness.

So this is really, really important. If you're not familiar with this, as I said at the beginning of the retreat, it's really, really worth taking a little time to play with. I remember actually Kirsten showing me a picture of her very young nieces – I think she has three or four nieces; I can't remember – meditating, or sort of trying to meditate. They're very, very young, between, I think, 2 and 10, their ages. But one of them, it was very interesting – it was quite a young one. You could tell from the photograph that her awareness was spread throughout her body. They were all sitting cross-legged, sort of copying Kirsten [laughs], with their eyes shut. But the awareness was spread through the whole body, and you could feel from the photograph the poise in the posture, but also in the attention, in the awareness, and you

could feel the quality of the attention, and that it pervaded her whole body. It was very alive and right there. It was quite interesting. The posture and *citta* quality go very much together at first, and it's really worth playing with that if you're not familiar with it.

I remember one of my first teachers, in an interview. This was many, many years ago, and I got called in for an interview. I think I was one of the first people. They would call you in for interviews on these retreats, and I was one of the first people to get called in. I thought, "Oh, why am I first?" I was a teenager. And he said, "You're very out of contact with the earth," or something like that. "Very out of contact with the ground." I had no idea what he was talking about, but it struck me as being really a problem. It sounded like a very serious ailment. And so he got me to sit, and played with my posture a little bit, and at a certain point, he just said, "There. There." I was not really in contact with my body at all back then. I had no training in that. I was probably pretty disconnected, as probably most teenagers in that generation were, disconnected from my body. He just said, "There." He was just gently moving my shoulders and my torso, and then he said, "There."

Really it wasn't so much a visible kind of yoga-looking posture that he was responding to. He was responding to, he was feeling, the way my posture helped my mind kind of inhabit the whole body, the whole body space, in a very natural, and open, and upright, and alert way. I think *that's* what he was picking up on. Of course, to me, it just seemed like some kind of supernatural power at the time. Now that I'm much more used to all this, and teaching, and energy body is very much what I emphasize, I can easily understand how it's possible to have that kind of awareness with another person, of another person – how their mind and body are right now, and how their energy body awareness is, and how the posture is, perhaps, allowing, supporting, or limiting certain possibilities psychically, certain possibilities for the *citta*, or certain possibilities in relationship.

I remember working with someone in an interview, and they were in a very difficult space in their heart and mind and soul, and I was asking them to come into presence, to be in relationship with me, with the open heart and the sort of holding there, and encouraged them to open to *their* body experience as well. But I could tell that there was just something very, very subtle in how they were sitting and holding their posture – certainly nothing like being hunched over, or contracted, or some kind of obviously defensive posture. It was extremely subtle, but that was enough to prevent her from coming into a different relationship with herself, but also coming into a different relationship with me. And we played with that just a little bit, and it allowed the relational space, both with herself and with myself, to open up to possibilities that were just not available two minutes beforehand, five minutes beforehand. And she had no idea.

So the mind, the *citta*, affects the body and the posture, and the posture affects the *citta*. This goes very, very subtle and deep, until it begins to be the states of openness, and states of *jhāna*, states of *samādhi* and all that, become much more familiar, and they're less dependent on the posture being like *this* or like *that* to enable them. But maybe for quite a while for some people, it is quite posture-dependent. So it's really worth taking the time to play with posture, even in almost what might seem like microscopically subtle ways. That was part of what I was trying to encourage at the beginning of the retreat.

[15:50] Okay. So let's run through a few more specific technical things. As I said, most of these are relative to things kind of going well, but hitting some tricky spots where it's just not quite coalescing or

coming together. We spoke about – sometimes there can be pain, obviously, or discomfort in the body, or a sense of contraction, or holding, or tightness somewhere in the energy body, the physical body. And we spoke about the possibility of actually taking that difficult spot and, for example, if you're doing *mettā* practice as your base practice, imagining the centre of the *mettā* there. The *mettā* is radiating from that very difficulty. Or imagining the breath coming in and out there. Or the energy, that being the centre of the energy body and the centre of the breath energy, if you like, or the centre of the light, the white luminosity, or golden-white luminosity that might pervade the energy body. Just almost exactly where you'd least expect it, imagining *that* to be the centre of what you're trying to encourage. Sometimes it can turn out, just as we'd least expect, counterintuitively, to be the loveliest place.

What I want to add now is, similarly, that if the mind is fuzzy, or foggy, or woolly, the mind, the head, and if you're tired, a similar thing can work: imagine light there in the head. The head feels dull, or there's that kind of tiredness behind the eyes, or just the kind of woolliness there. Imagine the light centred there, if you're working with light as part of the energy body awareness. Imagine the breath energy coming in and out there, or coming in or out through the top of the head, through the sides, the front, the back, whatever it is, or radiating, expanding out from that very woolliness. So just the same principle, but applied to qualities of the *citta*. Same principle as we suggested with regard to bodily discomforts or blocks, we can apply to discomforts or blocks in the *citta*. And often they do *feel* in the head, so we just imagine them in the head.

Some of these are quite basic. Some will apply to later *jhānas*, and I'll go into that, the specific *jhāna*. Some of them apply to working outside of a *jhāna*, before you're even in *jhānic* territory. Or, as I said, the *jhāna*'s kind of going okay, but there's a little bit that's not kind of brought into the fold of the *jhāna*; it hasn't spread there. So some of these things will apply at any level.

We just mentioned pain. We mentioned on the retreat – and again, it could be any *jhāna*; say it's the second, or first, or whatever – the *jhānic nimitta* is there. I'm in the territory of the *jhāna*, but it's not quite suffusing the whole body, and indeed, there's some place in the body where there's pain or discomfort. So it's in the *jhānic* territory, the *nimitta* has arisen, but it's not fully suffused, and I'm not fully absorbed. Well, it's not always best to hurry to spread or suffuse the *nimitta*. That may be exactly the right thing, but sometimes just pause a little bit, because we've got a few options. Sometimes it may be, yeah, just go ahead; try and spread it in the ways that we listed in the possible methods of spreading the *nimitta* through the bodily space, to pervade and permeate, as the Buddha says, suffuse and saturate the whole body space. Sometimes that's the best thing to do, and just go ahead and do that.

Sometimes, though, don't rush to do that. Stay, enjoying where it's okay first. Find those okay places where there is *pīti*, where there is a sense of happiness (if you're working in the second *jhāna*). Stay there. Enjoy that more first, before you think about spreading. Sometimes just in the staying and enjoying, it will spread, as we said on the retreat. And then there are other options too. We talked about playing with perception. Many of you had a lot of success with that. There's pain, there's discomfort – can I actually just imagine it, begin to see it, play with the perception, the malleability of the *citta*, of the perception, of the way of looking, and see this pain, see this discomfort as *pīti*, or as *sukha*, or as stillness, or whatever the *jhānic nimitta* is that's possible to have there when we change the perception? But basically, there are different options. We don't always need to rush to try and suffuse as the first option. But they're all good.

Sometimes – now something specific to the second *jhāna* – we might be working in the second *jhāna*, and we’ve known very effusive happiness, and intense happiness, and really grinning for hours on end, almost so that the face hurts afterwards. Other times, experiences with the *jhāna*, less intense happiness, or something else. So for instance, one might be in the second *jhāna*, but it’s not quite stabilized. Something about it feels a bit flimsy. Well, it may need a bit more ‘body’ in it (I’ll put ‘body’ in inverted commas), a bit more *pīti*. It may need a bit more of that kind of body/energy body awareness. So what you can do, you’re working in the second *jhāna*, but it’s a bit flimsy, it’s a bit weak somehow; it’s not quite stabilized, perhaps. It could be any of those issues. And then you can just dip back to the first *jhāna*. What you’re effectively doing is mixing more *pīti* and more body pleasure in. Just dip back. It could be for a few moments. It could be for a few minutes. Sometimes these things work – just for a few moments, just dip back, get more body in the experience, more *pīti*, and then come back, and see how the second *jhāna* goes.

So we can broaden this, and actually extend it to make a more general principle. Again, we’re talking about when there have been lots of really clear, deep, pure experiences of a certain *jhāna*, and as you’re working more, trying to marinate and develop mastery with that *jhāna*, you’re in and out, in and out, getting very familiar, and sometimes it *doesn’t* go so well. It doesn’t stabilize, or it’s hard to enter it fully on certain occasions. So if that’s the case with a certain *jhāna*, whichever *jhāna* it is, you can, in order to stabilize it or to enter more fully, apart from just working in all the ways we’ve talked about with SASSIE and all that, sometimes it can help to go back, as we just discussed, from the second *jhāna* to the first (but could be the fourth to the third, or whichever *jhāna*). Just go back one step. Or, if you already know the *jhāna* ahead, if you’ve already got familiar with the *jhāna* ahead ... Let’s say I know four *jhānas*, but right now I’m working on the third *jhāna*, and it’s not quite stabilizing; I can’t quite enter it fully. I could just dip back to the second *jhāna*. It might be for really a few moments, or longer. Or I could go to the fourth *jhāna* if I already know it. I skip forward. It’s the opposite of what I assume. I think, “It’s not going well. I better go to a simpler level.” Sometimes I go further, to the fourth *jhāna*. Again, it might just be for a few moments, literally dipping the *citta* and the body in for a few moments, and then coming out. Or it could be longer – a few minutes even. Or if you’re trying to stabilize and deepen the fourth, and it’s not going so well, but you’re familiar with it, could go back to the third, or to one of the formless realms, and then back to the fourth. So this is a general principle here, skilful working when things feel like they’re not going so well on those occasions. They’re still going well, but they could be better.

Here’s one thing particular to the third *jhāna*. I mentioned sometimes what happens at this level is that, in the stillness that emerges at the third *jhāna*, it’s like it allows the breath to perhaps become sensible again. In all the *pīti* and the *sukha*, it might be that we hadn’t noticed the breath – we’ve let the breath go. The *pīti* and *sukha* become the primary *nimittas*, which is a completely fine way of working, as we’ve emphasized. But sometimes, not only does the breath organically, naturally become more sensible because there’s more calmness, sometimes, as well, it may actually help the third *jhāna* to bring back an attention to the breath. At this point, the breath should be very, very subtle, very, very delicate, and like we said, the very movement of the breath is peacefulness. The very movement of the breath there, that subtle, delicate, gentle breath, is peacefulness, like those strands of seaweed in a lagoon, just gently, so subtle, they’re swaying peacefully. There’s movement of the breath, but the very

movement is peacefulness. Sometimes deliberately coming back to find the breath again. It may emerge, as I said, just organically we begin to notice it and include it, or sometimes that can help deepen and consolidate the third *jhāna*, if you feel like you need it.

Again – this is a more general point – particularly as we go into the deeper *jhānas*, and we have a sense of secondary *nimittas*, which we’ve talked about (for instance, the secondary *nimittas* just of release and relief), these are, I think, important ingredients of the *jhānic* mix, and any experienced *jhāna* meditator will notice these things, *should* notice these things. And so they’re not primary *nimittas*, but sometimes noticing them. So again, I’m working in a *jhāna*; it’s not quite coming together. I’m definitely in the territory, but it’s not quite coalescing. I’m not quite fully getting into it as much as I know is possible. Sometimes, actually, then beginning, just very gently, very delicately, without any pressure, just looking for the secondary *nimittas*, say, of relief and release, and noticing them, and just for a little bit, focusing on them and enjoying them, even just for a few moments. That can allow the whole *jhāna* to deepen or consolidate like that. That’s also a very skilful sort of subtle movement of the attention. We’re working. What will help here? It’s almost like we’re taking that relief and release, or whatever the secondary *nimitta* is, and kind of using it as part of the glue, part of the stitching to help cohere the *jhānic* experience at that point.

[28:30] Now something particular to the fourth *jhāna*. We talked about oftentimes there is a brightness there, white-golden light, and that’s quite central. The stillness is the light; the light is the stillness. Sometimes that can feel like a kind of vertical column of bright stillness through the centre of the body space. Sometimes it can feel all around you. Sometimes it can be it’s not quite all around you yet, or one can imagine this vertical column of bright white light that is the stillness. The stillness is the light; the light is the stillness. And it’s right up through the centre of the energy body space. One can begin to allow that, or even encourage that light, to melt outwards – melt outwards from that central vertical column – and in doing so, it kind of dissolves the body into it, dissolves the body with it. So that can be really helpful at times.

Other times, with different *jhānas* – but this may be useful with the fourth *jhāna* particularly – again, when that kind of leaning forward, or *if* that leaning forward occurs in the fourth *jhāna*, for whatever reasons (we discussed a few possibilities there, but the intensity of the focus, and the conceiving of the stillness and the *nimitta* in front of us), sometimes it’s really helpful to feel that you, or the body, or the energy body is kind of falling backwards into a *jhānic realm*. You conceive it backwards, but in addition to just *conceiving* it behind you, you actually also fall back into it. In a way, again, you’re working differently with the attention. It’s a different mode of attention to be probing forwards, or trying to enter/penetrate something in front of me, than it is to fall backwards, and that’s different from something within me, this vertical column that I’m expanding outwards. We talked about different modes of attention, and different conceptions of the directionality of the attention. The same thing with the *jhāna* in relation to the *nimitta*, and the whole body in relation to the *jhānic nimitta*.

Okay. So one other thing about the fourth *jhāna*. We mentioned, when we talked about the Buddha’s description, what’s left is nothing but this pure, bright awareness. “Wrapped in this cloth of pure, bright awareness” was his description of the fourth *jhāna*.¹ And then we talked at other times about the idea of mixing cooking ingredients to move between *jhānas*. So I kind of mentioned this; it’s just an extension of a point I’ve already made on the retreat. I can turn up the sense of presence in the

fourth *jhāna*, and that will take me [to the sixth *jhāna*], because presence is consciousness, consciousness is presence, so to speak. Turning up that sense of presence. So rather than stillness, as I said, a different perspective on the fourth *jhāna* is to notice the sense of presence, and that will take me to the sixth *jhāna*, the infinite consciousness. It will begin to open that up. It's already there. The fourth *jhāna* is already pregnant with it. It's already implicit in the fourth *jhāna*.

But another way you can think of this is kind of like with those cooking ingredients: I mix a bit of this, add a bit more of this ingredient to this *jhāna*, and it will take me to another *jhāna*. You could say we're adding *more* presence to the fourth *jhāna*, adding even more. But how are we adding it? By tuning to what's already there. So here it's different than cooking. The tuning to the sense of presence – again, when I notice it, when I tune to it, it amplifies it, so effectively I'm adding more of that particular ingredient into my cooking pot, and the fourth *jhāna* will then change into the sixth *jhāna*. I've turned up the sense of presence just by tuning to it, and I'm amplifying it. Tuning to it *does* amplify it, and that turns it up, and it goes to the sixth *jhāna*.

Anyway, of course, there should be, as I mentioned, a very strong sense of presence in the fourth *jhāna*. It's almost spellbound – the mind is spellbound. But still, we can increase things by tuning to them, increase certain factors within the *jhāna*, and then that can sometimes just help that *jhāna* consolidate. It's very common for the fourth *jhāna*, with a lot of experience, to get just a little bit dull. So just turn up that sense of presence. But if I really then tune into the sense of presence, and hone in on that, I'm amplifying it, and that can take me to the sixth *jhāna*.

One thing I mentioned: the Buddha says technically the breath stops in the fourth *jhāna*.² Whatever we think about the so-called biological reality of that, that will be the meditator's experience. It's hard to locate a sense of breath in the fourth *jhāna*. It feels as if the body has stopped breathing. But be careful. Don't try to assess, "Is this the fourth *jhāna*?", by keeping on checking whether your breath has stopped. That's not going to be helpful, just as checking whether thought has stopped, as I said, that's not going to be a helpful way of checking whether you're in the second *jhāna*. Doing that kind of thing, checking my breath – "Has it stopped? Oh, it hasn't stopped yet" – in a way, it's kind of reinforcing that pattern that I talked about, this micropattern in our psychology, micropattern in the *citta*, the *saṅkhāras* of the mind, to just give attention to the negative, to look for what's not quite right, what's not quite measuring up. Rather, just get into the stillness. The stillness is there. "Am I in the fourth *jhāna* yet?" Just get into the stillness. Really enjoy it. Really be with it with a very alive attention. Really see if you can penetrate into that stillness. See if you can dissolve into that stillness, if that stillness can dissolve into you – the mind, the body, dissolving into the stillness; the stillness dissolving into, and dissolving the mind and body. That's what we need to do, and it will mature into the fourth *jhāna* if there's that alive attention and that right attention with it, rather than just keep checking whether the breath has stopped.

Someone wrote me a note – actually, I mentioned this – about breath. So this person was obviously working around the territory of the second *jhāna*, I'm guessing, from the note, which seems very clear. "Quick and possibly silly question. Does it matter if the breathing is through the nose or the mouth? The combination of a cold plus an enormous grin [indicates probably the second *jhāna*], open-mouthed, means I sometimes breathe through the mouth." She had a cold, and there was this enormous grin, and so she finds herself breathing through the mouth. But then she says, "Sometimes it feels like it

dissipates the strength of *pīti* or *sukha*.” Breathing through the mouth actually dissipated the *pīti* or the *sukha*.

So I would say if it’s from the grin, you don’t have to stop your grin. The grinning is good and fine. But probably it’s the case that you can just very minutely, almost, move the position of your tongue against your teeth, and that will somehow allow you to keep grinning without the mouth actually being open, and then you can breathe through your nose. So we can have a full grin, I’m pretty sure – try it. If the tongue is in a certain position, we should be able to breathe through the nose, because it may well be that – in fact, it often is – when we breathe through the mouth, the breath isn’t allowed to become more subtle. So what the Buddha calls the bodily formations, the breath, are not allowed to become more subtle, and with that, it’s harder for the *citta* to become more subtle. If we’re trying to be in *jhāna*, as I said, it’s characterized by refinement of body energy vibration, and the refinement and subtlety of the *citta*. They have to be there for *jhāna*. So if we’re getting in the way by breathing through the mouth, and that keeps the breath unsubtle, then it can be a problem. So if it’s possible, if it’s not because of a cold, if it’s just because of a grin, there are probably things one can do with the tongue, to start with, that allows breathing through the nose, and then, maybe, if one’s ready, anyway, it goes beyond the second *jhāna*. Continue with the nose breath, and the whole thing gets more subtle.

If it’s a cold, and a bad cold, well, you’ll probably just have to breathe through the mouth, and put up with it for a while. However, as the *citta* gets more subtle, if it *can* (and it’s not *completely* prevented by breathing through the mouth at all; that won’t completely block things), you should find, as the *citta* gets more subtle, the breath will get more subtle. With a heavy cold, this might even take avoiding the breath at first, going via what you remember of the energy body vibrations, of different states, of different *jhānic* states, or just remembering a *jhāna*. If you get in the territory where the *citta* is subtle, then the breath will become subtle. Again, body affects mind, breath affects mind; mind affects body and breath. So if the *citta* can be helped to become more subtle, even if we have a bad cold, and we’re breathing through the mouth, the breath will become more subtle. Because the breath is more subtle, actually less air is being moved. And less air being moved, you might find that even with a relatively blocked nose, a quite blocked nose, you can actually still breathe through the nose, because we’re not moving that much air. A little amount of air can find its way through the blocked nose. But it’s not that we’re *trying* to make that happen; it’s just that we’re helping the *citta* to become, or allowing the *citta* to become, more subtle. Naturally, that allows the breath to become more subtle, and effortlessly, we will probably find that we’re breathing through the nose, or nose-breathing is happening, without us kind of trying to manipulate that physically.

[40:05] Okay. A couple of things just to finish. Two more things. One is: we talked last night about insight ways of looking that unfabricate, and that potentially move through the *jhānic* stages in their process of unfabricating. However, I don’t think, in that practice, the primary point, or the primary aim, is to necessarily learn a degree of skill that controls an insight way of looking to the degree that I can kind of stop the elevator exactly where I want, to an exact *jhāna*. That’s a good skill, but it’s not the most important thing there. What’s much more important (and this is important to understand) is that in that process of playing with insight ways of looking, we understand the principle of lessening fabrication. We understand the principle of unfabricating to whatever degree. Through this insight way of looking, there’s less clinging, and because there’s less clinging, there’s more letting go, which is just

saying the same thing, and because of that, and because of dependent arising, there's less fabrication, and so the experience opens up, refines out, in these different ways.

Understanding that principle of lessening fabrication through insight ways of looking is really, really important; understanding *how* to fabricate less; and thirdly, understanding what exactly is involved in subtle clinging. So we use this word, 'clinging,' I said, in a very stretchy way. It means all the way from the most gross to the most subtle, aspects of the relationship of the *citta* with phenomenal experience that we wouldn't usually think of as clinging. Really, really subtle, so that, in the end, even *avijjā*, in the Mahāyāna, even ignorance, is a kind of clinging. Even believing, looking at something, and the unconscious belief that it inherently exists, which is what most human beings do, most of the time, most of their lives, with most of phenomenal experience – just that unconscious and unnoticed, very common belief and assumption in the inherent existence of whatever is in perception, in consciousness at any time, we could call that *avijjā*, but in the Mahāyāna, they also call it 'clinging.' It's a very subtle level of clinging. And I use 'clinging' in that sense too.

So understanding the principle of lessening fabrication through insight ways of looking. Secondly, *how* do I fabricate less? Actually using these insight ways of looking, and getting familiar with them, and developing the art and the skill of them. And thirdly, what exactly is going on here? What exactly is involved in subtle clinging? What subtle clinging is being let go of here? And what *avijjā* is being let go of here? So *avijjā* also has a whole range of aspects, but also levels, to it, from very, very gross, of course – complete deluded thinking, etc. – to very, very subtle, and clinging as well. So what exactly is involved in subtle clinging, subtle *avijjā*, if that's what we're talking about? And lastly, fourth thing, to understand the implications of all that – the implications of the way less clinging, less *avijjā*, results in less fabrication, right then, in the moment, in the moment of looking, in the moment of relating, a way of looking. In other words, understanding dependent arising and emptiness, as we touched on to some extent in the retreat.

So all that, those understandings, those four understandings, are much more the point than being able to control and kind of, "I'll be able to go to exactly this *jhāna*, and not overstep it to the next *jhāna* or whatever, when I unfabricate through a certain insight way of looking." So always the insight is more important than the *samādhic* experience.

Okay, last thing. I want to read to you a fairly long note from someone. This is quite important. And for those of you that are familiar with soulmaking, it's very important. For those of you who are not yet familiar with Soulmaking Dharma, but who may be one day familiar with Soulmaking Dharma, it may well be very important. It's a little bit involved, and it's a slightly long note, but I feel it's really, really crucial. It also expands our sense of how we might go about *jhānic* practice, *jhāna* practice, especially when we have some soulmaking background, Soulmaking Dharma and soulmaking practice background. So this person wrote,

This has been a *dukkha*-ful retreat for me. Lots of *dukkha*, so much pain and struggle around desire, and sustaining intention and effort. [As always, I asked for her permission to share this note, and it was fine with her.] So much pain and struggle around desire, and sustaining intention and effort [the kind of things we were addressing, and talking about, and trying to open up and inquire into at several times on the retreat. She

continues,] Your teaching on desire and soulmaking the last few nights finally prompted me to try to go into the *dukkha* last night, to hold and sense it with soul, and to see what images of the path and the self on it might arise.

There were several beautiful and meaningful images that came from sensing the *dukkha* like this, and that felt like they began to clarify what I want from practice, and to give non-pathologizing place to some long-standing and painful patterns in my life. I won't go into this now. What I want to say is that, later on last night, there was a lot of frustration around, and I felt some confidence, from the above-mentioned experience, about going in through the *dukkha*.

So as skilfully as possible, I let the frustration rip, naming all the smallnesses and solidities in myself that I'm utterly sick of, tuning to the power, rather than the poison, of this emotion or energy. [We talked about that, as well, in the retreat at some point.] I didn't sense self-judgment in it – just clarity and fire. [This is really, really important.] Out of this, a sense of space opened, and in that space, as I was breathing, I became aware of a very subtle sense of the energy body breathing with me. This was the language that came, and it had soul-resonances. My sense of the energy body was that they, the energy body, were creatively and definitely other than me.

So rather than “I *am* the energy body,” or “it's me,” or “it's part of me,” the sense was that they were creatively and definitely *other* than me. We talk about twoness in soulmaking practice sometimes.

They were taking up a space somewhat larger than my physical body, but overlapping with it, and I had a strong sense of their autonomy and intelligence. I've not really worked with energy body *as* image, rather than as the terrain in which image and sensitivity to image arise, but I've heard you speak to this possibility, so I really tried to lean into it, using the nodes of the lattice to tune and sense. And what opened was a gorgeous sense of twoness with the energy body, and a sense that they, the energy body, were taking me under their wing, teaching me how to be in the right relationship with them.

I would say that my relationship with *pīti* on this retreat, and in general, has been pretty dysfunctional – tight with self and grasping and aversion. When *pīti* arose in this experience with the energy body last night, though, it felt like they [the energy body] were *giving* it to me, saying, “Here. Try feeling this,” and holding it for me while I worked and played, taking the pressure off and coaching me to try different things. I found I could stay with intensities and subtleties I hadn't been able to stay with before, because now they were being given to me as gift by this beautiful, unfathomable other. It was freeing and energizing and humbling.

So I'd be interested to hear any thoughts you have, and specifically around allowing or inviting a sense of imaginal other into the base practice. In some ways, what unfolded wasn't all that different from the energy body base practices you outlined on this retreat, but there was a strong sense of being in twoness with mysterious otherness that ignited and aligned my desire, intention, and effort, where they've been quite confused or limp through much of this retreat. I still feel very far from *jhāna*, but I feel like I've begun to see the possibility of righting something in relation to why and how I practise. Thank you for reading all this. I'm sorry it's so long.

And then a PS:

Actually, a couple more thoughts around intention. My intention in working with the frustration was for soulmaking rather than *samādhi*. It was a surprise to me when the *pīti* arose, and even when it did, I'd say the intention continued to be predominantly for soulmaking, for the beauty of that dimensional relationship with the energy body. In subsequent sittings with the intention for *samādhi* [so she returned to the intention for *samādhi*], I've tried to invite that imaginal sense of the energy body, but they haven't come. So perhaps it's that this soulful experience with the energy body now becomes part of the fantasy operating in the background of *samādhi* practice.

That was one of the options, if you remember, that I talked about: we work with an image, and then it goes into the background as a fantasy, and helps support things. She continues,

Or I can choose to pick it up more intentionally in soulmaking practice?

So I didn't have time, but I wrote a quick note back to her, and suggested she did the second of those options: choose to pick it up more intentionally as a soulmaking practice, with the intention for soulmaking, not for *samādhi*. So something had happened here, for good reason – some difficulty, some knots over the time around intention and desire and goal, those things that we were dwelling on and returning to several times in the retreat. So much importance, so much need to give careful attention to that, to inquire into that, to find right relationship with desire, intention, goal, aim, direction.

So kind of a long-standing history of *dukkha* and entanglement and difficulty there. My sense was, here, much, much more helpful to stay with the soulmaking. Look, something extremely important and extremely beautiful has just happened – a real gift, a real grace. You feel that. And something that is perhaps the beginning of a much more profound and long-lasting healing. If I think, “Oh, I'm on a *jhāna* retreat. I want to catch up with the others,” or whatever it is, and I rush too quickly back to the *samādhi* intention, something hasn't been allowed to ripen. To me, it sounded like it needed longer in that intention. Stay with the soulmaking intention. That's what opened things up. Anyway, it's delivering something beautiful. It's delivering the *pīti* and the gorgeousness, etc., and something is being healed. Something is also being ensouled. The *dukkha* is being ensouled. The energy body is

being ensouled. Lots of things are happening that are really profoundly important, and maybe more important than whether I attain X *jhāna* right now, or even in the next months, or whatever it is. That was my brief encouragement in a note back, and I really think that's important.

I got a short response saying,

Thank you. Wonderful. I'm so ready to put down the intention for *samādhī*.

I don't know if I was hearing it right, but I was a little concerned, getting that note, that there's a difference making a choice: "Okay, now I'm going to have a soulmaking intention, rather than a *samādhī* intention." We talked about the intention really being the primary thing that drives this or that practice, whether I'm navigating a fork in the road between insight ways of looking and *samādhī*, or soulmaking and *samādhī*, or whatever it is. It's the intention that's really important, for a number of reasons.

But there's a difference between an intention coming out of an *aversion*, and a fed-upness, and an intention coming out of love and desire, and a sense of grace, and wanting something. Wanting something is different. Wanting soulmaking is different than just really not wanting to be any more with a certain intention for *samādhī*. So I'm not sure, and it was right at the end of the retreat, so I don't know. I didn't get a chance to find out or respond. It may not be the case at all for this person, but I think what I want to say right now is: careful about these kind of choices. It's a different thing. And where there's been a habit of aversion, or making choices out of aversion, or getting so fed up with a certain situation, or situations, or how things are unfolding or *not* unfolding, that we feel a lot of aversion and frustration, and then the intention is coming out of that – that intention coming from aversion will have a different effect than an intention coming out of love for something, or eros for something, or responding to an invitation of an erotic beloved other. This is really, really important. I would guess that they will unfold differently. So it was the same move, but the intention is slightly [different]. I'm choosing the soulmaking intention over the *samādhī* intention, but the dominant intention is slightly different: one is eros, and one is aversion. That probably will make a difference. As I said, I don't know if it's the case with this person, but the point bears making in a general way, because it applies very, very widely.

This is all part of getting wise to desire and eros and this whole territory. These meta-questions are so, so important – how we respond to them, how we hold them, and how we choose in relationship to them. So that's all I wanted to add, a sort of 'PS' to the whole retreat. I hope some of that has been helpful or will be helpful at some point. Okay.

Actually, one last thing I forgot. Someone was asking about resource, and I had mentioned from the beginning of the retreat and emphasized the ability of *jhānas*, or practice of *jhānas*, to really form and open up for us a profound resource of well-being in our life, and really stressing that, their function there, or potential function for us, as deep resources. So just to elaborate on this a little bit and draw out some of the other things I've been saying, to make something clear here that this person was asking.

If one only experiences a *jhāna* once, or twice, or a few times, it might be that for some period after those *jhānic* experiences, if they're strong or whatever, that there is a relatively short-lived sense of resource, of happiness, of well-being, of energy, etc., a kind of unshakeability that might come with

that, even from just feeling so happy or whatever it is. But as I think I've alluded to already on the retreat, the danger with only having a *jhānic* experience a few times is that then it goes, and it's not around, and it may become, through the memory, an object of attachment and duality with what we experience now, compared to the *jhānic* experience. Then it's run out of anything it's giving us as a resource. It's not providing anything as a resource. But even worse than that, it's actually fostering a sense of suffering through the duality, through the attachment to the memory, etc.

Much more significant is when we are able to frequently practise and experience a *jhānic* state – perhaps every day, or maybe a couple of times a day, whatever it is, in our busy lives, etc. Or maybe not even every day, but regularly enough that it functions as a more constant source, like a well that isn't going dry, or a spring, and there's a sense of replenishment that it brings, of rejuvenation, of energy. The energy is being, yes, replenished, rejuvenated, and a deep emotional well-being of different flavours and kinds, dependent on what *jhāna* we're talking about. But that deep emotional well-being allows us or supports us, helps us, to stay steady, and to meet difficulties, to sustain our creative projects, the work that we're doing, when there is difficulty; to sustain our service work, if that's what we're involved in, or our activism, or whatever it is, through the ups and downs, through the knocks, through the slog of that. And sometimes it might be work that's not either well-paid financially, or we're not getting any pats on the back for it, or recognition, or even no one else seems to notice. But this dipping in regularly, drinking from these wells, these beautiful springs of cool, clear water, will definitely provide resource in our life.

But there's a second way that I want to emphasize, and that, actually, in a way, is implicit in stuff I said on the retreat, but I really want to draw it out to make it clear. Long-term, repeated immersion in and exposure to *jhānic* states (let's say second *jhāna* and above, I would say), long-term, repeated immersion, and drinking from that, and suffusing the body in that, and dissolving, and being absorbed in that, long-term, repeated practice of *jhānas* will open and deepen the sense we have of what a human being is – what *we* are as human beings, but also what *other* human beings are. It opens and deepens the very sense of the dimensionality of human beings. Our sense of our own being becomes dimensional. As I said near the beginning of the retreat, the *jhānas* become almost like dimensions of human being, but also dimensions of being more generally, or cosmic being, especially as we go deeper into the *jhānas*. So they're opening and deepening a sense of the dimensionality not just of our *own* being, and human being, but also of the cosmos.

In addition to the way it works as a resource, as I just described, it's this opening up of a sense of dimensionality that, even if, for some reason, later in our life, the *jhānas* are not accessible – maybe there are certain life situations where we're just not able to practise for some reason; maybe there's a severe illness; maybe there's medicine trying to treat a severe illness, and that medicine is having all kinds of difficult side-effects, and preventing clarity of mind, or preventing concentration, or preventing mental energy, or whatever it is; for whatever other reason – even when the *jhānas* become not accessible, they still function. Something has been seen and sensed and known by the being, by the *citta*, so that they still function after all that time – it could be years – as a resource. One senses still and *knows* something, knows something about one's own being, about human being, and about the cosmos. And that knowledge, if you like, if we call it, that sense of things, is there, even if one can't touch it or see it right now. It's imprinted on the psyche, on the *citta*, on the heart and mind, so profoundly, and

opened up and changed and dimensionalized the sense of things, that one *knows* it's true, even when one can't touch it any more. And that knowledge acts as a long-term support for the *citta*, for the soul, even when, including when, circumstances, in one way or another, may be very, very challenging.

So there are two levels there, if you like, of the way in which *jhānas* can function as a really profound and helpful resource for our lives, and for meeting life, and opening to life, and serving what we want to serve in life.

¹ AN 5:28.

² SN 36:11, AN 9:31.