

# Talks On Buddhist Meditation

by

*Godwin Samararatne*

Compiled from five lectures

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## Preface

What we give to our readers as the wheel number 448/449 is a collection of lectures on Buddhist Meditation given by the well-known Sri Lankan meditation master the late Mr. Godwin Samararatne in 1998 at the Chin Lin Nunnery, Hong Kong.

In a series of five talks on the subject he takes the meditator along the lengthy road of Buddhist Meditation indicating in his clear and pragmatic style of presentation why Buddhist Meditation is becoming popular throughout the world today thereby introducing the practiser to one of the most important exercises taught in Buddhism for developing the mind and reaching mental concentration or samadhi, which is the primary aim of Buddhist meditation leading to both *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

Next he takes on the four meditations of “divine abodes” or *brahmavihāras* which are discussed in great detail citing instances from everyday life as to how these can be properly practised. His practical guidelines such as treating mindfulness of breathing as one’s “friend” (p.12) and calling for its help in problematic situations as a “trump card” reminds one of the dictum in the game of bridge “when in doubt play a trump.”

The importance of awareness (*sati*) and of loving kindness (*mettā*) is highlighted showing their true significance in the practice of Buddhist meditation. The application and the value of self-criticism is another valuable point of advice as also the method of dealing with unpleasant emotions which are quite common in our day-to-day activities. The inadvisability of meditating with the aim of something particular in return is also such a guideline.

These lectures, taken from the Internet, were naturally quite full of repetitions and therefore had to be extensively edited to suit the literary form needed for a printed book. Of course, editing was done without the least prejudice to the preservation of the catachistic nature of the talks.

All in all, these exercises in meditation can be described as “lessons from Buddhism” which, if followed carefully, can make the contemporary world, torn apiece into antagonistic factions and mini-powerblocks, get most of its wounds healed and make the earth a more congenial place for human habitation.

It is also welcome news to see and hear that more and more Westerners are turning to the Buddhist way of thinking and living owing to the efforts of people like Godwin Samararatne.

As per information about the author we are reproducing an appreciation of him written by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi.

—Editor, BPS

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# In Memoriam

## *Acharya Godwin Samararatne*

(1932 – 2000)

In late March death snatched from our midst, too soon, one of Sri Lanka's most beloved Buddhist teachers, Godwin Samararatne. For close to twenty years, Godwin had been the resident meditation teacher at the Nilambe Meditation Centre near Kandy. He had also taught meditation within Kandy itself, at the Lewella and Visakha Meditation Centres (two affiliates of Nilambe), at the University of Peradeniya, at private homes, and at the Buddhist Publication Society. But Godwin did not belong to Sri Lanka alone. He belonged to the whole world, and he was loved and esteemed by people clear across the globe. Thousands of people from many lands came to Nilambe to practise meditation under his guidance, and they also invited him to their own countries to conduct meditation courses and retreats. Thus over the past two decades Godwin, in his own quiet way, had become an international Buddhist celebrity, constantly in demand in countries ranging from Europe to Hongkong and Taiwan. He was also a regular visitor to South Africa, where he conducted his last meditation retreat earlier this year.

What was so impressive about Godwin, however, was not what he did but what he was. He was above all a truly selfless person, and it was this utter selflessness of the man that accounts for the impact he had on the lives of so many people.

I use the word "selflessness" to describe him in two interrelated senses. First, he was selfless in the sense that he seemed to have almost no inner gravitational force of an "I" around which his personal life revolved: no pride, no ambition, no personal projects aimed at self-aggrandisement. He was completely humble and non-assertive, not in an artificial self-demeaning way, but rather as if he had no awareness of a self to be effaced. Hence as a meditation teacher he could be utterly transparent, without any trips of his own to lay upon his students.

This inward "emptiness" enabled Godwin to be selfless in the second sense: as one who always gave first consideration to the welfare of others. He was ready to empathise with others and share their concerns as vividly as if they were his own. In this respect, Godwin embodied the twin Buddhist virtues of loving kindness and compassion, *maitrī* and *karuṇā*. Even without many words, his dignified presence conveyed a quietude and calm that spoke eloquently for the power of inner goodness, for its capacity to reach out to others and heal their anxiety and distress. It was this deep quietude and almost tangible kindness that drew thousands of people to Godwin and encouraged them to welcome him into their lives. The trust they placed in him was well deposited, for in an age when so many popular "gurus" have gained notoriety for their unscrupulous behaviour, he never exploited the confidence and good will of his pupils.

Though Godwin taught the practice of Buddhist meditation, particularly the way of mindfulness, he did not try to propagate "Buddhism" as a doctrine or religious faith, much less as part of an exotic cultural package. His inspiration came from the Dhamma as primarily a path of inner transformation whose effectiveness stemmed from its ability to promote self-knowledge and self-purification. He saw the practice of meditation as a way to help people help themselves, to understand themselves more clearly and change themselves for the better. He emphasised that Buddhist meditation is not a way of withdrawing from everyday life, but of living everyday life mindfully, with awareness and clear comprehension, and he taught people how to apply the Dhamma to the knottiest problems of their mundane lives.

By not binding the practice of meditation to the traditional religious framework of Buddhism, Godwin was able to reach out and speak to people of the most diverse backgrounds. For him there were no essential, unbridgeable differences between human beings. He saw people everywhere as

just human beings beset by suffering and searching for happiness, and he offered the Buddha's way of mindfulness as an experiential discipline leading to genuine peace of heart. Hence he could teach people from such different backgrounds — Western, Asian, and African; Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim; Sri Lankan Theravadins and Chinese Mahayanists — and all could respond favourably to his guidance.

If it was not for a chronic liver condition that he had patiently endured for years, with hardly a word of complaint, Godwin might well have lived on to actively teach the way of mindfulness for at least another decade. But this was not to be, for in late February, almost immediately upon his return from a teaching engagement in South Africa, his illness flared up and a month later claimed his precious life. Those of us who have been touched by him will long bear in our hearts the memory of his calm, gentle personality, and of the impact his life had on our own.

May he quickly attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana.

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

# Talks On Buddhist Meditation

## 1. Why Is Meditation Becoming Popular?

GODWIN: Firstly, I like to welcome each one of you. I am very happy to be back and I am also very happy to see some of my old friends here. It's also nice to see some new faces.

I will give a short talk and there will be time for questions and then we can do some meditation together and wind up with some chanting, both in Chinese and Pali. When I arrived here this time, my friends told me that now there is more interest in meditation here and that there have been many teachers and many masters, also visiting this country. I was very happy to hear this and in a way, it did not surprise me because I know that everywhere in the world there is more and more interest in meditation now, especially in western countries. So a question arises: Why is there this interest in meditation in the present world? We can think of different reasons but a general reason is, I think, there is more and more suffering in this world. So human beings, at least some of them, are finding ways and means of finding some peace, a way out of the suffering. So I'll be presenting some aspects of meditation which will help us, as I said, to experience more peace and to find a way out of suffering.

In this modern world, one of the things that is happening because of mechanisation and industrialisation is that human beings are also becoming more and more machine-like, automatic. Here meditation offers two very important solutions.

One is that when human beings start becoming more more machine-like, they more or less become machines. They do not seem to have feelings and one result of this lack of feelings is that they become more and more violent, more and more violent towards themselves and towards others and also towards the environment, the surroundings wherein we live. This is why the problem of environment and ecology has also become very serious in the present world. Accordingly, meditation of loving kindness and of compassion is extremely helpful in dealing with this lack of feelings, lack of warmth.

A phrase that I often like to use is that 'meditation of loving kindness helps ourselves to be our best friend'. If you can be your best friend then naturally your behaviour will be not unskilful, and unwholesome to you and you create more and more happiness for yourself as well as for others. Thus, meditation on loving kindness helps us to open our hearts to ourselves as well as to others.

Another way meditation of loving kindness can help us is in regard to what I call 'wounds,' wounds created due to different reasons, from the past, wounds in relation to what you have done to others, and what others have done to you. I think that there is no human being who has not been wounded in one's life. A great source of suffering in the modern world is holding onto these wounds which can generate lots of suffering for oneself as well as for others. Meditation on loving kindness helps us to heal these wounds by learning to forgive ourselves as well as others. It is only when we can heal these wounds that we really experience joy and peace in ourselves. When we experience this joy and peace in ourselves, this can become infectious and it can even affect others.

So these are some very important aspects of meditation of loving kindness which the modern world needs very badly. I would suggest that this is the only way to work with global violence, violence that we are faced with in this modern world.

Another important aspect of meditation which can help us to work with human beings who are becoming more and more mechanical is the practice of awareness, the practice of being present. It is a practice of being alert and awake and like the meditation of loving kindness, this aspect of being aware also has many benefits. One is that it helps us to be conscious and to know what is happening in us, in our mind and body from moment to moment as far as possible. This awareness can help us to develop insight, to see what are we doing to ourselves and to others. It helps us to see how we create suffering in ourselves and in others. What awareness helps us to experience is that sometimes, or most of the time, how we create our own suffering. When you see quite clearly, how we create our

own suffering, then it becomes clear that it is only we who can free ourselves from the suffering that we have created. Sometimes I like to define meditation as a way of discovering the medicine for the sickness that we ourselves create.

Another aspect of awareness is that it helps us to experience the present moment. It is interesting that most of the time, we live either in the past or in the future, and we hardly know this fact because it happens habitually, mechanically, sometimes unconsciously. Thus here again awareness helps us to realise how we are using the past and the future which again can create problems for ourselves and for others.

So we need to use the past, we need to use the future. One simple way of using the past and the future is to learn from whatever has happened in the past as a learning experience, as a teacher. Whatever mistakes we have committed in the past, instead of holding onto them feeling guilty and suffer from them, it is better if we can ask ourselves: "what can I learn from my past mistakes?" It can be a very useful way of coming to terms with the past. Otherwise we carry the past as a burden. In a way this type of thinking and practice enables us to let go of this burden that we are carrying all the time.

In the same way, we must use the future also as a friend. Very often when we think of the future, sometimes what happens is that we feel anxious, or insecure. But if we can make friends with the future and learn to be open to the future, we will be learning to relate ourselves to the future in a much more creative way. With awareness, we can thus learn to experience the present moment when we breathe consciously, and in relation to the past and the future, we can see the past as a teacher and the future as a friend. This will be really beautiful, creating a happy and a peaceful way of living.

Another way by which we can use awareness is to use awareness to learn, to discover, to explore, and to investigate what is happening in our mind and body. A real problem we have in everyday life is how to relate ourselves to unpleasant emotions. A problem modern man is confronted with is the problem of stress, which is universal. Now people are finding ways and means of working with stress. It is interesting that there are now workshops called "stress management courses," Here they do not try to get rid of stress but to manage and control it. Awareness helps us to find out under what circumstances do we feel stressed, and also what really happens to us mentally and physically, when we experience stress. In this way we can explore, learn and investigate any unpleasant emotion that we experience.

Everyone here must be familiar with unpleasant emotions like anxiety, fear, sadness, guilt etc. which are quite familiar to us. When we experience them, we normally have no way or tools to work with them. Human beings have thus become helpless victims of these unpleasant emotions which really control, overwhelm and affect us. In meditation there are techniques and ways to deal with these unpleasant emotions. In fact there has been a very interesting book that has come out recently, "Emotional Intelligence." Has anyone heard of this book? The author, who is a Buddhist, says that human beings are trying to develop more and more high I.Q., but what is more important is not to develop a high I.Q. but to discover an intelligent way of working with emotions. This has become a bestseller and there has been lots of workshops on this problem because in the modern world, unpleasant emotions have become a real challenge.

Here again meditation, specially the aspect of awareness, helps us to work with such emotions. One method is not to repress them, not to control them, nor to express them but just to be aware of the emotions when they are there. We cannot prevent these emotions from arising but what we can learn is how to work with them when they arise rather than continue to suffer as a result of them.

Maybe another aspect of meditation is that it helps us to learn to be our own teacher, to be self-reliant, to have complete confidence in ourselves. This is a hard teaching but it is very important. It teaches you to develop your own resources, your own self-reliance, your own tools and how to work with suffering when it arises. So what arises from that is that we learn to take responsibility for what is happening in us, without blaming others or your surroundings. When there is a change taking place in your mind, you will be able to handle whatever that arises in a particular environment, whichever it may be.

I like to conclude by presenting a Buddhist symbol which shows how we can live in any environment and learn how not to be affected by that environment. This symbol is the lotus flower. As you know, the lotus flower grows in muddy waters and though it is surrounded by muddy and dirty water, it is able to remain unaffected by what is around it.

Thus in this modern world, there can be lots of challenges, lots of difficult situations, lots of problems that might arise but with the practice of meditation, we'll still be able to see them as challenges and learn like a lotus, still not being affected by the surroundings in which we are placed.

### *[Question time]*

QUESTION: When joy and bliss arise during meditation and when the body starts to tremble, is that O.K.?

GODWIN: I'm happy you are experiencing joy and bliss. It is very important to experience joy and bliss in meditation. When joy and bliss arise, and the body trembles, just know that the body is trembling and just try to find what exactly is the sensation you are experiencing and just learn to be with the sensation. What is important is not to hold on to them, when we have these positive emotions.

QUESTION: How to use our future in a proper way? For example, in the office when I deal with my boss, at first I may find that my boss has got some incorrect or improper views and then I have this anxiety that the situation may turn bad in the future and I become emotional. Then I try to alter my boss's attitude thinking that the situation maybe O.K. But afterwards, I find that I have not handled the situation properly. I could have done better. So my question is: How can I ensure that what I am doing at the present moment is the correct way to handle the situation rather than having done it first and then look back and regret for what I have done?

GODWIN: Just a few practical suggestions: How to work with such bosses? One thing you said is that you would like to change the attitude of the boss in which you can never succeed. Arising from that what you should learn to do is to change your attitude towards the boss. That is to use the boss as your spiritual friend because the boss is teaching you something through which you can look at your own mind. As I have said this is the importance of awareness. So the emphasis is not on what the boss is saying or doing but on your own mind, how you are relating yourself to what the boss is saying or doing.

Thus it will be interesting to start experimenting with your boss. So rather than feel angry with him or seeing him as a problem, you must learn to see him as a spiritual friend by finding out the emotions that arise in you when you are with the boss: "How long will these emotions stay with me? Now today, this is what happened with the boss. Now let me see what happens with him tomorrow?" So you are looking forward to be with the boss because it is a very valuable learning experience for you. You can really feel grateful that you have such a good boss, that he is really showing you a mirror to watch your own mind. Thus, without giving a minus to the boss or to yourself, you can give pluses both to yourself and to the boss.

These suggestions that I have offered can be used in any situation in relation to people: it need not necessarily be the boss.

QUESTION: Master, normally people practise meditation by sitting down with their legs crossed: but what happens if, as I am a little bit old and having a kidney problem making it difficult to sit too long to practise meditation, whether I can do meditation by lying down on my back?

GODWIN: There is still hope for you. You can just sit down on a chair with your spine erect and as you rightly said, you can use the lying down posture but what is important is that in that posture you have to be very alert and awake because from lying down you might start snoring but it is still interesting to learn to meditate in the lying down posture.

I am very happy that you have asked some very good practical questions. Now let us take a short break for about five minutes and during this time, please see how you can be aware of whatever you are doing. Whether you are standing or walking, whatever you are doing, please try to slow down

your movements and just try to practise awareness as far as possible. Being silent will be helpful in practising this awareness.

So please come back after five minutes if there's a need to go outside.

### **[Break]**

GODWIN: The meditation which you are going to do is something very simple. In my talk, I emphasised the importance of being aware, being mindful, being awake. So let us develop this very important skill during this sitting. We can try to be aware, mindful and alert from moment to moment as far as possible, just knowing what is happening in our mind and body from moment to moment.

In my talk I also emphasised the importance of friendliness and gentleness. We will try to combine awareness with friendliness and gentleness, feeling friendly and gentle to whatever is happening in our mind and body as far as possible. This is something very simple that we are going to do now.

You can close your eyes. If you are having thoughts, just know what thoughts you are having very sharply, very clearly. If you are experiencing sensations, just know what sensations you are experiencing from moment to moment. You can experience the present moment, just feeling the peace and the stillness in this room, feeling what it is to sit with your body completely still. If the body is still, the mind may become still and you can feel the stillness around you, feeling friendly and gentle towards our mind and body.

### **[Bell]**

Now please do not think that meditation is over. Please continue to know what is happening in your mind and body from moment to moment. In a way, there is no beginning or ending of meditation. This is the importance of awareness, of knowing. Thank you very much for sitting so peacefully and calmly. Let us do some chanting now.

### **[Chanting follows]**

Please make an effort to put in practice some of the suggestions that I have made: learn to be your best friend and also to be a friend of others. Learn to forgive yourself and others and then heal any wounds that you are carrying: make an effort to live consciously, with awareness and with a mind that is fully awake. As I have suggested, try to work with unpleasant emotions when they arise: try to find a new direction in your life, a new way of living where you will live in such a meaningful way that you will be not creating any suffering for yourself and for others. And may you experience more joy, more peace and friendliness to oneself.

## **2. Ānāpāna-sati and Its Advantages**

GODWIN: I would like to firstly welcome each one of you. Now please listen to my talk. The subject that has been suggested to me is to speak about the benefits of meditation on breath. We can reflect as to why the Buddha chose 'breath' as an object of meditation.

A very important aspect of meditation is developing awareness, mindfulness. Here we can use our breath to develop awareness. In Pali this technique is called *ānāpāna-sati*, developing awareness, mindfulness in relation to the in-breath and the out-breath. We can use the breath always to develop the practice of mindfulness because we are breathing all the time so that as it is with us all the time we can make use of that to develop awareness. Ajhan Chah, one of the meditation masters in Thailand, has said that if you remember to breathe, then you remember to meditate. If you have time to breathe, then you have time to meditate. So this is the first point I want to make as to why the Buddha might have chosen breathing as a technique of meditation.

Another important aspect of meditation is learning to experience the present moment, the here and the now. Here again, it is very interesting that when we breathe, we always breathe in the present. Sometimes I like to refer to our breath as our friend. If you make a connection with your breath as a



friend, then whenever we think of our friend, the friend will help us to experience the present moment. Whenever we are lost in thoughts about the past and the future and there is confusion and disorder in our minds, you have only to think of your friend and immediately you can experience the present moment.

There is another important aspect to it, namely when we are at times affected by our thoughts, when the thoughts control us, our friend can help us to learn to let go the thoughts, and to control them rather than allow the thoughts to control us. With the help of our friend we can experience the present moment by letting go the thoughts about the past and the future.

Related to our thoughts are our emotions and there is a very strong connection between our thoughts and emotions. Sometimes thoughts can create emotions and then with thinking, we can make them bigger. Hereagain if we can remember our friend and seek his help it will help us immediately to recover ourselves from emotions because it will help us to find some space in our mind, which space can help us to recover from whatever emotions that we are experiencing. We can experiment with this for ourselves.

Another useful thing that our friend can show us is the state of our mind. We all know what happens to our friend when we are affected by a strong emotion like anger, fear, excitement, stress or insecurity. What happens to our breath? As we know, it moves very very fast. Hence, it can be a very useful and a reliable signal to show us what is happening in our minds. If someone has problems with his emotions like anger, our friend will immediately show us from the way the breathing moves that we are getting angry. So it can be a very very useful signal as I said and then if you can listen and heed the signal, you will be able to recover from that emotion immediately.

In the same way, when our mind is calm, relaxed and still, what happens to our friend? The breath also becomes calm and sometimes so subtle that you do not even realise that you are breathing. Thus, if we can learn to make a connection with our friend, the friend will always tell us what is happening in our mind. Some of the friends we have can be sometimes wrong but you will realise that this social friend is always right and reliable.

Our friend also teaches about our body. Hereagain the way we breathe can indicate to us the state of our physical and mental well-being. If you can focus attention on the breath, you will sometimes realise that breathing can be very relaxing. Sometimes it can be very deep or shallow. When you realise that it is shallow, it will always show that you are having some tension in your body, and naturally it will create an emotion and will indicate the connection between tension and emotions. The only way or one of the ways of letting go this tension is by using our friend. In such a situation if you can take some deep breath immediately you might be able to relax your mind and body to a great extent.

In Buddhist meditation, there are two aspects as the aspect of experiencing calm or tranquillity, which is called Samatha and the aspect of developing Vipassanā, insight or wisdom. It is interesting that the object of meditation is relevant to both these aspects. When we are aware of the in-breath and the out-breath and if we can learn not to react to what is happening, then the mind becomes calm and tranquil. Thus this technique also helps us to develop wisdom or insight, *vipassanā*.

One aspect of *vipassanā* is to experience the fact of impermanence or change. When we are aware of the breath we will realise that whatever is happening in our mind and body, including breathing, it changes from moment to moment. You will immediately realise how thoughts are arising and are passing away. This becomes quite clear with our breath. Hereagain if we can be aware of the sensations, we will realise how variations of sensations are taking place and are changing from moment to moment. Thus we learn to be open to any changes that will be taking place in our mind and body from moment to moment. And this insight which you develop by becoming open to change and impermanence internally, will help you also to be open to the fact of impermanence when it happens externally.

As we know, sometimes we have no control of what is happening externally regarding certain events in our life. Suffering arises when we resist this change, when we resist impermanence. Thus if we can really be open to impermanence and understand the nature of impermanence, it will be a very

powerful way of overcoming suffering. Then we can develop this very important insight: how suffering is created by resisting change and how we can overcome suffering by being open to change and by understanding the nature of impermanence.

Another important insight that can arise in relation to our breath is the realisation that there is only the breathing that is taking place within us as its rise and the fall and that there is no ego or a sense of “I” or “me.” There is only the process of breathing from moment to moment.

Another very important insight to be realised is that we are all inter-connected, inter-related and inter-being, despite which we think that we are separate and foreign to one another in a sense. But when we reflect on breathing, we realise that what is common to all beings is this fact of breathing. This should enable us to develop a feeling of oneness with beings around us because what unites us, what is common to all beings is this fact of breathing. We have to realise that we breathe the same air as we cannot separate the breath and say “the air that I am breathing is mine.” Hence there is this universality.

According to a Buddhist text, those who have meditated on this object can easily remember the breath at the time of death if they are conscious. I know some people who are working with dying people and help them to die by getting them to breathe at that time and thereby to learn to be conscious of the breathing at that time. So when we are dying, if we can experience the present moment with our friend, we have a good chance of dying peacefully. So our good friend helps us to live peacefully and to sleep peacefully. Before you fall asleep if you can spend some time just to relax your mind and body with the breath, you can sleep peacefully. And then if we can die peacefully, is there anything more that we need in this world to live peacefully?

### *[Question time]*

QUESTION: Yesterday we heard from you that some people are teaching other people how to manage tension and you were saying that it is best to get rid of it and I am very glad to hear you just followed up on what you said yesterday by telling us to get rid of tension and other emotions through watching the breathing or having smooth and deep breathing. Can you elaborate more on this because it is very useful. Thank you.

GODWIN: So as I said, when we have an emotion, an unpleasant emotion, what makes it worse is our thinking, our thoughts. It is very interesting that when we have an emotion, if we have the space of mind to watch our thoughts, we will realise how thoughts come so quickly at the time and from which we can create a big story. Sometimes a small emotion can really blow up through just this process of thinking.

For example, if someone has made you angry or at least you think that someone has made you angry, then what happens to us? You will be using thoughts about that person, how that person has been behaving in the past etc., so that our whole attention is about that person and with negative thoughts about that person our anger becomes worse and worse. In such a situation, we lose control. Actually at that moment the emotions and the thoughts really control and overwhelm us. If you can spend some time with the breath, just the in-breath and the out-breath, completely being with it, then at least for a few minutes this brewing up of that emotion will become less severe.

In relation to tensions in our body also if we can do some deep breathing consciously and deliberately it can also help us to deal with that tension. In a way, being with the breath or just being with the sensation can be the same because we are experiencing the present moment with the help of the breath and the sensation.

An interesting process to be discovered is as to how thoughts and emotions are involved in creating tension. Supposing someone is afraid of dogs. When such a person sees a dog, the thought comes: “Ah, the dog is there, may be the dog is going to bite me.” That thought immediately gives rise to emotions—emotions of fear, anxiety, insecurity etc. and that can give rise to tension in the body. If we can see this process taking place slowly, it can be very very useful. There can be very important discoveries that we can make. And again the process continues. We react to the tension with thoughts which then become emotions. So it really becomes what can be called a vicious circle.

So how can we interrupt and break this vicious circle? One very powerful way is to spend some time with the breath because then immediately your mind comes to the present and then to all these things. There can be some space that is created by this focusing on our friend.

I took some time to explain in this way because I think we all can relate ourselves to what I have been saying. Therefore, what I would suggest is to experiment with what I am saying and just find out for yourself whether it works.

QUESTION: Some people have mentioned that there should be four steps in this breathing technique. These are soft, shallow, smooth and long and when I tried to follow these four steps, I found that my heart beats faster and when I counted the breathing, I found that even my breathing becomes faster. So how to deal with this situation?

GODWIN: I am not surprised because it seems that you are trying to force the breathing in an artificial way. What is important is to spend some time just allowing the body to breathe naturally. Our friend knows very well how to breathe. Even when we are asleep our friend continues to breathe. In fact this is what will be emphasised when we try to experiment with this technique: to spend some time firstly just allowing the body to breathe naturally, without being controlled, manipulated or interfered. Then it becomes a very simple and a natural way, just knowing, just being aware of what is happening to the body when the body is inhaling and exhaling. So it is a very simple technique but we are very good at complicating a simple technique.

It is interesting that the text says that when you realise that the breath is long, you just know that the breath is long, when you realise the breath is short, you know that it is short. So whatever is happening naturally, you just know it. So I like to suggest to you to try out the way I will be presenting the technique and after you finish, come and tell me what your experience was.

QUESTION: Master, when we are doing meditation, very often we cannot meditate well. Our body, our mind or breathing is not peaceful and calm. What should we do? Shall we just stop and do something else?

GODWIN: It is a very useful question and I like to offer a few suggestions. When we sit to meditate, please do not have any expectations of what should happen or what should not happen. If we can just know whatever is happening what is important is not to judge, not to give a plus, not to give a minus but just knowing from moment to moment what is happening in your mind and body with openness.

The whole idea of meditation is to experience freedom from suffering. Sometimes when we try to meditate with expectations, the meditation itself creates suffering for us. When we have an expectation that the mind should be calm, that there should be only positive experiences etc., if they arise, we hold on to them. When we are unable to hold on to them, that creates suffering. Then, when the mind is not calm and relaxed, you will think that you are not meditating rightly and that too creates suffering. So without this positive and negative ideas of duality just be open, just be friendly to whatever is happening from moment to moment with awareness. That can give us immediate freedom. I shall be emphasising this aspect when presenting this technique.

Now please take a short break and try to develop awareness. When you are moving, try to move slowly and consciously as far as possible. What can help us is the practice of complete silence during this short break.

*[Interval follows]*

Let us begin the meditation without any expectations of what should or should not happen. We will begin with what is called the "beginner's mind." Let us begin by being aware of our body, the different sensations, the different movements in our body. Let us learn to feel friendly towards our body and also to feel what it is to sit with our body completely still. See if you can feel the stillness around you and now please allow the body to breathe naturally. The body knows very well how to breathe and therefore just allow the body to do what it likes. Now please find out what happens in the body when the body is breathing naturally and also the different movements and sensations in the body when the body is breathing. Let us just be with the different sensations and movements in our body from moment to moment.

### 3. Four Sublime States — I

*(brahma-vihāra)*

Today and tomorrow, we are going to talk about a very important aspect in Buddhist meditation. It relates to the development of four very important spiritual qualities within ourselves. They are called “The Four Sublime or Beautiful States.” Also known as “Divine Abodes,” we can be like divine beings or gods when we develop them. I like to see that these four qualities as our friends because if we can encourage them to be with us most of the time, this will help us to experience a lot of joy and lightness which will help us to give joy and lightness to others also. To put it in another way, when these four friends are not with us, it can create lots of suffering for ourselves as well as for others. These four qualities in Pali sound so soothing, so nice, as you can see. They are *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*. *Mettā* is loving kindness or friendliness; *karuṇā* is compassion; *muditā* is sympathetic joy and *upekkhā* is having a non-reactive and an equanimous mind. Let us today talk about the first two qualities, the first two friends.

*Mettā* in simple terminology means just ‘friendliness.’ Hence the interesting question is: “where do we begin this friendliness”? It is psychologically interesting that we are to begin in ourselves. I think it is difficult to be friendly to others unless you are friendly to yourself. A phrase that I like to use is: *mettā* enables us to be our best friend. Sometimes we do not realise that we can be our own worst enemy. Generally speaking, we see enemies outside ourselves and all our life we are trying to find and get rid of the external enemies without realising that we can be our worst enemy.

In what way do we become our worst enemy? One is that we can be extremely critical and hard on ourselves. It can become a very strong habit in us, to give ourselves minuses. When we have this habit of giving ourselves only minuses, we will also be giving minuses to other people as well. So we can create a hell where only minuses exist. However, meditation of loving-kindness helps us to see this very clearly, how we become our own enemies by giving ourselves and others minuses and also we learn to see more and more positive qualities in us and others.

In this connection there is a beautiful word that is used in the Dhamma which is “rejoicing” in our own good qualities, in the positive aspects in ourselves. Thus everyone of you can rejoice that you have made a commitment as meditators. In this way, to see more and more the positive side in us is to learn to rejoice in our own goodness. This can bring lots of joy and lightness to us and when we experience more and more joy and lightness in us, then it also can be infectious to others. It can influence and inspire others also to experience more joy and lightness.

In the Dhammapada, one of the very important books on the Buddha’s teaching, there is a very interesting idea that we should try to overcome our suffering through joy because at times we try to overcome suffering through suffering. When suffering arises and we experience unpleasant emotions it becomes very easy to handle them when we experience more and more joy and lightness.

Another aspect of rejoicing is when we take to meditation as a part of our spiritual life, when we learn to lead a harmless, skilful and a wholesome life, not creating suffering for ourselves and others. This comes under an ethical behaviour very much emphasised in the Buddha’s teaching wherein there is a beautiful phrase, expressed by the Pali words *anavajja-sukha*, which is joy and bliss that come from harmlessness, joy and bliss that come from a skilful wholesome way of living. Thus one can see how clearly we can learn to be our best friend from being our worst enemy.

Another way whereby we can be our own enemy is when we hold on to the wounds that we carry in relation to what has happened in the past. Wounds can be generally created by what you have done to others and *vice versa*. In relation to what you have done to others, a very destructive emotion that we can be holding on to is guilt and remorse, while in relation to what others have done to you, the emotion that assumes this role is hatred and ill will.

When we have these unhealed wounds, it can affect us in many ways, even our body sometimes. We can have psychosomatic illnesses which are created by psychological reasons. It can also affect our body wherein it can create certain tensions. Its also can affect our sleep and we will be having

dreams in relation to some of these unhealed wounds. So we can be experiencing sadness, fear and guilt even while we are sleeping. At the time that we die, some of these unhealed wounds can surface in a very strong way so that we will not be able even to die peacefully.

So it is extremely important for us to learn how to heal these wounds. Here again meditation of loving kindness can be extremely helpful in learning also to forgive yourself as well as others. Forgive ourselves by realising that we are human, that we are still not enlightened, that we are still imperfect. In the same way forgive others by realising that they are human, that they are also imperfect like you. This is also a way of learning to let go of the past so that we do not carry this past as a very heavy burden that we are holding on to. It is only when we can really heal these wounds and let go of the past and the burden that we can really experience joy, peace and more compassion for ourselves and others.

Now I like to say something about our second friend, *karuṇā*, which becomes associated when you see suffering in other people. It is extremely important to learn to do something, to have friendliness when you see suffering in other people. In this world, there can be more and more suffering in particular situations. Thus we need to develop this important spiritual quality of compassion where we need to do something, even small things when you see someone suffering. One of the spiritual teachers has said that it is not so important to do big acts of loving kindness to others when you see suffering but it is small mercies that we can and should do.

This reminds me of again a quotation from the Buddha where he was emphasising the importance of loving kindness when he was addressing a group of monks. He told them that if they can practise loving kindness during the time it takes to snap your fingers, they are worthy of being monks. This shows that even practising loving kindness for a few minutes is worthy.

In the same way, doing little acts such as even talking to or smiling with a person even for a few minutes constitute a way of developing this quality. When you develop this quality, you are bound to see such opportunities everywhere, even while travelling in a bus or going on the road, so that you can be of some help and show some kindness to others.

I also like to suggest that regarding this quality of *karuṇā*, one should also learn to relate it to oneself. When you see yourself suffering, when you realise that you are suffering yourself, you will be your worst enemy if you just allow yourself to continue to suffer in this way. So having *karuṇā* for yourself is trying to do something about this suffering.

Now we realise that these qualities are called beautiful and divine because they help us to do something about our own as well as about the suffering of others. Here too, like loving kindness, when you develop this quality of *karuṇā* and when you see that whatever help you have given is having the desired effect, you can be very happy about it. When you see that you can do something about your own suffering, this can develop lots of self-confidence and you can be happy that you have found a way to deal with your suffering and also found a way to eradicate the suffering of others.

### **[Question time]**

QUESTION: I would like to ask if there is any limit for compassion and loving kindness. For example, I have a friend who asked me to lend him some money because he said he was poor but in fact I later found out that he went gambling. Even when I came to know this I gave him money a second and third time and stopped. Thus there is a limit to forgiveness, loving kindness and compassion.

GODWIN: Very good question, because in everyday life we sometimes have to face such situations. It is very important to realise that loving kindness does not mean allowing others to exploit you. This can be considered as "idiotic compassion." In this connection there is a very interesting story. It is one of my favourite stories, which I like to share with you. It comes from the Indian tradition and the story is about a cobra who was practising loving kindness.

There was this cobra practising loving kindness in the forest saying: "may all beings be well, may all beings be happy, may all beings be peaceful." An old woman who was collecting firewood saw this cobra and mistaking it to be a rope she used the cobra to bundle the firewood that she was

carrying. As the cobra was doing loving kindness, it allowed this woman to do anything and the woman carried the bundle of firewood home and the cobra escaped with lot of physical pain and wounds.

It went to meet its teacher and said: "See what has happened to me. I was practising your loving kindness and see the wounds and all the pain that I am experiencing in my body. The teacher said very calmly: "You have not been practising loving kindness: you have been practising "idiotic compassion" because you should have shown that you were a cobra. You should have at least hissed." Thus in relating yourself to people like the person you described, we have to learn to hiss whereby you will be doing a service for him.

QUESTION: Master Godwin, I have a problem which I like to present here. A couple of times in my life, in fact recently, lots of things were going wrong: things like losing control and it was just like my being in the eye of a hurricane, spinning and spinning or like a rat climbing on the wheel trying to keep up with the spin and I don't understand that my own mind should create such a horror. I want to know whether you have any idea what really is causing it, and how to get out of it.

GODWIN: Anyway I would like you to, if you don't mind, meet me personally and I like to get more details on what exactly is happening but in the meantime, I might try to offer one or two suggestions.

The first suggestion I like to offer is learning to make friends with unpleasant experiences. When we have unpleasant experiences, whether it is physical or mental pain, what normally happens is we don't like it, we resist it and then the result is we start hating ourselves for that. By hating, resisting and disliking them, sometimes we might be giving them more power and energy. Here, loving kindness can be used by making friends with this situation, which you are experiencing. A phrase I like to use sometimes is just to tell yourself: "It is O.K. that I don't feel O.K." This is the first suggestion I like to offer.

The second suggestion is making friends with it and becoming open to it. Then you can explore, investigate and learn about what you are going through. Sometimes we may have such an experience when we have unrealistic goals in life, when we have expectations about how you should behave, how others should behave, how life should be etc. Sometimes in a way, we can be making strong demands of how things should be and when these demands are met, you are happy but when not met, we start to suffer and to hate ourselves, others and life itself. So with friendliness, you can learn to find out, learn and explore more about what you are really going through.

The third suggestion I like to offer is something related to the second suggestion. That is to find out whether this condition is created by thought, emotion or sensation. Sometimes when we have such unpleasant experiences, it is a very good practice to spend some time with the sensations or the breath which technique can help you to create some space when you will realise that these sensations are changing all the time. If one can really be open to the sensations and become open to the change, one will be able to relate oneself to it in a different way.

The last suggestion I like to offer is to find out the time when you do not have unpleasant experiences. It is extremely important in everyday life to find out if you are bothered by a particular emotion and to know the times when that emotion is not there. Perhaps if you can be open to that, you might be surprised that during the day, there are moments when this condition that you are describing is completely absent. I am sure you are not experiencing that now because I can see you smiling.

So I would suggest to try to use some of these tools and still if they do not work, you can either call me or come and see me.

Another last point is that if we can learn to see such experiences as valuable opportunities to learn, then it is a beautiful way to live. Learning from unpleasant experiences and negative conditions is to exploit them as opportunities for our spiritual growth.

QUESTION: Usually when nothing happens, it is very easy to say "let's have loving kindness to ourselves and to others," but when things happen, for example, somebody saying or doing something around us which makes us very unhappy, my experience is that I get very very angry, to such an extent that I completely forget everything about loving kindness and I find that I cannot even sleep

for a few nights and this hatred remains for a few days. I want to know whether you have had any such experience before. If you have, how did you handle it?

GODWIN: Very good question, very good question. I am very happy that you are presenting very practical questions relating to everyday life. Firstly I will share with you how I work with such situations and that will help you to work with what you have described.

The first point is: do not be surprised, because we are still human, and imperfect. As long as we are human and imperfect, we are bound to get angry. So why should we be surprised?

The second point is: do not give yourself a minus because you are getting angry. By giving yourself a minus, what you are doing is getting angry about the anger and you are hating yourself because you have anger.

The third point is that, if you are unable to observe the anger at the time it arises, to do so at least later, when you can start reflecting on as to what happened: "Why did I get angry? Why did I use those words? What really made me lose my control?" So our failures can become very valuable spiritual friends. This kind of reflection has to be done in a very friendly, gentle way rather than in a very hard way, beating yourself and unnecessarily experiencing guilt and remorse in relation to what has happened. Also, as I said in my talk, you can forgive yourself with the thought that you are still human: "Let me see when I meet that person next week, I will see how I will be reacting to that person." Thus you will be learning from and experimenting with such experiences.

If we need to have an ideal, the ideal should be not to get angry. A more realistic ideal we can have in relation to anger is to see how soon we can recover from that anger. This is the importance of practising awareness in everyday life. If you can practise awareness and if you can have a connection with your breath, then as you are getting angry, the breath will tell you that you are getting angry, and with that awareness, you can notice how you can really recover from that anger.

I met a woman having a terrible temper, anger was her big problem. I gave her a simple suggestion which worked very well. I told her to carry a mirror in her pocket and whenever she got angry, to look at the mirror, without opening her mouth but just to look at the mirror. When she did it she was shocked to see her own person. Whenever she did that she felt bad about how she looked like because she was concerned about her appearance. There was an immediate recovery from the anger and sometimes she was able to laugh at her own anger.

*[Now follows a short interval during which the meditators were asked to move slowly with awareness and also to maintain silence and enjoy the space that silence creates in one's mind and to come back after a few minutes.]*

One must feel grateful that one has this body, that we can use this body for our practice.

Can you see yourself as your best friend and really feel it too? Feel it in every part of your body, your whole being, in the area of your heart and allow your heart to open up to yourself, like a flower? Feeling yourself as your best friend, can you forgive yourself for any mistakes you have made in the past? In forgiving yourself, can you really say to yourself and feel these words: "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be peaceful, may I be free of suffering"? For anyone who does not have such wounds, you can feel happy that you have healed your wounds. For those who have wounds in relation to what others have done to you, let us also learn to heal these wounds by learning to forgive others, and to let go of the past, learning to let go of any hatred or ill will that you have been carrying.

Can you think of these and others and also wish them that they also be well and happy, that they be peaceful and free of suffering? In healing our wounds, may we experience more joy, more lightness, more friendliness to oneself and to others.

Let us learn to rejoice that we are learning to develop  
loving kindness to oneself and to others.

## 4. Four Sublime States — II

### (*brahma-vihāra*)

According to the Buddha's teaching, when we develop the four spiritual qualities of *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* we can become god-like. That is why they are sometimes called "the divine abodes." I like to see them as four of our very beautiful friends. When we have these four friends within us, they will make us beautiful, they will make us experience more joy and lightness and this can also infect and affect others around you. Last time I spoke of two of these qualities, *mettā*, loving kindness and *karuṇā*, compassion.

*Mettā* can be seen very briefly as learning to be your best friend and also to be a friend to others. *Mettā* helps us to open our hearts to ourselves as well as to others. *Karuṇā* is when you see suffering in us and in others, doing something to overcome such suffering. In this modern world, as there is lot of suffering which manifests itself in different ways, it is extremely important to develop this quality of *karuṇā* in relation to one's own as well as others' suffering. In this connection, the Buddha has said: "Helping others is helping yourself: helping yourself is helping others, and eventually you see no difference between ourselves and others."

Today I like to deal with the third and the fourth qualities, which are *muditā*, sympathetic joy and *upekkhā*, having an equanimous and non-reactive mind.

It is interesting to see that while *karuṇā* is responding to suffering in whatever way it turns, *muditā* is when you see others happy, you also become happy because others are happy. This is sometimes not easy because the opposite of this quality of *muditā* is jealousy and envy, specially when you see others doing better than yourself. Is it possible for us to really be happy and joyful that others are experiencing happiness and joy?

Another aspect of *muditā* is making an effort to make others happy. In a way one can relate it to *karuṇā* because when you see others suffering, trying to do something about it and then getting them to experience some joy and lightness from their suffering is *karuṇā*.<sup>3</sup> When that happens, you can be extremely happy about that, which is *muditā*.

This sympathetic joy or *muditā* has another interesting aspect, which is learning to rejoice and to be happy about your own happiness. Though this sounds simple, sometimes for some people, it is not easy in practice. There are some people when they experience happiness and joy, they would say: "I don't deserve this. I am such a bad person that I don't deserve to be happy." Yet others would say: "How can I feel happy? I feel guilty because there is such a lot of suffering around me and how can I experience joy? When I experience joy, I feel guilty about it." Thus, it is extremely important to learn to develop this quality as it is quite interesting: to rejoice in your own happiness and goodness and in seeing more and more the positive in you and in others.

Everyone of you right now should rejoice because you have made a commitment to follow a spiritual path by being meditators. You should rejoice that you have made a commitment to lead a harmless life, learning not to harm yourself and others. You should also rejoice that meditation sometimes or most of the time is an attempt to work with our unpleasant experiences, whether physical or mental. How many people in this world are really prepared to do this? Try to learn from them and ask the question: "What can I learn from this?" I'm very happy to find that some of you have been coming for these talks regularly. You can rejoice yourself that you have this motivation, this interest.

Being hard and critical about ourselves and giving ourselves minuses may come sometimes for some people quite naturally. That is why we need to deliberately and consciously cultivate this positive quality of rejoicing in some of the qualities that I have mentioned. Sometimes I reflect that we, all human beings, have the potentialities to become free which means that these qualities of freedom are just within us. Meditation can be seen as a way of acknowledging and realising this and allowing these factors of enlightenment to arise in us. I hope you realise the importance of this



beautiful quality, the divine-like quality of *muditā*, sympathetic joy, in relation to ourselves and to others.

The last quality of equanimity, of having a non-reactive mind also is something we have to cultivate. Therefore, when we meditate and do formal sitting meditation, whenever a pleasant feeling occurs, if you are having a non-reactive mind you can learn just to relate yourself to it without giving it a plus and thereby wanting to continue with it. When we have an unpleasant experience to physical or mental pain, the immediate reaction is giving it a minus and not liking it, resisting and disliking it. Thus with an equanimous mind you just learn to see things just as they are without giving pluses and minuses.

As we are still human, there are moments when we like or dislike, with commensurate reactions. Hereagain I would suggest that if you are reacting, just to realise that you are reacting and then to find out, in your own experience, how suffering is created for you when you like something and continue holding on to it. And also when you are resisting and disliking something, how it again creates suffering. Thus we can learn from our reactions, from our reactive minds.

When you react just know that you are reacting and it is a learning experience. When you do not react just know that you are not reacting and see for yourself the results, the benefits of it. Thus, if we can really learn to be open, and see the difference between the reactive and the non-reactive minds that can be considered something very important.

This is how we can try to practise when doing formal meditation. We must learn to do this in everyday life as well, which may be more difficult but that should be the practice. If you can be observant and aware in the different situations in everyday life, you can catch yourself how in certain situations you like certain things, which you like to continue and to which we give pluses and in other situations which we don't like and we like to get rid of them. Hence, when doing formal meditation in everyday life, when you like and identify yourself with something, try to see for yourself what happens to you, what it does to you. Then you will realise that you are making a very very important discovery, namely, that we cannot be demanding from life how things should be. In a way what we are doing is making demands from ourselves as to how we should behave in making demands from others, how they should behave in demanding from life, how life should be according to our own terms. Making demands is one thing and the reality is another. This is a simple way of seeing as to how we create our own suffering. Hereagain, it is very important in everyday life just to see how we create our own suffering with the demands we are making.

This brings us to what the Buddha discovered as the Four Noble Truths, the first of which is the fact of suffering. There is no human being who is not familiar with the first noble truth, for everyone here, including myself, has experienced the first noble truth. Maybe some of you are experiencing it even now.

Here an interesting question arises: Why is suffering a noble truth? What is noble in suffering? It is an interesting and a useful question to reflect. I suggest that it is noble because, from suffering, if you can go to the second noble truth, you can find a way out of suffering. In everyday life when you are suffering, if you can tell yourself: "I am experiencing the first noble truth," that is an interesting way of saying about suffering. Then what happens to most people is they just stick only in the first noble truth, only in suffering.

The second noble truth is more difficult sometimes because you have to find out how you are creating your own suffering by your likes and dislikes, by the demands that you are making. I would suggest that this is a very very important realisation for us because if we can see that we are creating our own suffering, then you have the realisation that only you can free yourself from the suffering that you create yourself. This brings us to the third and the fourth noble truths.

### **[Question Time]**

QUESTION: I don't understand the relationship among the Four Sublime States that you have mentioned. For example, when you mentioned about equanimity, you said that we should not distinguish between liking or disliking or any such outside circumstances but when you talk about

loving kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy, we have to feel for others and external circumstances; so we have to get involved in what happens outside. So how can you reconcile the three qualities where we have to get involved with what happens outside while the fourth quality is that we should not distinguish.

GODWIN: Very good question. I like practical examples. So let us take a practical example where you are walking on the road and you see someone fallen on the road. If you have loving kindness and compassion, there is a need and an urge to respond. Here again there are two very important words: 'reacting' and 'responding.' Reacting would be getting emotionally involved, having fear, insecurity, and even start crying. And if there is a reaction, you will not be able to respond clearly as what to do about that person. This is how the four qualities come together. Thus with an equanimous mind you learn to do something about it, just responding without reacting. I hope it is clear.

QUESTION: If we only handle the situation as you have just said, then if we go on this way, I feel that we may get cold and very indifferent to what is happening outside. Only handle the situation and do not feel anything. So what is your suggestion?

Godwin: Yes. Well this is why my response to the earlier question was that you have to have *mettā*, *karuṇā*, when you see the person fallen on the road. If there is no *mettā* and *karuṇā*, you will just see the person fallen on the road and you just walk by. It is only because of *mettā* and *karuṇā* that this person felt the need to do something, to act, to show some concern and care for that person. It is that sense of concern and care that makes you act. This is what is beautiful when you cultivate these qualities. When there is a need to use them in such situations, there is just the response. I hope the answer is clear.

QUESTION: How can we cultivate these four qualities during meditation?

GODWIN: Another good question, practical question. This is how it can be done. Now what I suggest sometimes is to choose one of these four qualities. May be today we can do what we did yesterday, by choosing loving kindness.

If one wants to develop *karuṇā*, then supposing when you are sitting there you get physical pain and suffering. So rather than continue to suffer try to do something about it, learn to be friendly in relation to that, and to let go that. That would be practising *karuṇā* in relation to meditation. Then you can immediately perhaps experience sympathetic joy, to feel happy. Instead of suffering you tried to do something about it and now there is a change taking place. Now you can experience joy and happiness about it. Then you can experience the last quality by realising that you should not hold on to this joy and have a non-reactive attitude. Thus you see one particular simple situation and develop *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *uppekā*, all the four qualities. Today when we meditate, I might try to offer some guidelines regarding all these four aspects.

QUESTION: Can I just come back to the big qualities *mettā*, *karuṇā*. Are they not reactions and feelings that one would have when one sees a child fallen on the road?

GODWIN: I again repeat the same point and take the example of the child. When you walk on the road and you see a child fallen instead of a man, here too it is the same principle because with a child, you can really react, you can even start crying, and feel sad: "Oh, see what has happened to the child?" When you get involved like this, you will not be in a position to help that poor child. Thus, like doing something to the person who has fallen, here you show some concern also and then you would do something about the child.

This is why I used the two words, please get the two words very clear: reacting and responding. If we react emotionally, we can again learn from that also. What made me become so sad, depressed and insecure? It could be a thought like this "may be my own child would be like this." Thus we can create a huge story from that typical incident. If that happens, you can reflect on that: "Oh why am I reacting?" Hence that becomes an object of meditation.

And may be in another situation, you might be able to respond, very clearly and calmly, with a still mind as to what has to be done. So you see the difference very clearly: "Ah, see what happens when I react and see what happens when I respond." Just see the difference.

The same principle applies to what is happening internally. Here it applies to some external event as when we are meditating, someone who is very habitually reactive, can be reactive to what is happening in meditation also. To take an example, supposing your knees are in pain. You can say “my knees are in pain, who knows my knees might break.” I know some meditators who have broken their knees and in like manner you can create a huge story from the pain in the knees. And from the pain in the knees, you can have anxiety, fear, insecurity and all such unpleasant emotions. So responding would be just observing the pain and learning to make friends with it and if it becomes unbearable, you change the posture. Now let me thank you very much for asking questions and take a small break.

**[Break]**

### *Meditation of loving kindness, mettā.*

We will try to radiate lots of friendliness in all directions. “May all beings be well, happy and peaceful and free of suffering.” Let us now think of the people whom you know are suffering, whether physical or mental. Let us feel for those people who are suffering, let us feel concern for them. “May they be free of the suffering that they are experiencing.” Can you really wish this from your heart? Can you now feel happy that you are trying to develop qualities of loving kindness, *karunā*, concern for others? Rejoice in doing so. Can you be happy with yourself that you are trying to develop these qualities of the heart?

Let us now try to develop the important quality of a non-reactive mind. Whatever is happening in our mind and body right now, can you relate yourself to that without liking or disliking? Or if we are experiencing physical pain and discomfort, can we relate ourselves to it without reacting? If your mind is not calm, can you just know that the mind is not calm and not react to it, not give it a minus? Also if you are experiencing pleasant experiences, can you like it and relate yourself to it without liking it and giving a plus?

Just be open to whatever is happening and learn to see things just as they are.

**[Chanting follows]**

## **5. Meditation In Everyday Life**

GODWIN: I like to welcome each one of you for this one day meditation programme. The first point I want to make is that everyone of you should feel very happy because being a Sunday and a holiday you have the motivation to come here and spend the whole day in meditation. Everyone of you should rejoice and should feel very happy about this.

One of the things that we have been emphasising in the talks as a very important aspect in meditation is the practice of awareness, mindfulness. So today we will make a special effort to develop this very very important skill, the skill of being conscious. And also related to that, we will try to have continuity of awareness from moment to moment as far as possible. Whether you are sitting, standing, walking, eating, doing *yoga* or whatever you are doing, whether going to or doing something in the toilet, please make an effort just to know, just to be conscious of what is happening in your mind and body from moment to moment.

It is also important to learn to use awareness with friendliness and gentleness. There is a very interesting Mahayana text in which watching and observing yourself is compared to a mother, who keeps on just watching and observing, just noticing her child whatever the child is doing. In the same way, if you can watch, observe and find out what is happening in your mind and body with awareness and friendliness, this combination becomes extremely important. Another important aspect of awareness is experiencing the present moment, the here and the now. So today let us make an effort just to forget whatever has happened in the past, which we cannot change, because it is gone. And then let us not think of the future because the future has not yet come. Thus, in a way,

thinking of the past and the future is not being one with reality and today we will make a special effort to use awareness and friendliness to experience the present moment as much as possible.

A very important area wherein we need to work is that of emotions, especially emotions like sadness, fear, insecurity, shame, guilt etc. that create suffering in everyday life. So I'll be presenting techniques which will help you to work with these unpleasant emotions. It is also important to know when these unpleasant emotions are absent. Here too what will be helpful to us is the practice of awareness because if you know how to be aware, then you know what unpleasant emotions you are having and not having. I will present one or two tools which will help you to work with them.

Thus it is important to have self-confidence by knowing when these unpleasant emotions would arise and how to deal with them. We need not be afraid of them and you will discover some of these tools and I really hope that you will develop this self-confidence in you and trust in the Dhamma so that you know what to do with them when they arise. Knowing how to recover from them is extremely important.

In conclusion, I like to suggest that you make a real effort to make full use of your stay today. In a way you have made a big sacrifice in coming here on a holiday. So let us make an effort to make full use of the opportunity and get a glimpse and a taste of what meditation is about and then to have the confidence that through your own efforts, you can find a way out of the suffering you yourself have created.

## **Sitting Meditation**

Let us begin by just feeling friendly and gentle towards our mind and body. Can you see yourself as your best friend? Can you really feel it in every part of your body, your whole being? And being your best friend, you have complete confidence and trust in yourself. Now let us just be mindful, aware, alert and awake of what is happening in our mind and body from moment to moment.

Please realise that what we are doing is not developing concentration but just learning to be aware, to be conscious and to be alert. Please don't try to achieve anything but just know what is happening in your mind and body. If you are aware you know that you are sitting completely still and that you will feel the stillness in this room.

Now we will use our awareness to become aware of our breath. So please allow your body to breathe naturally and just be aware of the sensations and movements you experience in the body, in your breath. You know when the body is inhaling and also when it is exhaling. Feel friendly towards your thoughts and just return to your breath. Experience the present moment with the help of your friend, the breath. When the breath is long you know that the breath is long. When it is short you know that it is short. When it is deep you know that it is deep. When it is not deep you know that it is not deep. Feeling the stillness in the room, you inhale. Feeling the stillness in the room, you exhale. If there are unpleasant sensations in the body, just learn to feel friendly and gentle towards them. Don't see them as disturbances or distractions. Let us now end with meditation of loving kindness and take a short break.

Please don't think that the meditation is over. Please continue to know from moment to moment what is happening in your mind and body. We can meditate in four postures which are sitting, standing, walking and lying down. We will be exploring three of these postures, sitting, standing and walking. Now let us do some standing meditation and when you stand, please stand slowly, observing every movement when you are standing and observing the intention to stand. Also learn to stand slowly so that you will not be disturbing persons around you.

Now just feel what it is to stand. Feel the different sensations and movements in your body when you are standing. When thoughts come, gently let them go off and come back. Experience the present moment with the help of your body. Note carefully and sharply how sensations in the body change from moment to moment. Feel what it is to stand with your body completely still. Then you can feel the stillness around you and try to remain not thinking about the past or the future but experiencing the present moment with the help of the sensations and stillness. Whatever you experience in the body, just see them as just sensations arising and passing away from moment to moment.

## Walking Meditation

Here you should be aware of all the movements in your body while you are walking. It is experiencing the present moment with the help of conscious walking. You must feel the different sensations and the movements in your body while you are walking. You can look at the feet of the person in front and let go your thoughts gently and come back to walking and just enjoy conscious walking without looking around. You should walk as if you are walking on lotus flowers, conscious of each step that you are taking. You must feel the sensations in your knees and of the feet touching the floor.

You can try to slow down the walking so that you are really conscious of each step that you are taking from moment to moment and let go your thoughts gently and come back to walking. Now you can stand wherever you are and close your eyes.

Now let us do a short sitting before yoga: so you walk slowly with moment to moment awareness to where you were seated and then we will do a short sitting. So continuity of awareness from walking to sitting is very important. This is going to be a very short sitting so we will try to sit with a mind that is really alert and awake from moment to moment, and as it is a short sitting, you must learn to sit without moving.

## Yoga Discussion

Now before yoga and after yoga please go to the toilet so that during the sitting you should try to avoid leaving the hall to go to the toilet or outside. We can discuss what we have been trying to do today. What we will try to do is to go over some of the things we did today followed by a question time.

The first technique we practised was just being aware of whatever was happening. Does anyone have any question in relation to this?

QUESTION: When I practised the walking and standing meditation, I was able to be aware of the sensations and what happened at the time but when I practised sitting this morning, I had many passing thoughts and was carried away by these passing thoughts. Later if we are going to have sitting again this afternoon then, if I am again carried away by the passing thoughts, can I do standing meditation instead of sitting or what other suggestion you would give me?

GODWIN: Yes. Very clear question. In that technique I have presented, it is something very simple just to observe the passing thoughts and to know very clearly, and sharply, what thoughts are arising from moment to moment. Having passing thoughts should not be a problem when we have this awareness of whatever is happening.

QUESTION: Thank you for your teaching. Now I know that my suffering comes from my expectations but this is my habitual pattern, this is my bad habit. How can I stop this bad habit from coming back again. That is the first question. The second part is should I deal with this situation with sympathetic joy or with equanimity? And the third part of the question is if I deal with it with equanimity, would there be another expectation of what I have to do?

GODWIN: Well, it is quite right to say that suffering is created by our expectations and that it is a strong habit in us and this is where awareness becomes important. With awareness, you catch yourself immediately when your habitual pattern arises and realise that it is just a habit and not reality. Again, to repeat, being aware and catching the habit when it arises in whatever form and then learning to let go it, knowing that it is just a habit, is what is required. If you can catch it as it arises it will be great because then you will be really handling it effectively. As I have often said, as we are human, sometimes we might fail to catch it as it arises and we might become victims of this habit. When that happens again reflect on what has happened when the event is over and then learn from what has happened and learn to experiment with such situations. The best technique to work of course is to be aware and be equanimous as you have pointed out, learning to have a non-reactive mind to whatever is happening.

Whether to have a non-reactive mind is another expectation to be realised: I am trying to be non-reactive but sometimes it might succeed, sometimes not so that if you can have that openness, there is very little likelihood of it becoming a strong expectation. I am very happy that you have made a very important discovery and I would like to say that with such a tendency for discovery I am sure you have confidence for more and more discoveries and I feel that eventually you will succeed in working with this habitual pattern. Another thing you were doing was focusing on breathing.

QUESTION: When I walk normally in the streets, there is no problem, very natural but when I try to practise walking meditation and place mindfulness on the feet, then I find that my walking becomes unstable.

GODWIN: Actually my question was about focusing on breathing, but it is alright that you asked a question about walking. You are making a very interesting point because in meditation also we have to do things naturally. This is why in the meditation of breathing one has to learn to breathe naturally. In the same way when doing the walking meditation, it is only slowing down but in slowing down one is learning to walk naturally. But if you try to do it differently and not naturally, then naturally you will have problems in both cases.

A very interesting point that arises from that question is that when we are meditating, we feel that we should do something different, something special. So if you try to do something special, as if it is something different, then there will be special problems. Therefore please realise that meditation is not something special. It is something very natural. It was so beautiful when I had a session with a group of children, so natural, simple and uncomplicated.

QUESTION: I usually meditate in the night around 1.00 a.m. and I find that when I breathe my eyes appear to be pulled inwards. When I meditate during the daytime there is no such problem. So I would like to know whether there is a difference between meditating at night and during daytime.

GODWIN: It depends. If you are getting up at 1.00 a.m. I feel that you may be trying too hard. I am very happy that you are so motivated to start meditating at 1.00 a.m. which is a big plus. I like to suggest to you to try to meditate between 3.00 and 4.00 in the morning, may be 3.30 or 4.00 and the problems that you were describing may not happen then. In most meditation centres in Sri Lanka, we get up around 3:30, 4:00 or 4:30. I think it is very important that we should get enough sleep, of course depending on the individual.

QUESTION: When we meditate and focus on the breath sometimes we may find that the air around us is polluted. For example, when somebody is cooking nearby and there are smells, the focusing would be disturbed by the smells or the polluted air. So what should we do under those circumstances? Should we stop meditating or what?

GODWIN: No I would suggest you to continue with the meditation because it might be difficult to find a place where there is no pollution. The problem is not with the smell of food but with ourselves. If we can find ideal places where there is nice air without smell of food that is very good. But does that mean that we should not meditate in places where there is smell of food and not very pure air? In relation to the smell of food, when you get that smell what you can observe is as to what the thoughts that you have in relation to the smell of food. It will be a very good insight that when you get the smell of food there is only smelling and no reaction to the smell. If this happens, you have a very important insight, a glimpse, that the problem is not with what is happening externally but what is happening inside us. What is beautiful about meditation is the so-called distractions and disturbances. They become your teachers. Rather than wasting such situations, we should learn to confront such situations and see how far you can meditate. This will give you a lot of self-confidence which will be a very very important breakthrough.

If we meditate in a place where there is pure air, where there is no smell of food, do we think there won't be any problems for us? There we might have other problems.

Thank you very much for the useful questions that have been asked but what struck me was all the questions were asked by ladies. I hope the men do not have any problems.

## Discussion with Group B

GODWIN: Do you have any questions about what we have been trying to do today?

QUESTION: When we sit, is there a posture which we must stick to?

GODWIN: I would say the ideal posture will be the cross-legged posture wherein too there are variations. The lotus posture is one. Anyway, whatever the cross-legged posture be what is important is to have your spine erect because when you have your spine erect, it is very easy to become alert and awake and really be conscious. So this is where *yoga* exercises can help you sometimes to work with your posture. In the afternoon session, if you have any difficulties with the sitting posture, please ask the *yoga* Master and he will help you with the sitting posture. Here again what is important is to have your posture wherein you can feel relaxed. It is very very important to be mentally and physically relaxed when you meditate.

QUESTION: When I meditate and after I have completely relaxed, I find my eyes usually become moist and tears coming out. I would like to know as to what happens here.

GODWIN: I am happy to hear that you do feel relaxed when you meditate. When you are relaxed if something is happening in the eyes, just know that it is happening. When we meditate, we really do not know what is going to happen in our mind and body. Many different things can happen in our mind and body. If you ask the question: "Why is this happening to me? Is it the right or the wrong thing?" etc., it can create more problems and more suffering. So in meditation whatever is happening, you just observe, you just know, and then continue. Something else is bound to happen next.

QUESTION: I would like to ask questions not about meditation but about the Four Sublime States. I work in a coroner's court as a clerk and whenever I read reports on the cases, in each case there is a deceased person. He or she may have been killed in an accident or might have committed suicide. Whatever the cause of death, when I read the reports, I have to write down his or her age, occupation, address, reason for death etc. and there is a code for each age, occupation and when I do this, I find that no matter whether a person is young or old, man or woman, there has been a lot of suffering and it is because of such suffering that they have committed suicide or because of some negligence that they were involved in accidents. Whenever I write down a code in the file, I feel pain in my heart and sometimes what I do is reciting some formula like *namo tassa* and then the pain would become a little bit less. I also found that my mind expands, thinking that the person who has committed suicide must have suffered a lot before committing the act and even thereafter in his next life, he may have to go to a place where he has to continue with the suffering. Thus I become very unhappy. I would like to know how to handle this situation. Should I try to lessen the pain or should I just allow the pain to go on?

GODWIN: I will give a simple suggestion. You can think of the particular without the details such as age, the circumstances and then think of him or her that wherever that person may be, wish him or her to be well, happy, be peaceful and free of suffering. So in place of pain, grief and suffering, you will be developing loving kindness for that person. It will be good for both you and that person.

QUESTION: Most of the time when I meditate, I find that it is very difficult to relax because there are many passing thoughts. What is your suggestion?

GODWIN: What is wrong with passing thoughts? There is nothing wrong with them. Or do you think that you should not be having passing thoughts when you complain that you cannot relax? As I have repeatedly mentioned, please make friends with your thoughts, emotions and sensations. I cannot understand why meditators hate their passing thoughts. When we do not meditate passing thoughts are no problem and when we meditate they are not welcome. So when you do not meditate, you feel very relaxed despite the passing thoughts and when you meditate you cannot relax because of them. Are not we very funny? See what we are doing in the name of meditation. Please understand this very clearly.

QUESTION: Previously, I have practised some other kind of breathing where my breathing is not natural. Now I would like to practise natural breathing and then I found that because of this change

of my breathing pattern during the sitting, my body became stiff and even my skin got affected. I would like you to give some suggestions as to what I should do.

GODWIN: Now when you are seated in this posture, I am sure you are breathing. Is that creating a problem? No. So when you sit, there is nothing special. Thus, most of the questions are very interesting for me and for you they are different and something special. There is a meditation Master in Sri Lanka who tells that when you sit and if you aim for something special, you will have special problems. Please realise that meditation is a way of living. Please realise that meditation is involved not only when you are sitting but whether it is sitting, standing, walking, lying down or in any situation, one has to have meditation of just being aware. Then meditation becomes natural and all these questions about what happens in sitting may not arise.

QUESTION: The first question is that when I was younger, I was able to sit cross-legged but now I am much older and I cannot sit cross-legged. So I would like to ask whether I can meditate in the posture in which I am now sitting. The second question is that I practise visualisation and I visualise some deity or Bodhisatta so that I have seen a deity coming down from the sky. I would like to ask whether this phenomenon is O.K. or not.

GODWIN: First question. You are looking very beautiful, very peaceful when you are sitting on the chair.

QUESTION: So when I sit like this, can my feet touch the ground?

GODWIN: The way you are sitting now is perfect.

QUESTION: I am now 91 years old.

GODWIN: I am very impressed and inspired that at 91 you could be sitting so beautifully on the chair and that you could so clearly ask these questions.

About the second question, I am very sorry I have not practised "visualisation meditation." I am sure you must have a teacher who is teaching you about visualisation. I think you should ask the question from the teacher concerned. I am very sorry.

QUESTION: The teacher who taught me visualisation has passed away.

GODWIN: Then I will try to offer some suggestions. So when you visualise, when you have pleasant or unpleasant visualisation, just try to have a mind that is equanimous in both situations. I am sure you will be able to do that.

## Discussion with Group C

QUESTION: When we have negative feelings and thoughts when in meditation, how can we be friends with them and deal with them?

GODWIN: Please see it as an opportunity, as a learning experience because it is extremely important and valuable for us to learn about unpleasant emotions.

The second suggestion is, as I have been saying this morning, how far can we make friends with them, saying they are O.K? The third suggestion is to try to find out what exactly is negative and unpleasant about them. Is it a thought, a sensation or an emotion? Try really to look deeply into what you consider as negativity. Another tool is to think of our friend, the breath. Breathing whilst standing and just becoming conscious of the sensations in the body: just being with the breath and the sensations. Then you might be having less thoughts and this will help you really to create a space around that unpleasant emotion troubling you. The next tool is for us to realise that 'whatever arises passes away.' What is funny is that if you have an unpleasant emotion and tell it "don't leave me, don't go," what will happen? It won't stay. Or if you say: "stay with me" it will change. Thus we have no control. These things arise and pass away. It is just to be open to that important aspect is what the Buddha has taught.

Another very important point is that when these unpleasant emotions are not there you should know that they are not there. As emotions are subject to change sometimes we have pleasant



emotions and sometimes unpleasant emotions. We cannot be having all these pleasant emotions nor all these unpleasant ones. So again one should be open to both and know when they are there and when they are not there. The last tool is to realise that these are visitors that come to our mind. So you must be a very good host.

Let these visitors come and go. When they come, as a good host you must say: "Hello, welcome" and make friends with them and talk to them. You must try to find out as to why they have come and try to learn from them. When they leave, say: "Good bye, come back." In this way, we can sometimes learn to play with their coming and going. Rather than see them as problems, look at them as very interesting situations and challenges and to work with them. And it is a very deep Buddhist insight to know that they do not belong to us. The problem arises when we think that they belong to us thereby creating sadness and anxiety in us. I hope you will wait for these visitors to come and then learn to use some of these tools. When you develop lots of self-confidence, you know what to do when they arise.

QUESTION: At the beginning, I think it may be difficult for us to welcome unpleasant experiences. When they come, we will not like them and here reflection is very important. After the unpleasant experience has gone, we can reflect on the situation and gradually we will discover that we can really learn a lot from such experiences and they are really our great teachers. Then gradually we will even welcome unpleasant experiences. So I think reflection is very important.

GODWIN: So I hope that those who have problems with unpleasant emotions will have the experience of learning to make friends with them.

QUESTION: When I meditate, it is not important that there are unpleasant or pleasant sensations. Sometimes there are practical questions which arise and need to be answered. For example, in daily life there are things which we should handle. As you said, we should respond but not react. So when those questions arise, should we think about the solution during the meditation because it is very natural that when such questions arise, we need to think how to handle them. Can we think whilst we meditate?

GODWIN: Yes, a useful question. This brings up an important technique in meditation which is called "reflection" which is using thoughts in a very creative way. Usually we use thoughts destructively to create our own suffering but here when you use thoughts creatively, you are using them to work with all kinds of suffering. So, what is important is with a mind that is calm and clear, you start to reflect on the problem you are supposed to be having. A very interesting exercise is to see that problem from different angles. Usually we see only one or two aspects of the problem but when we reflect in this way, we can see many more areas and aspects of the problem. This in itself, as I said, becomes a meditation and from this, a solution to the problem may arise.

QUESTION: Master, when we practise a non-reactive mind, we have a negative feeling, which we try to overcome: say worries and things like that, which are negative emotions. Would we become pieces of wood or lose interest in life or lose the ambition to succeed? Is there a problem here?

GODWIN: In relation to unpleasant emotions, I offered many tools. When I offered the tools, I never spoke about a non-reactive mind. In working with unpleasant emotions, you should not have the idea that you will have a non-reactive mind, in which case, I should have just said that there is only one tool, a non-reactive mind. I did not say that. In Sri Lanka there are many people who are grief-stricken through having lost sons in the war. I just cannot ask them just to have a non-reactive mind. It does not work. So I would tell them to realise that it is natural that you have grief inside. We all have grief in us, and it is natural then to try to work with them with the different tools that I have mentioned. I think the problem is with the term, 'non-reaction,' a feeling that you do not need any action. Is that the problem you have? Is that what is worrying you?

QUESTION: No. If we are non-reactive to things and outside circumstances there may be a danger that we would have no feelings and as a result, not interested in anything else.

GODWIN: For a few days I have been speaking about *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. I said that they are really making an effort to open our hearts because they are all qualities of the heart. So firstly, when you have *mettā*, you learn to open your heart to yourself, feeling for yourself. Then when

you have *mettā* for others, you really open your heart to others. So you are relating yourself to others with warmth. The second quality that I mentioned was *karuṇā* which means really feeling for the suffering, concern and care for others. If you do not have feelings, you cannot care and have concern for others. In the same way, if you do not care for yourself, then you do not have *karuṇā* for yourself. I have been emphasising so much the importance of joy and lightness, which are nothing but the area of your heart, of your feelings. A non-reactive mind may be described as “to be cool without being cold.” So I like to tell my friend not to use the word “non-reactive” but to use the words, “cool but not cold.” Is it clear now? Thank you.

QUESTION: Can you give us some idea as how to maintain your joy, compassion and warmth to negative people whom you meet day in and day out. I find it very difficult. I get swallowed up in their negativity after a while and I cannot help them and then I cannot help myself.

GODWIN: Although it is time for *yoga*, I will still respond to that question because it is a very important question. I think everyone here can relate oneself to that question specially in everyday life. Sometimes we are forced to see people whom you consider as negative, may be starting with your husband or wife or probably your boss. What do we do then? Fortunately or unfortunately, you cannot avoid them or escape them. Then what do we do? I will give some suggestions. First suggestion is not to be surprised. Why? They and you all are unenlightened beings. It is very very important to realise that we are living in a world which is full of imperfect human beings including yourself. To put it in a stronger language, according to the Buddha, “until we are enlightened, we are all crazy.” We are crazy in the sense that no one can claim that we can always see things as they really are. We all see things subjectively and not objectively. In this sense, we are all crazy. As we are living in a crazy world please don’t be surprised when you see imperfections everyday, both in yourself and in others.

The second suggestion is that when you see imperfections in others, try to remind yourself: “I am also imperfect like that person.” Otherwise, we have a self-righteous attitude: “I am perfect, the other person is negative. I am positive, the other person is negative.” Is there anyone here who is always positive? Are you always positive? So just realise: “now the other person is negative and I too can also be behaving like that.” Then you become more and more humble.

The third suggestion is to try to see them as your *gurus* and teachers, as your “masters.” I like to mention now that I have been called a “master” but I like to see myself as a “spiritual friend” and not as a “master.” When you see negative people, please see them as masters. Why? The master is showing you a mirror. What we do when we are angry is to look at our face in the mirror. So whichever way the master is behaving, look at your own emotions. “What are the emotions that are coming? I am giving that person a minus. Thus I am getting angry, annoyed and agitated.” See all the emotions that arise are thankfully due to the master. The function of a good master is to try to test whether you are good meditators. This master is testing whether you are a good meditator.

Let me suggest something very difficult and very interesting: try to see the master as if it were for the first time. Sometimes we come to the conclusion that he is a negative person. Every time you see that person, you will be with that conclusion, prejudice and bias. Sometimes we see what we want to see. So poor master, even if he is behaving in a positive way, he looks negative because we only want to see what we want to see.

The last suggestion is to ask the master as to the negative things he can see in you. That will be very revealing. Thank you very much. Enjoy your *yoga*.

### *[yogic exercises follow]*

GODWIN: We will now try to meditate on our thoughts because in the discussion there were people who were having difficulties with thoughts. Let us learn to meditate on thoughts. Just learn to observe and to watch the thoughts that arise and pass away in our minds. Let us learn to make friends with our thoughts and to observe them very sharply, very clearly. Let us see how far we can observe the thoughts without judging them, without awarding pluses or minuses, just letting thoughts come and go. If you judge the thoughts, just know that you are judging them and see the difference when you are judging and when you are not judging them.

If some of you are having difficulties with unpleasant emotions, can you just allow them to arise—emotions such as sadness, fear, anxiety, depression, whatever you do not like—let them arise now.

If there are no such unpleasant emotions, just know that they are not there and if they are there, just know that they are there and then make friends with them.

[*yoga ceases*]

I will offer some suggestions as how to integrate meditation in daily life. One can see meditation as medicine for the sicknesses we create for ourselves. The first point that needs to be very clear in your mind is: "Are you really interested in taking the medicine? Have you really made a commitment to take the medicine?" If you have really made a commitment to take the medicine, one can never say that he forgot to take the medicine or that he had no time to take it. You all have different priorities in life but where does this taking medicine figure in that list? This is a very important point to be clear and it is the first point I like to make.

The second point is the importance of just knowing, just being aware, just finding out what is happening to us, especially in our daily life. One has to make a sincere effort during the day to make a conscious effort to try to be aware, to be conscious of what is happening to you. Maybe a good time to do this is in the morning. Just as we wake up in the morning, one may have lots of things to do but can you just spend a few minutes just lying down on your bed? I mean it would be ideal if you can do some sitting meditation in the morning even for a short time, at least lying down and spending even five minutes in the lying down posture. You may start the day with loving kindness meditation by just feeling friendly towards yourself and radiating thoughts of loving kindness. It is useful to have just a wish, "may I get an opportunity to practise loving kindness, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and other things that we have been discussing." This is a beautiful way to begin the day. It won't take more than five minutes.

There are certain things that we have to do in the morning. However much you are busy, everyone will brush their teeth in the morning. No one will say "I do not have time to brush my teeth." Here again, can we just practise a little awareness, (mindfulness) when we are brushing our teeth? What happens when we brush our teeth? Again, we have thoughts, we hardly know that we are brushing our teeth. This becomes a very very strong habit in us. As it is a strong habit, thoughts will come. So just learn to let go the thoughts and come back to conscious brushing of your teeth.

However much you are busy, you are bound to go to the toilet. It is interesting that the Buddha has described how we should develop awareness when you are even in the toilet. Try to be aware and conscious of what is happening when you are in the toilet. I call this 'toilet meditation.' If you are really interested, motivated and really want to take the medicine you will have time to do at least toilet meditation.

You will definitely be having breakfast. I won't be telling you to eat breakfast in silence because it is not possible. At least by spending one minute before you start eating breakfast you can feel grateful towards the person who has prepared it for you. It is beautiful to feel grateful for that person or even if you have prepared the breakfast yourself, just feel grateful thinking "today I prepared my breakfast and now I am eating it." Just developing this quality of feeling grateful is a very important aspect, a very important spiritual quality. You also must at least make an effort at least occasionally to come back to awareness in tasting, swallowing and chewing. Just make an effort to do that.

What happens next? Maybe you have to go to work, which is a very interesting place where interesting challenges crop up. A very important aspect there in your everyday life is the problem of human relations. How to relate yourself to people around you? As we live in an imperfect human world all the time, we have to encounter and to have relationships with imperfect human beings. Here what we can try to do is to try to learn from them. There lies the importance of meditation and of awareness in trying to watch your own mind relating to others. Here, it is natural to have unpleasant emotions. This is the importance of awareness, of watching and of learning. We can see how to work with the emotions, to understand them and to let go of them.

Supposing at that time, we are unable to do that and we get angry and annoyed and then we show and express our anger. What happens when we do this? Again, please do not be surprised and learn

not to give yourself a minus. This is very very important. If you do not have time there, when you go back home or when you have a little space, what you can do is to reflect on what really happened. This is learning to reflect and this reflection, this exploration, has to be done in a very very friendly and a gentle and not in a harsh way, its being an extremely critical attitude to yourself and seeing yourself as a failure.

So this would be a very creative way of living where we really learn from our mistakes. Our mistakes become an area for our spiritual growth. I like to suggest that rather than giving yourself a minus, please give yourself a plus for this. You deserve a big plus because you are learning from this, you are trying to use them as part of your spiritual growth. So should not we rejoice for this learning and growing and our effort to do this. Again one should feel grateful for such an opportunity.

Here it does not mean allowing others to do what they like to do, namely allowing yourself to be exploited. Sometimes, in certain situations, we need to be assertive and firm because some people understand only that language. Here again very deliberately and consciously you must say "now I'm going to be very firm, I'm going to be assertive in relation to this person." You do it with complete awareness. I know some meditation masters who pretend that they are getting angry with their students in order to awaken their students. So it can be used as a tool, as a device.

I also would like to suggest that during this day, specially if you are very busy, just try to take very brief times when you can spend some time on yourself. You do not have to leave the place of work but still be seated on your chair and you can even have your eyes open so that no one really knows what is happening. Please spend some time with your friend, the breath, at least for five minutes. It will create space in your mind. The build-up that is happening in your office, or whatever you are doing, there can be some recovery even for five minutes, and this will really help you. Of course you have the freedom when in the office also to do some toilet meditation where you can be completely alone, secluded. So during the day, whatever emotions and states of mind that would arise, they are bound to arise in a busy place. What we have to do is to make them the objects of meditation.

When you go back home, you might be too tired to meditate and as such spend at least ten minutes, either in the cross-legged posture or just lying down on a chair and just go on reflecting on how you spent the day. Try to do this reflection in a very friendly and a gentle way: "Now how did I spend the day today? What were the times when I had unpleasant emotions? What were the times when they were not there?" This is equally important. Sometimes you might be surprised that for the whole day you were angry only once. This can really help you to understand and to discover about yourself, about how you are relating yourself to others. This can naturally bring about a transformation in oneself.

Another point related to this which is a really powerful, very practical and a direct practice is to see the Four Noble Truths in everyday life. It will be really excellent and wonderful when you are suffering during the day, if you can remind yourself "here I am experiencing the Buddha's first noble truth." If you can tell yourself all this, you will be relating yourself to that suffering in an entirely different way. Then if you can really move from that to the second noble truth "Now let me see, in what way am I creating my own suffering?" Then you can use the third and the fourth noble truths also in this way. During the day, just find out when you are free, when there is no suffering and then find out as to why there no suffering"? If you can really learn to use the Four Noble Truths in daily life in this practical, simple and direct way, you will be living in the Buddha's teaching whether you are suffering or not. Isn't that a beautiful way to live?

A few more practical suggestions may be given. In the Buddha's teaching, spiritual friends are very much emphasised. So you are very fortunate here that you have many groups doing meditation. It is good to join one such group and to cultivate friendships with spiritual and noble friends. Spiritual friendship is learning to grow together. I was speaking about relationships earlier wherein you can see them as spiritual friends. It is a very positive way of relating to one another. If there are meditation groups, please join one of them.

Another helpful suggestion is to read about the Buddha's teaching. Here again there are some very valuable books that have been translated and I think some of them are already distributed here. It is

good to read and reflect on them. This can really inspire us and be an incentive for us to practise by reminding ourselves of the importance of taking the medicine.

### *[question time]*

QUESTION: Master, I like to ask that when we are sick and suffering from great pain or other things, can we practise meditation spiritually because we are not in a fit state of mind.

GODWIN: If I understood the question correctly, it means that there are certain situations when we are really overwhelmed by emotions and where there is lot of suffering and it is not possible to think of meditation at such times. What I would suggest here is that you can wait until you recover from that state of mind. It does not matter how long it takes and then as I had suggested earlier, you can look back and reflect: "What really happened to me? What really made me go through the physical and mental suffering? What can I learn from that experience?" This is the importance of spiritual friends. At that moment, if you have a spiritual friend, it is something very wholesome and skilful just to share your suffering with another person. This is how we help one another.

QUESTION: I occasionally join talks on Buddhism like this one and I sit and meditate occasionally. There was an experience when I was sitting. I felt some force or very strong sensation in my abdomen towards my heart and it made me very uncomfortable and I cried. Can you comment on this phenomenon?

GODWIN: As I said this morning, when we meditate, we really do not know what is going to happen. As it happened to you, the most unexpected thing can happen. So when such things happen, please do not be surprised and blame yourself. Please do not give that experience a big minus and also do not try to understand it. Sometimes we cannot understand it intellectually but we can only know it. This is the beauty of awareness. This is why the Buddha has said that this is the only way. Just realise what is happening to you and just be with it. If it is very unpleasant, you can say: "I do not really feel O.K. but it's O.K. Just really feel it, just really say it.

The last point is something I consider as very important. It is that meditation is also learning to work with unpleasant experiences, as it does not mean having only positive and pleasant experiences, with which we are familiar. I like to repeat that such experiences are extremely valuable and useful, if you can really learn from them by seeing them as meditative objects rather than as something strange, unusual and so on. Please make such experiences the objects of meditation. Sometimes I consider such unpleasant experiences as more valuable than the so-called pleasant experiences, which do not create problems. So in that sense, such unpleasant experiences are valuable because you learn to handle them when they arise. This is exactly what happens in life. Suddenly when we find ourselves with an unexpected situation in life we use the same principle. So you see the importance of learning to handle such situations. If such events were to arise externally in meditation we learn to do the same. This is why in the Dhamma there is what is called internal and external. Here too it is the same principle, same solution.

QUESTION: I was told by somebody that it is very important for us to choose the right type of meditation. May I ask whether there are any schools of meditation which are evil and others which are not evil and how can we distinguish between these types of schools? What are the criteria for us to choose the right master?

GODWIN: I like to quote a very very inspiring text from the Buddha when he was asked the same question. People told the Buddha: "There are many teachers, there are many methods, we are confused. Please help us." The Buddha said: "Please do not accept anything just because it is said in the traditions, just because it is written down in the scriptures, just because it sounds logical and reasonable." This is the important point. Do not even accept when a teacher says something. Please do not accept what I am saying also. The Buddha said that only when you see it for yourself in your own experience only to accept any teaching. That is the right quality for you to practise. The teacher is ultimately your own experience, which should see whether the medicine is working or not. You have to see it for yourself. I am so amazed and inspired that it is a very radical teaching of the Buddha.

QUESTION: Can meditation cure insomnia?

GODWIN: I work with people who suffer from insomnia. This becomes interesting in meditation on loving kindness of which they speak of eleven benefits, three of which are related to sleep. With loving kindness, you sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully, you do not have unpleasant dreams, nightmares and so on. When I meet people who suffer from insomnia, what I tell them is to practise loving kindness before falling asleep and I have found that this generally helps in working with insomnia.

QUESTION: If we sleep very late, we feel very tired mentally and feel like going to sleep most of the time. In that situation, when tiredness is so overwhelming, is it right that we should not force ourselves to continue with the sitting and just go to sleep?

GODWIN: What I would suggest is that when you wake up and you find that you have not had enough sleep and you really want to meditate, what can be attempted is not to do sitting meditation straightaway, but to do some *yoga* exercises where you try to wake up physically and mentally through them.

Another suggestion is to take a very cold shower. This will also help you to wake up physically and mentally and then try to sit with your eyes open.

*[Chanting follows]*

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