

MID-MORNING DAY TWO

LISTENING AND SILENCE

Whenever we give instruction or a basic talk about Mental Development and Meditation, it is very important and beneficial for you to try your best to listen and understand what is being said. Try to listen, try to focus on what is being said as best you can.

Listening is a very important part of all of our lives, but many people cannot listen very well at all. So often when people are listening to others, they are not really there; their minds go off, thinking about something totally different, or they think about what the person is saying, or they think about what they want to say, as soon as the other person stops talking.

Learning how to listen with a clear, open, awake mind is very much a part of our growth and development. For this reason, we ask all of you to sit in a meditation posture as best you can for listening to whatever Rosemary and I will be talking about. Please treat it as a sitting meditation, but instead of trying to concentrate on the breathing, turn your attention to try to concentrate on what is being said. Try to listen as best you can.

The only part of your actual sitting posture that some of you may wish to change is just your eyes. Some meditators prefer to watch the speaker and some keep their eyes closed.

If any pains develop in your body, again it is O.K. to shift your legs, relax your back, etc. However, this time do not worry about being strongly mindful about your actions. Try to move quietly so that you do not disturb others, yet try to keep most of your concentration on listening to whatever is being said. By sitting in a meditation posture, you will be giving yourself the best possible conditions for keeping alert and concentrated on listening.

Try to stay in a sitting posture for the entire time that the talk is being given, as well as during the normal sitting meditation periods. That is, for going to the toilet or getting a drink of water, it is best to do so during the walking periods or regular breaks. The sitting posture is a stationary posture and it is best to try to stay stationary for the entire period. So, please try not to disturb any of your sitting periods and especially try not to disturb any of the talks and instructions.

The more you can concentrate on listening, the more you will be able to understand. The more you can understand, the more benefit you will receive. The more benefit the talk has for you, the more benefit the talk will have for others also.

There is another aspect of listening that is very seldom talked about in the normal, everyday world. It is listening to quiet, silence, calm. Most of our societies are not interested in quiet ... silence ... calm. Most people do not understand the value and importance of quiet and silence. And many people do not understand when it is appropriate and beneficial to be quiet or silent.

For many, there is a type of fear toward silence, almost as if it were some terrible enemy. The moment that their environment becomes too quiet, they feel threatened in some way. So they turn on the TV or stereo, call someone on the phone or simply go to a busier place. These people have not yet learned the value and importance of quiet and silence and how we can learn, grow and appreciate life within the moments of silence that we can experience.

Doing a silent meditation retreat such as this can help you to discover how valuable and important quiet and silence can be. You can discover how appropriate and beneficial it can be at times to stay quiet or silent. As well, you can learn to understand just how peaceful and calm silence

and quiet can be. You can learn how to be with silence without being afraid of it or feeling threatened by it.

This is a rare and wonderful opportunity in life, where we are actually allowed to be quiet and encouraged to be quiet. Often in normal life, people who are somewhat quiet are considered strange. So many times when we want to be quiet, we feel the pressure of our society and think that we must talk or else something is wrong. But it can be OK and appropriate at times to be quiet and this retreat can help you to see this value. This is not to say that keeping silent in normal, everyday life is always appropriate, because obviously at times, it is not appropriate to be silent and it is more appropriate to say something.

Much of this Mental Development practice is to learn when certain actions are proper and when they are improper. There are some actions that are proper outside but they are not proper here. Saying "Hello" to others, smiling at others, communicating in different ways can be very appropriate and healthy at times in normal life. But here this produces unbeneficial results instead.

Very important in this practice is to understand our motivation or intention behind whatever we do, and to try to develop a Compassionate Motivation behind our actions, speech and thoughts, not wishing to cause harm or difficulties.

In normal life a Compassionate Motivation often leads us to saying "Hello" to others, smiling at others, communication with others, wishing to help others. But here, if you talk to others, smile at them, communicate with them, you will actually be disturbing their practice and inward journey, as well as disturbing your practice and inward journey.

These actions, if done here, are not coming from a Compassionate Motivation. They are not appropriate here to express your caring of others, to express your friendliness, Compassion and Lovingkindness.

Here, to express your caring is to be silent, allowing each meditator to experience the retreat in the best way. This is the way that each of you can show your friendliness, Compassion and Lovingkindness. To stay silent. To help each other.

This can be more difficult between friends, due to our conditioning. But ... if you are really friends, if you really care for each other, you will stay silent and do your best so that you do not cause difficulties for your friends.

And ... you may find that, after the retreat ends, you will actually have a deeper, more caring, richer relationship between yourself, your friends and all others; through developing these techniques in silence.

We will now do sitting meditation. When you start your sitting meditation, be sure to try to check over your body. Checking all areas and see if they are relaxed. The legs, hips, back, stomach, chest, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, face, eyes, mouth, teeth, etc.

Each time that you observe the breathing, just try to watch the breathing as it is. Not trying to change the breathing to be in a different way. If it is long, then just know that it is long. Short, short. Fast, fast. Slow, slow. In whatever way that the breathing is, try to allow it to be that way. And try to just observe. Starting to get to know and understand the breathing.

Every time that the mind wanders and you catch the wandering, just gently note it and then try to return to the breathing. It is a natural, conditioned process for the mind to wander.

This is a continual effort of trying to come back, trying to come back, trying to be mindful, trying as best you can. Each time that you catch your wandering mind, just start again on the breathing, slowly learning about your breathing and slowly learning about your mind.

During this hour, there is normally the sound of the cuckoo clock from across the path at 10:00. Try to see if you can just note "hearing, hearing" if you hear it. Try not to get involved in what it actually is or in thoughts about the clock, which will distract your attention from the breathing.

After you have checked over your body then perhaps a couple of bigger breaths and then relax and let the breath be as it is. Watching at the nose or stomach-chest area. If you wish with mental noting, "breathing in, breathing out," "in, out," "rising, falling."