

LEARNING THROUGH MEDITATION

RETREAT TALKS IN HOLLAND IN 1996 & 1998

GODWIN SAMARARATNE

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FOREWORD

On Wednesday the 22nd of March 2000 I found a message on my answering machine saying that Godwin had passed away that morning at 7:30. Spring was barely one day old.

Godwin had been admitted to hospital a short time previously because of an infection in his liver. His situation was so severe that he couldn't communicate and he had to be treated in the intensive-care unit. But he got better, grew stronger, and after a while he was discharged, though of course he was still weak and had to rest a lot. He couldn't talk for more than 5 minutes before needing to rest again. Unfortunately his situation soon worsened and again he was admitted to hospital, where he passed away quite quickly.

In 1998 Godwin visited Holland for the last time to give a retreat. At that time he already had some health problems. Often he was tired, and when I asked him about it during a walk he said that when he felt tired he would try to go for a short walk, and after that he always felt more refreshed and stronger than ever. During that retreat the plan was conceived to make some of his talks available to the general public. It turned out to be a quite a big task and only after ten years have I found space to finish the job. The previous years I was too preoccupied with my professional career and did not have sufficient energy to work on it.

I first met Godwin in 1992. I had left Holland 6 months before to travel around the world. I didn't know what I was looking for, but a certain restlessness had always been part of me and books like "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac strengthened my resolve to travel. The first words I wrote in my journal, more or less jokingly, were: "I'm on my way home". Reading these words after all these years, I realise they were true. I was looking for a home, my real home.

I travelled through Turkey, Pakistan and India. It was 6 months full of impressions, but it didn't seem to bring me closer to the peace and joy I was looking for. In a hotel room somewhere in the south of India I had to admit to myself that I couldn't go any further. I didn't have the energy to visit more temples or places of interest mentioned in the guidebook. What seemed to bring joy to my fellow travellers didn't touch me anymore.

By chance I met a Dutch university student who was doing research on ashrams. He told me about an ashram nearby. As I was unfamiliar with ashrams, I decided to go there and investigate. In this ashram I came into contact with the living spirituality of India. My stay in this ashram made me realise that I was looking for something that was alive and that I could connect with my own experience.

I then decided to leave the ashram to take some time off on the beaches of Sri Lanka. In my heart of hearts I knew I wouldn't find peace on a beach, and as it turned out I never saw those beaches. In the plane on my way to Sri Lanka I met a young German who had got stuck in India just like I had. He had left his broken motorcycle behind and was on his way to a Buddhist retreat centre in the hills near Kandy. We stayed in a hotel together and there we met a wonderful woman who had just spent some time in this particular centre. She shared her experiences with us, and my friend left the next morning for the centre. One day later I followed him.

After a four-hour journey by train, a one-hour bus drive and a steep climb I arrived, tired and sweaty, in Nilambe Meditation Centre. During my first conversation with Godwin we didn't say much. He asked about my meditation experience, which was almost none, and

tried to get a feel for me. During subsequent conversations we didn't say much either. Godwin gave me some guidelines for my practice and had a lot of confidence in the process of meditation I was in. The most important message he gave me on this first day, and he kept on repeating it, was that I had to learn to be my own best friend. In this way he gently led me to the treasure-house of my own heart.

Godwin liked to see himself as a spiritual friend, and he always tried to convey his vision of Buddhist meditation in a way that could benefit both Westerners and Easterners.

He spoke in plain language which was easy to understand. He was a man with a deep commitment to the spiritual path. A man with a lot of lightness and a very fine sense of humor

But above all he was a man with a tremendous capacity to love, to understand and to live life joyfully. Godwin has been the most truly friendly man I have ever met.

May he be well. May he be happy. May he be peaceful.

Peter van Leeuwen
Gorinchem, May 2008

1: AWARENESS

HURNSE GAPER, HURWENEN, HOLLAND (17TH JULY, 1998)

In the Buddha's teaching awareness is very much emphasised. There is a text about meditation called the Satipatthana Sutta, which is a teaching about the development of mindfulness or awareness. The whole text is about the practice of awareness and the development of the Noble Eightfold Path, the path to free ourselves from suffering. Right mindfulness and right concentration play a very important part in the Noble Eightfold Path. This mindfulness or awareness is sometimes said to be the only way to achieve freedom.

Awareness helps us to recognise objects that come into our field of perception, and so with awareness we can see how perceptions arise in relation to the senses. In that process of interaction with the external world we see how perceptions give rise to concepts, and concepts give rise to our suffering and our problems. This is a very interesting process to watch.

When we see something, immediately our past associations arise, and from our past associations our likes, our dislikes, and our identifications arise: all our desires will arise, and our ego will arise, and similarly our prejudices and our biases arise. All these things arise, and this prevents us from seeing things just as they are, without distortion. This is a very important and interesting area to watch in relation to the working of perception.

Take food for example: it is very interesting to find out at what point we taste our food. In a way, it is when we first see the food; and then we start eating with all our past associations, with our likes and dislikes. Even before we start eating we have tasted our food mentally. This is an example of how perceptions give rise to concepts, or how our prejudices arise.

The same thing can happen in relation to hearing also. In Sri Lanka at the moment there is a lot of talk about bombs. When a Sri Lankan hears the sound of a cracker, immediately he or she can experience fear, associating that innocent sound with a bomb. Because of our senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and of course thinking) we create a world of our own. We distort things, and that prevents us from seeing things as they are.

We need awareness to really enjoy things. If we have awareness we can start enjoying even small things like a flower, a leaf, an ant, the sound of a bird drinking something. It can make such a difference if your awareness, your attention is there while you are seeing, tasting, hearing and so on. You might be able to see something as if for the first time. This is a beautiful quality one can develop with awareness. If you can see things as if for the first time you really become alive when that happens.

In one of the Buddhist texts, which is called the Dhammapada, there is a very interesting statement that says that if we don't have awareness we are like people who are dead. We can understand from this that awareness is the opposite of being dead; with this quality of awareness we become really alive, fresh and innocent.

For instance, we ordinarily see work as something that we are forced to do, but if you use awareness you can see work as an expression of loving-kindness. Then you learn to see work in an entirely different way, and rather than suffer as a result of the work we have to do we can really enjoy it.

When we are eating together, unless we are aware and present we don't feel the need to pass the butter or to help someone who needs something. It is only with awareness that we develop this kind of caring for people. To be present for other people, to forget yourself and to focus on others is related to loving-kindness. It only comes about when you are in the present moment, when you are aware of what is happening in any given situation.

Many things are happening in our mind and body. Only if we are aware do we realise what a lot of thoughts we have, what a lot of sensations we feel in our bodies. So many things are happening. Unless we are aware, unless we have space, it is as though we are living but we really don't know what is happening. We don't know what is happening externally and we don't know what is happening to ourselves internally.

The word that comes to my mind is that we are being mechanical. I think that with more and more mechanisation we are becoming more and more mechanical, machine-like, and automatic in the way we operate. Everything is functioning very well, but we do not know how it is functioning or why it is functioning.

Another aspect about being mechanical is that we don't have feelings, just as machines cannot feel. This is why I like to emphasise the need for sensitivity, to really be in touch with our feelings. Maybe we are losing the ability, the capacity to feel our bodies even, to be sensitive to them.

What we are suppressing, pushing away, denying, is most of the time something that we don't like, something that is unpleasant. When we push these things away we don't realise that we give them more power. And when they arise again, they will come in a much more powerful way.

In my opinion this is a very important aspect of awareness. It means that nothing is excluded, and this is very much related to meditation. We may think that meditation is only about having pleasant experiences, calm experiences, positive experiences. So we push away and don't experience the unpleasant and negative. This is why I often emphasise that meditation is also learning to work with physical pain, mental pain, and other unpleasant states. When these so-called negative experiences arise we should not give them a minus. We should not think of them as a disturbance or a distraction. Rather we should see it as a very good opportunity to work with them and to realise that we have these aspects in us. If we don't realise that we have them, how can we work with them or overcome them?

Sometimes I'm happy in a way that there are sounds coming from the kitchen while we are sitting in meditation. We really get an opportunity to work with the aversion that arises, with the reactions that arise, with the judgements that come up. We can then just acknowledge the fact that they are there.

Another important aspect of awareness is that it helps us to work with our behaviour. With awareness we can relate to others in a conscious way in certain situations. For example we can be aware of the noise we make with the opening and closing of a door. With all our actions we have to be aware and sensitive, so that we know how not to create a problem for someone else, how not to be a nuisance to others, and also how not to create any problems for ourselves. We will find that with increasing awareness our ethical behaviour, our moral behaviour, is regulated naturally. Indeed it is very important to learn and to reflect on our behaviour, our actions, especially in relationships. This kind of friendly reflection helps us to

really understand ourselves, it leads to self-knowledge and self-understanding, and it helps create a kind of natural transformation in ourselves.

This reminds me of a Tibetan story. There once was a pious monk, a very good monk, who was living in a particular village. A very rich woman was living in that same area. She heard about this monk and she wanted to make a gift to him. She reflected a while on what she wanted to give and she decided to give him a beautiful golden bowl. So she ordered a golden bowl from the goldsmith of the village.

In this village there was also the local thief who heard that the rich woman had ordered this golden bowl for the monk. He waited till the bowl was ready and had been presented to the monk. Then the thief immediately went to the temple. The monk saw the robber coming into the temple and he went inside his room, took the bowl and threw it to the robber.

This robber happened to be a rather reflective and thoughtful thief, so he thought: "I waited all this time to steal this golden bowl and now this monk just throws it at me. I would like to understand more about this." So he went up to the monk and said:

"I don't understand your behaviour. Please tell me how are you able to let go of this beautiful golden bowl. I have been waiting for it all these days and I had a really strong desire for it. How can you do this?"

"Well", said the monk, "I am a meditator".

"Can I also learn to meditate?" the thief asked.

"Yes, you can", said the monk.

"And do I have to give up my profession?", asked the thief.

"No", the monk replied.

This troubled the thief even more and he said:

"I went to several spiritual teachers, they all said that I should stop my profession before I could take up a spiritual practice. You are the only one who says that I can combine the practice of meditation with my profession. Please tell me more about your meditation, I am very keen to practise". So the monk said:

"You have to be aware before you do something, be mindful when you do it, and be conscious of what you have done".

The thief thought this was very simple and began his practice. After some weeks he thought: "It is time for me to practise my profession". He went to a house and wanted to break into the house. But he thought of the monk's words that he should be mindful of what he was doing. Then for the first time he understood clearly his intended action, and, as the story goes, he could not proceed. Later he went to the monk and said that he wanted to give up his profession and that he wanted to take up meditation in a more serious way. So we can see from this story how mindfulness can lead to moral behaviour.

Another very important aspect of meditation is that we can investigate and explore any experience we have. If you develop this attitude, this perspective of finding out and

exploring anything we meet, whatever the experience is, even very unpleasant experiences become an object of meditation. Then we can see the Dhamma in everything. I think this is a beautiful way to live: wanting to learn and to find out about whatever we meet.

This is the way to interact with emotions, and like this we can learn to really investigate the different aspects of our emotions. Take anger, for example: you ask the question: "Why do I become angry?" You just explore that issue and learn to reflect on it, and then you will see what is happening inside you, rather than what is happening outside of you. Or take fear: when fear arises you learn from fear by asking: "Why do I call this fear? What really happens when there is fear? What happens in my body when there is fear?" Learning, exploring, discovering - in this way any experience, any situation, any problem you have gives you the opportunity to ask the question: "What can I learn from this?"

These are some aspects of awareness that can help us in meditation and in our spiritual life.

2: LOVING-KINDNESS

HURNSE GAPER, HURWENEN, HOLLAND (18TH JULY, 1998)

In Buddhism, meditation on loving-kindness has a very important place. The words loving-kindness are a translation of the Pali word metta, which means friendliness. There is an interesting quotation from the Buddha about the importance of metta. He was talking to a group of monks and he told them that if they could practice loving-kindness even for the time that it would take to snap their fingers, they would be worthy of being monks.

To my mind this has two important implications or two meanings. One is that even if you practice loving-kindness for just a few moments, that is good enough. The other is that it shows the importance of developing loving-kindness.

An interesting psychological point is that one is asked first to practice loving-kindness towards oneself. It shows that it is important to make a connection with oneself. It also shows that for different reasons we may not like ourselves or we may even hate ourselves. We can have this self-destructive aspect, and in a way we are acting like our own enemy. Instead of being our own worst enemy, loving-kindness can help us to be our own best friend.

One very important way of being our own enemy is this habit we all have of giving ourselves minuses in different situations. To put it in another way, we have this inclination to see only the negative aspect of ourselves. Related to that is that we imagine that others are giving us minuses as well. In this way we are like our own enemy, creating a lot of suffering for ourselves and others. One of the meditation masters, Thich Naht Hanh, put it very well; he said we always look for what is wrong in us, never for what is right. It is with the help of awareness and loving-kindness that we can work with this very strong destructive aspect in ourselves.

Meditation on loving-kindness can also help us to learn to see the positive in ourselves. For that we need to consciously bring up and reflect on our own goodness and the positive qualities we have. When we see the positives we develop self-respect, whereby we see more and more of our own goodness and the kind things that we do. I think it is very important to develop self-esteem or self-confidence, because with the self-destructive aspect in us we lose this ability to appreciate ourselves.

Seeing the good in ourselves can create a lot of joy and happiness. I feel that this is very important in the spiritual path. This is the first step of loving-kindness, using meditation of loving-kindness in order to generate a lot of joy and happiness. And of course, when you are happy this can also be infectious, it can affect other people. But the first step is to have this joy, happiness and lightness. The next step is to see your feelings as impermanent, because when you hold on to them they can cause suffering. It is important to realize that they don't belong to us. In Buddhist terms, you see *anicca*, impermanence and *anatta*, the absence of a separate self.

Another aspect of loving-kindness that I emphasise is the importance of feeling grateful. I think we take this very important spiritual quality for granted. When I was in Bodhgaya, the place where the Buddha is said to have become enlightened, I was reflecting on what is known about what the Buddha did after he had attained enlightenment. One of the things

which is recorded is that he contemplated for seven long days the Bodhi tree which had given him shelter. Without closing his eyes to sleep, he stayed looking at the tree, showing his gratitude. Often we take the good fortune we have for granted. We take for granted that we have eyes to see, ears to hear and food to eat.

When this was mentioned in Nilambe, the meditation centre where I live, there was a nun from Thailand who made a very interesting point. She said that not only should we feel grateful for the positive things, but we should also feel grateful for the challenges, for the opportunities in life to work with ourselves. So for instance, when we get angry we can feel grateful that we have an opportunity to study anger. Sometimes when we have physical pain we start hating the pain and the body, but it is possible instead to feel grateful. We can make it an object of our meditation. In this way we learn to be grateful for positive things, the blessings we have; and we can also be grateful for the difficult situations we face, because they can be very valuable learning experiences.

Another aspect in relation to loving-kindness is learning to heal our psychological wounds by forgiving ourselves and forgiving others. These wounds may have been created in childhood or in subsequent relationships. If we do not really heal our wounds, one thing that might happen is that this may create problems in our relationships which cause suffering for ourselves and for others. They can create certain destructive patterns in our relationships. They can also affect our bodies. They may create tensions in our bodies that are related to these repressed emotions or wounds. They can also create illnesses in us. They can also affect our sleep and dreams, so that we might get angry in our sleep, or we might cry in our sleep, or have frightful dreams. These things can be related to the unhealed wounds that we carry. Or we can have sudden emotions, and we can't find a reason for them. Suddenly we feel like crying, suddenly we experience fear or we feel panic.

Another way that these wounds can affect us is when we are dying. A big problem when a person is dying can be the wounds which they have not healed. They may surface in a very strong way. While we are living we can suppress them, we can push them away and not look at them, but when we are dying our mind and body become weak, then these wounds can surface. Unless we heal these wounds we cannot live peacefully and we cannot die peacefully. The meditation on loving-kindness can help us to heal these wounds by forgiving ourselves and by forgiving others, although both may be difficult.

It is sometimes difficult to forgive others because the wounds we carry are normally created by those who are close to us. It is very interesting to reflect on that. People who are distant don't create wounds: penfriends never fall out! Only friends do who are close to us. This is an important aspect of close relationships.

A way of developing this forgiveness is by realising that you are human and others are human also. We sometimes put ourselves on a pedestal and this can be very unrealistic, it may be too idealistic. In Western culture the model you use is often the model of perfection. What happens is that you fall down from this pedestal of perfection, and consequently you suffer from guilt and self-hatred. You give yourself a minus because you have fallen from this pedestal, because you couldn't live up to your own expectations. This is what we do in relation to other people also: we put them on pedestals. In Buddhist terms it means that you want to behave like an enlightened person and you expect that also from other people. And when others don't behave like enlightened people you give them a minus and start hating them. This is how you create so much suffering for yourself.

I sometimes say that if you make a mistake, you should remember: "Don't be surprised, you are still not enlightened". And when you see someone else make a mistake: "Don't be surprised, they are not enlightened either". This is a very simple, direct way of accepting ourselves, our humanness, our imperfection and accepting the imperfection and humanness of others.

There are four positive qualities that are mentioned in the Buddhist texts and we have four Pali words for them. These words are: *Metta* (loving-kindness), *Karuna* (helping others in their suffering), *Mudita* (being happy about your own happiness and being happy about the happiness of others) and *Upekha* (a detached mind, a mind that is cool, but not cold). These are four beautiful qualities that can be developed. These four qualities are very important in meditation and in life.

In everyday life one should develop friendliness or *metta* towards oneself and others. And if in your daily life you see people who are suffering, make it a point to do something for them. Then you are practising *karuna*. Sometimes there is a small thing, a little thing, that you can do in such a situation, just some little act of kindness. In this connection Mother Theresa has said something very wise. She said you do not have to do great things, just small acts of love are good enough. With this you develop an openness to the needs of others.

The quality of *mudita* is to rejoice in your own goodness. To rejoice over our own happiness is something we don't generally do, we simply neglect that. Even more difficult is to rejoice in the happiness of other people. When others are suffering it might be easy to help them. But when they are happy, for us to really experience happiness for them is not so easy. But it is worthwhile trying because it can give more happiness to ourselves. When your own meditation is not going well and you hear that someone else's meditation is going well, can you really be happy then?

The quality that is needed for this is to have a non-reactive mind. In fact this is one of the qualities that we are developing in meditation, *upekha*. When we are sitting, whatever happens within us, we learn to observe it with a mind that is non-reactive. And when things are happening externally, like noises and disturbances, again we can relate to them without reacting.

To have this quality of equanimity - to be cool but not cold - is extremely important when helping others. Sometimes in helping others we create suffering for ourselves because we are reacting instead of responding. When we react in the course of helping others, we get emotionally excited and stirred up. Responding is trying to do something while keeping a clear mind. It is important to learn to respond and not to react in any situation. But as you are still human, it is possible that you will react instead of responding. In that case you can reflect: "Why am I reacting?" It is possible to learn from this experience of reacting and hopefully, ideally, remind yourself not to react but to respond next time.

Normally we react because we are surprised. Again it is human that we are surprised, because we all have a model and expectations about how things should be. When something happens which goes against this model and our expectations we are surprised and react to it. It is quite human to have ideas and models, but at least when you are reacting, you can reflect on it. Ask yourself what the model is, what the expectation is that you are having.

But don't have the idea, I will not react. Because if you have this ideal of not reacting, then when you react, you will be reacting to that. When you react, make friends with it and try to

reflect on it in a very gentle and friendly way, otherwise you will be giving yourself minuses. This is the important thing. We all make mistakes. When we make mistakes, try to make an effort not to give yourself a minus. Though not giving yourself a minus doesn't mean that you just allow such things to happen; you do not indulge in them.

Loving-kindness is important in this respect. You can have a very friendly conversation with yourself. You can ask in a very friendly way: "What did I do? Why did this happen to me?" instead of: "I shouldn't have done this". That last thought is a big minus. Just try to understand why you behaved in such and such a way. So then you can really learn from your mistakes, without giving yourself a minus. In a sense you should give yourself a big plus, because as you have become more aware of your mistakes you can learn from them. You can even rejoice. You can see in this way the importance of loving-kindness. In the same way that you relate to your own mistakes you can then relate to the mistakes other people make.

Yet the self-destructive force in us can be so strong that it is difficult to be friendly to ourselves. The self-destructive feelings can really overwhelm us. This is why awareness is so important in the practice of meditation. When you realise that you have this self-destructive tendency, and this aspect arises together with the minuses, you should immediately catch it. You realise that it is a very strong tendency, a strong conditioning, a habit. It is important to realise that it is only a habit, it is only a conditioning. It is not representing something real. When you see it as a habit you don't give it such a power and energy as when you take it as real.

A very interesting exercise is to ask yourself every day: "How many minuses have I given myself today?" Then try and see also the differences in the minuses you are giving yourself: big ones and small ones. Finally, rather than feeling bad about it, you can laugh at it. Then there is a lightness and even a joy. In the practice of meditation I think it is very important that we work with ourselves in a light-hearted way, even with our shortcomings, rather than be heavy, beat ourselves, or be very serious and intense.

3: RELATIONSHIPS

HURNSE GAPER, HURWENEN, HOLLAND (19TH JULY, 1998)

No human being can avoid relationships. Even if someone is living as a hermit in the forest he or she has relationships. A person has a relationship with his food, with his surroundings and, of course, with himself. This shows that we cannot avoid relationships. It is a very important theme that we have to be clear about. When we use the word relationship usually what comes into our mind is a relationship with another person, but what is most important is to find out how we relate to ourselves.

The way we relate to others will depend on the way we relate to ourselves. If you are very critical of yourself, you will be very critical of others. If you do not trust yourself, it will be very difficult for you to trust others. If you feel insecure, other people will generate a lot of insecurity in you. Therefore it is very important when we discuss relationships to find out how we relate to ourselves. This is why meditation of loving-kindness is so important. With this meditation we can really learn to be our own best friend, and our dependencies on other people can become less.

Sometimes what happens is that we use other people to cover up our own sense of inadequacy. This is how we give so much power and so much energy to other people. We allow our own happiness or unhappiness to be dependent on other people. Though we are grown up, we still have our toys in the form of external things that we have become dependant on for our amusement and our happiness. Like children, we keep on changing toys. When we have one toy we think: "Now this is going to make me happy", but very soon we are unhappy with that particular toy and we start looking for other toys. Our whole lives we are looking for toys, and at the end of it we are still dissatisfied.

Meditation helps us to become our own toy: that is the only difference, but it's a very big difference. Having loving-kindness and being our own best friend helps us to have a relationship with ourselves where we become our own toy and where we'll be contented and happy with ourselves. That doesn't mean that when we are with other people we are unhappy. It is more that when we are with ourselves we can be happy and contented with ourselves, and when we are with other people we can still be happy.

A challenge can arise in relationships when we see the shortcomings of other people. Whatever the relationship, sometimes we see the other person behaving differently from how we think they should behave. Normally what we do when we see other people's weaknesses is that we become very judgmental. We want them to be different and we get angry with them. We give them a minus and try to correct them. This shows that we are demanding how other people should behave.

It is funny how in life we make demands on ourselves, how we should behave. We demand from ourselves that we behave according to our own model of perfection. In the same way we project our model of perfection onto others. Consequently we demand that their behaviour should correspond to the model of perfection that we hold in relation to them.

But do we stop at that? No, we even demand from life how it should be. Take for example the weather. When there is Dutch weather we demand that we should have Sri Lankan

weather! When there is Sri Lankan weather we are very happy and when there is Dutch weather we are very unhappy.

It is really funny how we make demands upon life, how we make demands upon ourselves, how we make demands upon others. Naturally you cannot meet all the demands you are making of yourself, and naturally others can't meet the demands you are making of them; and again quite naturally, life can't meet the demands you are making of it.

Here we see in a very simple, direct way how we create our own suffering. We create our own problems without realising it by the way we are making demands, without ever posing the question: "How realistic are my demands?"

When we see someone behaving in a way that we think he or she should not behave, we assume that the other person is acting with full responsibility and knows what he or she is doing. This is just a belief on our part. The other person sometimes doesn't know why he or she is behaving in that particular way. Often we don't know ourselves why we are acting in a particular way. Yet we assume that others always know what they are doing.

When we come across such a situation, rather than immediately giving a plus or minus to the other person, rather than getting angry and reacting to the other person, we can have a dialogue to find out why that person is behaving in a particular way. If you can do this with other people in such situations, you'll be really helpful to them. Maybe for the first time they are encouraged to reflect on what they are doing. In relation to your own actions, rather than giving yourself a minus, try to have a dialogue with yourself about why you're behaving in this particular way. This is a very important skill that we need to learn in relationships.

Another very valuable skill is to learn to see an action or a word from another person not from your own point of view, but from the other person's point of view. It is very difficult because we are so fixed with our own pluses and minuses, with our own assumptions, our own beliefs and our own value judgements. To be able to forget all that and try to understand another person from his or her point of view we need to have a lot of space and a lot of understanding about human nature.

When we see the shortcomings and the faults of other people it is important to realise that we're not free from them either. When we judge others, when we give minuses to other people, when we give advice to other people, we tend to forget that we also have similar qualities ourselves.

There's a very simple aspect in the Buddha's teaching in relation to human behaviour. It is said that human beings have three strong drives which are motivating them to act in particular ways. One is greed, another is hatred, and a more subtle and difficult one is delusion. We all have those three drives in us, and the Buddha said that unless and until we really overcome our subjugation to these drives completely, we are still crazy. We relate to the outer world, the external world, through a private world that we have constructed ourselves. In other words, we are being subjective and not objective.

Our problem is that we take this crazy, subjective world very seriously, we believe it to be true. If you can really understand that we are living in such a world, a world where there is such a lot of delusion, such a lot of grief and such a lot of hatred, that we live in a world where human beings are imperfect simply because they are still human, then you learn to see yourself and others in an entirely different way. I would suggest that this is real loving-kindness. When you see the shortcomings and faults of other people and you can remember

that both you and they are living in a subjective world coloured with so much delusion, then you'll be relating to them with more understanding, tolerance and compassion.

We have given such power and energy to other people. Our happiness and our unhappiness are dependent on what other people think of us. We all have this tendency. Most of the time we are trying to please other people. We do this because we are starving for the plusses of other people. Over time we have developed this dependency which manifests in whatever we are doing. It is like being dependent on a toy we would like to get, and only when we get it do we feel that we are really happy.

When I meet such people I feel very sad about them. They are trying their best, but of course they are not getting enough plusses. They can never be satisfied with the plusses they get. Then they try more, and the more they are trying the less successful they are, and they end up suffering. They give themselves minuses and they feel rejected. These aspects are very important in relationships, because our happiness and our unhappiness are really dependent on how we relate to ourselves and how we relate to others. What is important to realise is that we need friendliness, self-confidence, self-esteem. We are not giving enough to ourselves. We are suffering from a kind of lack, and we try to cover it up by creating a dependency on other people.

We can really feel as though we are a nobody. We say to ourselves: "No one likes me. Everyone rejects me. I'm a victim. Poor me". This is what I call being a nobody in the sense that you're giving minuses to yourself and you're getting minuses from other people. From feeling like nobody we need to feel like somebody. For that we need plusses from ourselves: we have to learn to see the positive in ourselves, to rejoice in the good things that we have been doing. This is why I emphasise loving-kindness very much. We all have the qualities by which we can really free ourselves. They are all hidden inside us. Meditation or the spiritual life should enable us to see these inner resources that we have. The practice is to see that the Buddha-nature is within us and to allow this Buddha-nature to flower out.

You can also be nobody in the true sense of the word. When you are truly nobody, you are no longer dependant on plusses or minuses. You have gone beyond plusses and minuses. That is where you learn to be your own toy and you learn to be really self-contained within yourself.

In this world people have a lot of difficulties and there is a lot of suffering. It's a very good practice sometimes to forget all your problems, all the difficulties you are going through, and learn to relate to the suffering of other people, to translate loving-kindness into action. These kinds of actions can generate a lot of joy and a lot of happiness. It can be a very meaningful way to live when you are being your own best friend and you are being a friend to others also.

When we find ourselves with a difficult person - it can be your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your neighbour or your boss - it's a very good practice to see such a person as your teacher, as your guru. They are very powerful gurus, because they are really showing you a mirror. It is useless to try to break the mirror, to get angry with the mirror. It is wiser to look at the reflection in the mirror and see what is happening there.

With meditation a shift is taking place within yourself. When you find yourself in a place where you have to relate to difficult people or situations, rather than getting caught in the external scene you learn to look at your own mind. In everyday life where you have to

interact with people you start looking at your own reactions. You look at the emotions that are coming up and the thoughts that arise.

One can feel grateful to these difficult people, because they enable us to see what is happening in our own minds. It really gives us an opportunity to work with our mind. Can you say: "May I have more teachers, more gurus like them?" When in our life we can have this openness to learn from other people, we can learn from any experience. Any experience can be a learning experience, and this is a beautiful way to live.

In my own life my best teacher has only four letters: L-I-F-E. Life is my best teacher. If you can really open up to life situations this teacher can tell you some very interesting things, but if you come to the conclusion that you know, that is the end of learning. This is why we need to have what is called a beginner's mind. With a beginner's mind, with a don't-know mind, we can really learn from life situations. Any situation can be a meditative situation and this is a beautiful way to live.

In our spiritual practice we have to allow ourselves to be vulnerable. Trying to do the right thing, acting very cautiously and trying too much to know what is going to happen in the future all give rise to a false sense of security. According to the Buddha's teaching, real security comes if you can be open to insecurity. We never know what is going to happen next. It is always something uncertain. The real practice is learning to be open to uncertainty in whatever form uncertainty comes. This is especially true when we interact with people.

Some people in the West are hurt very much in their youth. They have never been able to develop their own self-esteem. They feel a coldness and indifference inside. This wound can be so deep that it is difficult to heal even with loving-kindness. It's a kind of vicious circle they are in. The question is: how can they foster this little germ of self-esteem and self-love?

Sri Lankan people don't have this problem. It is possible that they might have had a difficult childhood, but they do not suffer from it so much. Sri Lankan people are raised with the idea that they should be grateful to their parents. They never see a connection between their parents and the difficulties experienced in childhood, and their present problems. It means they never blame the parents for their upbringing and for what they are experiencing.

In Sri Lanka children are brought up within extended families, so children get enough attention, and they have many sources for experiencing affection. Their diet of affection and love is very rich and they have a lot of opportunities to find comfort and support if they need it, therefore the wounds described above don't develop.

When I started to be with Westerners, I learned about these very serious and deep wounds which have happened to them in childhood. Usually these people carry a lot of anger and resentment against their parents. In the beginning I made the mistake of saying: "Just forgive your parents, have loving-kindness." I realised this did not work because they would come and tell me: "How can I have loving-kindness? I feel like hitting my mother, I feel like beating my father." Sometimes they had so much anger that I got afraid.

Now what I say is: "Please bring up that anger. If you like to, you can verbalise that anger, speak to your parents in your imagination, wholeheartedly experience that anger." I think as children they did not have an opportunity to really express the anger they had towards their parents. They're holding onto it, and it's sometimes good to bring it out.

Another thing is that parents might also have been victims who have had a lot of difficulties. In this connection I heard a very moving story from a woman I was working with. She told me she had had a very difficult childhood. Especially from her mother there were physical and psychological wounds. It was terrible what she had had to go through as a child, and as an adult she completely lost contact with her mother. She told me that what had happened in childhood had really affected her personality and her behaviour.

When this woman was about fifty years old she thought: "Maybe I should try to contact my mother." She made inquiries and heard that her mother was living in a home for old people. She made contact and she met her mother. When she saw her mother for the first time after fifteen years, she hugged her and said: "I love you, Mother." The mother didn't say anything but broke into a lot of tears, she was really crying. Then the daughter asked her mother: "Why can't you say that you love me also?" Her mother replied: "How can I say that? I have never known what love is." When the daughter heard those words, the wound she had been carrying for fifty years immediately healed. So sometimes, you see, we don't realise what our parents have been through.

Another thing which I try to communicate to people who carry these childhood wounds is: you might have had problems in childhood, but what are you going to do about it now? It's a very easy thing to continue to blame your past and your parents. But by blaming your parents, you don't take responsibility for what is happening now. So anything might have happened in the past, but now you are in the position to take responsibility and to work with it in the present moment.

One more thing you can do is to reflect on three questions in a very meditative situation. The first one is: "What are the good things your parents have done for you?" It is interesting that we have a selective memory. We have a tendency to remember only the minuses. The memory can change when one recalls the good things. The other questions are: "What are the good things you have done for your parents?" and: "Do you know what difficulties you created for your parents?"

When you reflect very deeply on these questions, a sense of appreciation arises. It's also possible that a sense of guilt will arise because of the wrongs you did to your parents, and if that happens then practising meditation of loving-kindness might help.

But I realise it takes a lot of time for a person with deep wounds to come from being a nobody to being a somebody. The work has to take place on a psychological level, on an emotional level, and also on a physical level.

4: EMOTIONS

ZONNEWENDE, DWINGELOO, HOLLAND (25TH JULY 1996)

What I call tools are ways to work with our so-called negative emotions, the monsters. It's interesting to draw up a list of the emotions that sometimes bother us. You can ask yourselves what are these monsters: what are the names of these emotions? It is a long list: fear, shame, lust, jealousy, greed, anger, distrust, sadness, guilt, self-pity, insecurity, loneliness, doubt, and so on. A long list, and I don't think there is anyone who likes the emotions on this list.

A tool for working with them is to see them as opportunities, learning experiences, and opening ourselves to them. By hating, disliking and resisting them we give them a lot of power. I know it is not an easy thing but slowly, slowly, I think we need to learn to be open to these emotions.

Related to this is that when they are there, not to be surprised! Often in our model of perfection there is no place for such emotions, and we feel we should not have them. I suppose only enlightened people may not be having these unpleasant emotions. But as we are still human, as we are still imperfect, we should not be surprised when they come. Not being surprised and being open are related. There is a phrase that I use very often: learning to be friendly to them.

When I say this I am reminded of a myth which is presented in one of the Buddhist texts. It is about a demon who was living among human beings. When a human being got angry the demon used this anger as food, so as you can just imagine he had plenty of food. But demons can get bored with the same food every day, and one day this demon thought: "Maybe I should go to the heavens where the gods live and see whether they will have any food for me". So he goes to heaven, he looks around and he finds that the throne of the chief god is vacant. Nobody was there so he sat himself down uninvited on the throne. When the gods arrived and saw this they got angry. And when they got angry, the demon for the first time had a taste of divine food.

In the beginning when this demon had sat down on the throne he was very small, but when the gods were getting angry with him, shouting and resenting his presence, he became bigger and bigger. The boss, the chief god, realised something was happening. He came to see what was going on and he spoke to the demon in a very friendly, a very gentle way. He welcomed the demon and said: "Would you like anything to drink?" and so on. You can guess what happened to the demon when the chief god became friendly to him: the demon could no longer feed himself on the divine food and so he shrank.

Psychologically this is really interesting. What we are trying to do with an open attitude towards our negative emotions is to learn to make friends with our monsters. A phrase you can say to yourself which can be helpful sometimes is: "It's okay not to feel okay." It is really about being friendly with yourself, accepting what is happening. I know it is not easy, but slowly, slowly, something interesting might happen. Your monsters might lose some of their strength. Helpful here is our friend the breath and the sensations in our body. These two friends help us to experience the present moment, and they can prevent emotions from blowing up.

Another tool related to this is learning about our negative emotions, learning about our monsters. Because we don't like them we don't experience them fully. We don't really make an effort to know them, to learn about them, to discover, to explore. There are so many things that we can learn about these emotions. One thing you may discover is the connection between thoughts and emotions. It can be a very useful discovery, that it is really the thought that is creating the emotion. One can then work with the thought that precedes the emotion as it arises.

Normally when we have these emotions, we give ourselves a minus. As a reaction to our negative emotions we start hating and disliking ourselves. It is very interesting to explore emotions without giving them and yourself a minus. If you can develop this attitude of wanting to learn, you are really waiting for them to arise. And what might happen if you are really waiting for them to come is that they don't come! When we don't want them to come, they come and when we want them to come, they don't come!

Another tool is: when they are not there, just to know that they are not there. Often when we take to meditation, when we start to follow the spiritual path, we are trying our best to get rid of our monsters. By doing that we give them a lot of power. But when they are absent we hardly know that they are absent. Sometimes I feel that this is one of the tragedies of the human condition. We don't realise that there are moments when we are really free of our so-called negative emotions. When they are absent, it is too good to believe that they are really not there. Meditators come and tell me: "Maybe I am repressing them!" So they don't really want to accept that they are truly not there.

In this connection, I like this very simple quotation from Thich Nhat Hanh, a meditation master from Vietnam. He says that when we have a toothache we suffer from the toothache, but when we don't have a toothache do we ever say: "Wow, I don't have a toothache today!" Even when we don't have a toothache we are thinking: "Maybe I will get one tomorrow". Aren't we funny?

I really like to emphasise this aspect very much. When negative emotions are absent really to know that they are absent. There is an interesting Zen story in this connection. Someone went to a Zen master and said: "I have a big problem." The Zen master asked: "Well, what is your big problem?" "My big problem is that I get angry". "So", the Zen master replied, "where is your anger now?" Of course, the anger was not there. The Zen master continued: "If it is *your* anger, you should be able to produce it!"

This brings up an important perspective: the realisation that our emotions don't really belong to us. Because we have a strong sense of ownership, we think we own things, we also think that we own these emotions. This is *my* anger, this is *my* fear. Of course, what you own, what you *think* you own, you don't want to give up.

The Buddhist perspective here is that emotions are empty of a separate self. There is no real owner. All things arise due to causes and conditions and all things pass away due to causes and conditions. This idea is also presented in the Buddha's teaching in another way, which I like very much. One can treat these monsters, or even pleasant emotions, as our visitors, our guests. We are the host, and as a good host we should be open to any visitor who comes. When visitors come, as a good host we are not surprised, rather we are friendly and we welcome the visitors. When they leave we just say, "Bye-bye, please come back again". This sounds very simple. When the visitor comes, when the visitor stays, when the visitor goes, the host remains the same: no problem. Just visitors coming, visitors going. This brings up

the Buddhist perspective of impermanence: everything changes, there is coming and going, going and coming.

While working with emotions you can sometimes ask the question: "Who is having this emotion? Who is having this joy? Who is having this sadness?" When you explore this question your attention goes to something other than the emotion. You might realise that there is no-one having the emotion, but only emotions that come and go: there is no owner.

I am suggesting many tools to you, because if you can learn to play with these different tools you can alternate them and use them skilfully. Sometimes one may work, sometimes another may work. If you can see it as a play, then sometimes the monsters win and sometimes the tools might work and you win. In a game you can't always win. Situations become learning experiences, and our so-called failures help us in our spiritual growth. I think this is a very important perspective to have.

Having a certain lightness can make such a big difference. What is important when we experiment with these tools is that we see that we have a tendency to look for pleasant, positive experiences, and we don't like unpleasant experiences. Our spiritual path can become a battle. If you can really be open to both what is considered as pleasant and what is considered as unpleasant, then you can see the spiritual practice as a going beyond this division, this duality that we have created.

5: THINKING

HURNSE GAPER, HURWENEN, HOLLAND (21ST JULY, 1998)

An interesting question to reflect upon is whether suffering can arise without a thought. Most of our problems are related to thoughts, the way we use our thoughts.

Thoughts often arise involuntarily, mechanically and habitually. What is happening, if we observe our thoughts, is that they just come up. They pop up just like that. They arise because of our habits and our conditioning. After they have arisen we get hold of them. A self-destructive person will give himself minuses, or remember the minuses that other people have given him, in a mechanical way. Someone with a self-destructive aspect may occasionally have a positive thought that comes up, but because of their habits they let it go, or just ignore it. But they hold on to their negative thoughts. It is really funny to see what we do with our thinking.

There is another thing we do with our thoughts: we create stories. We then give reality to the story that we have created, and even though the story is not real, we become a victim of the reality that we have created ourselves. This is really a destructive and dangerous mechanism. These stories can give rise to uncertainty, insecurity, anger, guilt, and so on. I think that all our so-called monsters can arise thanks to the stories we create. This is a clear example of how we create our own suffering without realising it.

This shows the importance of awareness. If you analyse the different meditation techniques, you'll see that most of them are an attempt to be with something factual. Maybe it's being with the breath, being with the sensations in the body, or being with the sounds that are around. It is an attempt to distinguish reality from unreality.

What is also interesting is that we can become so dogmatic about our beliefs. Yet most of our beliefs may be the result of such stories, the stories we have made up. When somebody comes and tells us that our stories are nonsense we become angry with that person. We don't like it when our reality is challenged. This is how we hold onto beliefs, this is how we become dogmatic. Unfortunately it is impossible for us to really communicate with each other when we hold on so strongly to our beliefs. After a while our made-up stories develop into a fantasy, a kind of a daydream that we are trapped in. You can ask yourself what is the difference between a dream at night and a daydream. Actually there is no difference: it is only when we wake up that we realise: "Ah, I was dreaming".

The wonderful thing about the breath is that it is something factual. It is something objective. You can't create a story out of it. You can't fantasise about the breath. It is a very clear situation where we can really draw the distinction.

I work with people who have psychological problems or psychiatric complications. Sometimes I use two techniques to help them to see what is real and what is unreal. One is focusing on the breath, and sometimes when people have difficulties with the breath, I use focusing on the sensations in the body. For this I use what is called the sweeping technique. Mentally you sweep the body from your head down to your feet and then up again. I get them to feel the body: the sensations and the movements in the body. Then when the fantasies or the paranoid thoughts come, I ask them just to let go of them and to come back and rest in the reality of the present moment. It is a very clear distinction.

Another aspect concerning thoughts is that when thoughts come we start judging them. You immediately give a minus to what you consider as a negative thought. By doing this you control and push away the thought. With the technique of just observing the thought you learn to be open to thoughts; you learn just to know that you are judging when you are judging. When by such observation the judgements become less strong, you start creating space for any thought to arise and for any thought to pass away. Then the power of thoughts becomes less.

In the Tibetan tradition they put it so well. They tell you to have a mind like the spacious sky and to let the thoughts be like clouds: the clouds do not affect the sky, the sky does not affect the clouds. In our practice we can try to be like this. Allow any thought to arise without judging it. I am putting it in a very simple way. I know judging is a very strong conditioning that we need to work with, but this is what the practice is: not reacting to thoughts when they come. In the same way that they come, they will go again when you are having this spacious abiding in a non-reactive mind.

This technique can be seen as developing a mind like a mirror, just reflecting things as they are. This simile, the mirror-like mind, I have come across in many spiritual traditions. When something that is considered beautiful comes before a mirror, it is reflected just as it is, and the same thing happens with something that is considered ugly. Applying this to our everyday lives, when a positive emotion comes we just allow that positive emotion to be there as it is. When joy is there, just be with the joy. And when monsters come, just reflect the monster as it is. Sadness, just the sadness; fear, just the fear. Just reflecting it as it is. No plus to the joy, no minus to the sadness, both simply reflected as they are.

In everyday life we may be able to do this. If you are reacting to your emotions, you can explore and investigate your reactions. It does not matter if you react. This is one aspect of what can be described as having a mirror-like mind.

Another aspect of a mirror-like mind is that it always functions in the present. A mirror cannot reflect something that is going to happen in the future; it cannot reflect something that has happened in the past. The question arises, is it possible always to be in the present in everyday life? So what does it mean to be in the present? We need to clarify this. Experiencing the present moment is like seeing the candle in front of you now, hearing the cough now, being aware of the breath and the sensations in the body now. But in everyday life we need to use the past and the future. This is a real challenge we have: how to use the past and the future, and still reflect them just as they are.

If you completely let go of your past you will not be able to go back to your homes: this shows that we need to use the past. If you don't think about the future, if you don't plan, you would not have been able to come here. When we think about the past, when we are recalling, and when we are anticipating the future, we are doing it now. We must realise that when we are thinking about the past, and when we are thinking about the future, we are always doing it in the present moment. The only thing is that we give a reality to the past it doesn't have. We don't realise it cannot be changed and we allow the past to create negative emotions and suffering for us. This is also how anxiety about the future can arise. The future has not come yet, but while in the present we think certain things will happen. In this simile of a mirror-like mind all this thinking about the future and about the past is happening now.

Another aspect of the mirror-like mind is that a mirror-like mind does not retain anything. What happens to us is that we identify ourselves with our experiences. We hold on to what

has happened. This is how wounds are created and through our memory these wounds come up to affect us.

There is a very well known Zen story that shows very clearly the process of holding onto these experiences. Two Zen monks were walking together, and they came to a place where there was a stream. There was also a girl there who could not cross the stream by herself. One of the monks lifted up this girl and carried her across the stream. Then he placed her down and they continued on their walk.

The following day the other monk said: "You know, you should not have touched that girl, you should not have carried her across the stream. We are monks and we are not supposed to do that." Then the other monk responded: "I left her on the other shore, but you are still carrying her!" This is what we are doing, we are carrying things we should have put down, so it is very interesting for us to know what we are carrying.

We all have selective memories. If someone has a very strong self-destructive aspect he or she will be carrying only the minuses, only the failures. Only the wrong things others have done. It is natural, as we are human, that some of our past experiences have had a deep effect, so unlike the mirror we hold on to them and do not let them go.

We have to learn to let go of things that we are holding onto, that arise from our memories. When they arise from our memory we start judging them, especially by giving minuses, and then we push them away. In the technique of the mirror-like mind we are there with all these things, allowing anything we are holding onto in our memory to come up. We are just being a passive observer, allowing these things to come and allowing them to go. Things that arise can be in the form of emotions, they can be in the form of memories, they can even be sensations in the body. We don't realise what we carry in our body, but we carry all our past experiences in our body. Tensions and unpleasant sensations sometimes are related to repressed emotions. When pain and unpleasant sensations arise in the body, just like the mirror you learn to observe them, just to create space for them, just to make friends with them.

Yet another aspect of the mirror-like mind is that there is no difference between what is reflected in the mirror and the mirror itself: there is no duality. There is no thinker apart from the thoughts; there is no hearer apart from the hearing, there is only hearing. With this meditation technique you can have a glimpse of the fact that there is only the hearing, not the idea that 'I am hearing'; that there is only the thinking, and that there is no thinker apart from the thoughts that are arising and passing away; that there is only the feeling and that there is no-one feeling.

It is like an orchestra, with the sounds, the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations; but the difference is there is no conductor. It is the conductor, the controller, who directs, who wants, who judges. When the conductor is absent there is only the orchestra; there is only the thought, there is only the sound, there is only the feeling.

It sounds very simple, but this is what the model is, and this meditation technique I find is very powerful, it has a lot of very profound and deep aspects. What I like in it is that you can really practice it in your everyday life. With certain meditation techniques you have to close your eyes or you have to sit in a particular posture. For this meditation you don't have to close your eyes and you don't have to sit in a particular posture. In any situation it is just having the awareness to know what is happening in your body and mind.

6: THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

ZONNEWENDE, DWINGELOO, HOLLAND (26TH JULY 1996)

Today I will try to explore what the Buddha called the Four Noble Truths as they relate to our own experience. The Four Noble Truths are: the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, freedom, and the way to attain freedom. Sometimes I like to use this medical model: sickness, the cause of sickness, health, and the cure. We can try to see whether these truths make any sense in our own lives, our own experience, without accepting it on authority. One of the beautiful aspects of the Dhamma is that there is no place for such authority.

It is interesting that suffering is called a noble truth, because initially suffering doesn't seem to be very noble. But unless we know that we are sick we do not feel the need to find the medicine. In that sense the First Noble Truth is a very important discovery, a very important realisation. A situation where you are sick and you don't know you are sick is a very dangerous situation to be in.

Before Prince Siddhartha became a Buddha one of the things that he encountered was the fact of death, old age and disease. When he encountered them there was a need for him to find a way out of them. Death and impermanence are very important in our lives, although sometimes we are not very happy to look at them because change or impermanence can be a source of frustration. We may be very attentive in one meditation session and perhaps we give ourselves a plus for it; but in the next session we are not attentive, we are not present, and we give ourselves a big minus. This kind of suffering can come from such comparing.

But if everything was permanent, how could a flower grow? How could the sun rise? How could I speak? How could I be silent? Changes which do not create suffering for us are no problem. But changes like death, like sickness, like old age, like the break-up of a relationship cause us suffering. Yet all these things can be seen equally as change. For example, when you have a relationship and suddenly the other person leaves you, or does something that disappoints you, you forget about the fact of change, and you want that person to live up to the fixed image you have of her or him.

Getting something that you don't want certainly can create suffering. But it is interesting to find out that even when we get something we want that can also give rise to suffering. Initially there may be satisfaction, but afterwards the feeling of satisfaction lessens and you start looking for something new, another toy, something different which can give you back that initial feeling of satisfaction.

For me coming from Sri Lanka it is interesting to see that in that country there is a lot of suffering because of poverty. But in some Western countries there is a lot of affluence and that also can cause a great deal of suffering; it can create the illness I call affluenza. Isn't that an interesting thing about the human condition?

So the First Noble Truth is fascinating, and you can apply it both to different situations in your own life and to situations world-wide.

The Second Noble Truth is a little more complicated, or a little more subtle. There we are told that the problems, the conflicts and the suffering come into existence due to our expectations, in wanting things to be our own way, in our being demanding. Sometimes I think that this truth is more important than the first one. If you can see in your own

experience how you create your own problems, how you are destructive in your own very creative way, you might come to realise that you have to take responsibility for your suffering.

It is not a very easy thing for us to realise this and to take complete responsibility for what is happening to us. Human beings are usually very good at holding other people responsible. You might blame the other who provoked you for your anger. You might lay the cause of your sadness on the one who let you down. It is our habit not to look at ourselves, but to look at other people. Unfortunately there are many people in this world who continue to blame others, who hold others responsible for their suffering and therefore don't see the need for a spiritual life and don't see the need to take responsibility.

When we realise that we are creating our own sickness, we realise that only we can discover the medicine to free ourselves from the sickness. These are the Third and the Fourth Noble Truths: the truth of freedom, of being cured, and the truth of the way to attain freedom, the course of medicine.

In a way spiritual practice is about discovering the medicine and being clear about the medicine. The Buddha himself realised that taking to the spiritual path is not an easy thing to do. He said that the spiritual path is going against the stream, it is going against the dominant culture and cultural values. What we usually see and hear around us in the media or in casual conversation is often not conducive for the cure. So you should be very happy, you should give yourself a big plus, if you are making a commitment to the spiritual life.

But even discovering the medicine can create some problems. One problem is that we might get interested not so much in taking the medicine, but just in reading about it. In Sri Lanka I have some friends who are outstanding Buddhist scholars, they can speak about the prescriptions brilliantly, but if you ask them: "Have you taken the medicine?" they would have to say: "No, I have only read the prescription." There are some others who without taking the medicine themselves give the medicine to others. When they give the medicine they get affection, they get plusses, they get fame, pictures, publicity. They enjoy giving others the medicine and might confuse it with taking the medicine themselves.

Another trap can be that you use the medicine for some time and you don't see results, so you think that the sickness is still there. This can sometimes be related to the type of person you are. If you are a self-destructive person who is always giving a lot of minuses to yourself, you can think that even if the medicine is working it is not good enough. Maybe you think that something more should happen, something different should happen. Then it is possible that you keep on changing medicines, without giving one medicine a fair chance.

I visited a New Age centre once and I was amazed at the number of different courses that were available there. In the West there is now a supermarket of medicines, and this makes it difficult to choose. It can make it confusing because all the medicines offered have their advantages and their disadvantages. This raises the question, how to find out whether the medicine is working? Sometimes in meditation you can have very unpleasant experiences: the medicine does not always provide relief, it is not always pleasant, some injections can be very painful. In meditation and generally in spiritual life what you discover about yourself can be very painful, it can be very unpleasant. So you have to have a lot of courage, you have to have a lot of commitment, you have to have a lot of dedication in spite of all this to continue to take the medicine. In that sense we should be happy, we should be grateful that

we have made a commitment to take the medicine, and that we make an effort to continue taking it.

On the positive side you can try to find taking the medicine itself interesting. This is a very positive approach, because usually we are very goal-oriented, and we do certain things only to achieve our ends, and we consider the end itself as the only thing that is interesting. It is like someone climbing a mountain who wants only to reach the top: if you are preoccupied with reaching the top you miss the fun in the process of climbing. But climbing itself can be such an adventure, such a challenge. In the same way, just taking the medicine itself is something you can enjoy. This is something that I think is very important.

We should learn to take the medicine in a different way, in a very light-hearted way, without being too much preoccupied with what is going to happen when we are completely cured. Learning to play with the medicine, but at the same time having a seriousness about this play. With this playfulness, with this complete openness to whatever is arising, we might be able to see the painful experiences as challenges, as opportunities, as learning experiences.

For me it is a joy to see people take the medicine and that there is a healing process that is taking place. Then I see their faces changing like flowers that are blooming. When the medicine is working you will experience more joy and lightness. And you can develop a real confidence in the medicine. When you discover that the tools are really working you become completely self-confident, you become completely self-reliant. Then you become really grateful to the one who discovered the medicine. That gratitude comes right from your heart, because you know by experience that the medicine is wonderful and that it is working.

The beauty of a spiritual community is that we are sharing the spiritual path together, we are exploring and taking the medicine together. This can help us in our own practice, but this kind of sharing should not be done in a very authoritarian way, as if you know everything. One can do it in a very humble way, saying: "This is what I'm doing, this is what seems to be helping me, please try it out". Anyway this is what I am trying to do.

7: LIVING AND DYING

(COMPILED FROM VARIOUS TALKS DURING THE RETREAT)

I think that in Western culture one internalises the idea of perfection. I am surprised to meet so many people on meditation retreats who suffer from guilt. We project this model of perfection onto ourselves, onto other people and onto life. Please be open to your imperfection, please let go of your models of perfection and stay open to your humanness. Learn to see your imperfection and your humanness as learning experiences, then you will learn to relate to yourselves and to others in a much easier way. You will have fewer difficulties in your relationships because you know in what type of world we live.

Another aspect of this model of perfection is that we take life so seriously. I always stress the importance of feeling light, of being playful and having the ability to laugh at life and ourselves. That is a really important spiritual quality!

One day I was talking to a very wise monk in Sri Lanka who lives in a forest hermitage. Suddenly he told me: "Sometimes I see life as a big joke. Sometimes it can be a very bad joke! But still it's a joke." Our problem is that we take this joke too seriously. We take this life as something that should be perfect. With that we lose this lightness and playfulness in our attitude to life and in our attitude to practice.

This idea about playfulness came to me one day when in Sri Lanka I was asked to teach meditation to a group of young Buddhist monks. They were around fifteen years old, wearing robes and living in a temple. Before we talked about meditation I had a friendly chat with them and I asked them: "What is it that you don't like in this temple, and in the schedule?" They said: "Getting up in the morning for meditation." I said: "I'm very happy, it is a very honest answer! Now tell me, what is it that you enjoy in this temple?" Everyone gave big smiles and they said: "Playing with the dogs!" Then I said immediately: "Well, you see, meditation is playing with your mind!" They liked this very much. I met some of them later on and they said that the meditation had become very light, especially focusing on breathing. They said that it was like playing with the breath: sometimes it is there, sometimes it is not there. So then there was a lightness to the practice.

This ability to laugh at ourselves, to develop this humour towards life, to have this lightness, is something really beautiful. In life we are bound to have difficulties, we are bound to have problems, however much we meditate, however much we follow a spiritual path. We cannot avoid problems, we cannot avoid difficult situations. When you read the life of the Buddha it is surprising the problems and difficulties he had. He had problems with his relatives, his disciples gave him difficulties, followers of other religions gave him difficulties. Even though they were great people religious teachers like the Buddha and Jesus had difficulties, so who are we to expect to have no difficulties? Jesus Christ was crucified. Look what they did to a great man like Socrates. Problems will be there and we should be grateful for such situations, it is an opportunity to learn how to deal with our difficulties.

A good question in such a difficult situation is: "What can I learn from this?" In my own life, life has been my best teacher. I have met gurus, I have met enlightened people, I have met masters, but my present position is: "My best teacher is life." And what is interesting about life is you can never come to a conclusion about it. You can't say: "Now I'm sure that in the rest of my life I will not have any problems."

We have to be really open to uncertainty, so in a sense spiritual life is learning to be open to insecurity. This is also mentioned in the Buddha's teaching. The danger of Western culture is that to a great extent everything seems to be under control and predictable. This gives a really false sense of security. In that way Sri Lanka and India are very good for practice! You never know what is going to happen: suddenly there's a bomb blast! In the West transport is very convenient, but in Sri Lanka you don't know whether there will be a bus or a train.

There are some interesting stories about people who have been able to laugh at life, and they were able to laugh at death in the same way. At present I am reading a book about how people met their death. It is fascinating how many of them have been able to really laugh at death and dying. There is a Zen story that comes to my mind, about a meditation master who was dying. When he realised he was dying he called all his students and asked them: "In what posture have you seen people dying?" His students replied: "In so many different postures." The Zen master continued: "I am going to die in a most unusual posture." After that he stood on his head and then he died! It shows that one can be playful about life and even about death.

In traditional Buddhist countries one is encouraged to reflect on death. I think it is a very important reflection. Otherwise we forget about the most certain thing in life and we assume that we are going to live forever. So when you encounter death it can really give you a shock, you will be taken by surprise.

Talking of cultural differences, I think, generally speaking, in the West death is something that is not looked at, it is something hidden away. In Asian countries you can see death more easily. In India, for instance, you even see people dying on the roadside. You can see death in Sri Lanka also, it is a common sight. One grows up with the idea that death is part of life, that there is no difference between living and dying.

When I was in South Africa I was asked to officiate at a funeral there. That was the first Western funeral I saw: what a contrast to a Sri Lankan funeral! For example, the dead body was in the undertaker's place; this would never happen in Sri Lanka! In Sri Lanka when there is a funeral, the whole village is watching the funeral. In South Africa only a few people came to the funeral. And people, even the close relatives, were wiping the tears away from their eyes, like they didn't want to express their sadness, they didn't want to show their tears to others! But in Sri Lanka and in India people really express their sadness, they even shout and scream without hiding their tears. What shocked me most was that the grandson of the person who had died, he was about forty years old, told me that this was the first time he had seen a dead body. In Sri Lanka you can't find a four- or five-year old child who has not seen a dead body.

The point here is that it is good, as part of your practice, at least occasionally, to reflect on the impermanence of life: how things are changing from moment to moment. Sometimes reflecting on death, the inevitability of death, helps us to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. It emphasises the need to heal the wounds we are carrying. This idea of death can be something very useful to cultivate and it can be very useful for our practice.

We can reflect on what are the things that we might miss when we die. This will help us to recognise our identifications, it will help us to recognise the things that we think we own. Things we consider "our" things; things we don't like to leave. These identifications can be divided into three categories: the first is identification with ourselves, with our mind and body; the second is identification with other people; the third is identification with our

possessions. While reflecting on them we realise that in an absolute sense we really don't own them, and we can die to our identifications.

Another aspect of dying to reflect on is that when we die we have to face it all by ourselves. We may have spiritual friends, we may have other people, but at that moment we are alone. This is why I encourage you as meditators to spend some time alone, to spend some time with yourself and to make a connection with yourself. In a way this can be seen as learning to live with yourself, to be happy on your own and enjoy your own company. Then when the moment comes for you to leave you can face that situation in a different way. Because you have made a connection with yourself, your dependencies may be less.

Another question to reflect on is: "Do we know what death and dying is?" We are really reacting just to the word. In ancient Greece Socrates was executed by being given poison to drink. Before he was given the poison some of his friends and relatives came, but at this stage he was very keen, very impatient to take the poison. His friends and relatives were puzzled and they asked him why he behaved in such a way. He gave a very good reply, showing his humility: "I really don't know what dying is, I'm very keen to find out!" So this is the kind of humility we should have: we don't know!

8: INTEGRATING MEDITATION INTO DAILY LIFE

HURNSE GAPER, HURWENEN, HOLLAND (25TH JULY, 1998)

I would like to share some thoughts with you about integrating meditation into daily life. One thing is that we have to be very clear about our priorities. If we give a very high priority to meditation and the spiritual life, then everything flows from that. It will be difficult for such a person to say: "I don't have time to meditate". So one has to be very clear about this point.

Something we might try to do when we wake up in the morning is to spend a few minutes just lying on our bed listening to the sounds, or feeling the body. Perhaps we could do some loving-kindness meditation in the morning, just having this thought: "Today I hope I will get an opportunity to do good to others, to make others happy and to make myself happy." This might take five or ten minutes in the morning while we are still lying down.

Another suggestion is to try to be aware of the small things and routine things we do, like brushing our teeth: this is just a very simple suggestion. You can make a little effort to brush your teeth with awareness. We all know that when we brush our teeth we do it mechanically, habitually, while mentally we are elsewhere. This simple exercise in the morning, brushing our teeth in a very caring way, will help us to develop awareness, and as an extra benefit your teeth will shine in the darkness! Another simple exercise is that when taking a shower in the morning, you can just stand there for two or three minutes simply feeling the water on the body, just being with the feeling. It is a beautiful way to start the day.

During the day we can experience many so-called negative emotions, but can we make an effort to realise when the monsters are not there? Wherever you are, in the office or at home, and whatever you are doing, just take your mind back and remember the times the monsters came, and the times they didn't come. Very soon you will realise that you are spending more time without the monsters, and this can give you inspiration, faith and confidence in the Buddha's medicine. You will be surprised to realise what a good person you are.

Work can be seen as an opportunity to develop spiritual qualities like patience, caring, and compassion for others. I could draw up a long list of spiritual qualities relating to work. So it is possible to see the work you do as something you can use as a practice to help yourself and other people.

In your daily activities you can use your friend the breath to experience the reality of the present moment, even if only for a few minutes. You can make this connection throughout the day, especially when there is a build-up of work and tension and stress. Just pause for a few minutes. You can do it seated on your chair. You don't even have to close your eyes, people do not need to know you are meditating. Thinking of your friend the breath, you can come back to the reality of the present moment and stop this build-up of tension that has been happening so far.

You will be surprised that in the main Buddhist text that spells out the development of mindfulness and awareness, which is called the Satipatthana Sutta, it is said that even when you are in the toilet you can practise mindfulness and awareness! Going to the toilet is a very powerful way of preventing stress and anxiety building up. It is a very nice posture,

and I don't know any place where there are restrictions about the time that you can spend in the toilet. Just relax, just use the breath, then if people actually do notice you, they will think: "It is one person who entered the toilet, it is another person who is leaving the toilet!"

A helpful tool in everyday life can be to develop a non-reactive mind. If you are in a situation where you are getting anxious or unhappy, try telling yourself not to react. In most of these situations it is reacting to the things that happen that makes the problem worse. We don't like something and we start resisting it. Naturally it becomes a battle, a tiresome struggle.

Another thing is learning to have a caring connection with the material things you use in your daily activities, like computers. It is a way of making a human connection with the computer, even though it is a machine. A very good friend of mine in Sri Lanka talks with his car, he touches the car, he has got a very special connection with his car. And of course now with the progress in technology cars and computers are talking back to you. These are interesting things I hear about when I travel in the West. A car can speak to you and now we are learning to speak back to the car or to the computer! If you try this, you'll realise that you make an entirely different relationship with the machine, as though with something that has life.

When I say this, I remember an old gardener we had working in the Centre. I considered him as one of my teachers. Although he was teaching he was not conscious that he was a teacher. He was teaching with his being, with his openness, with his gentleness, which is the real teaching. He would speak to the plants, he would speak to the trees, he would speak to nature. It was fascinating to watch because he had a personal connection with nature. One day we were talking and he told me that even in his dreams he sees nature. I asked him to meditate, and after a while I asked him what was happening in his meditation. He said: "I see plants, I see trees!"

I think that in our spiritual practice we also have to learn what we should forget. People often remember only their minuses and they tend to forget their plusses. That way we are using our selective memory to create more suffering for ourselves. This is a very interesting, a very fascinating area to work with. Someone who is self-destructive will remember only the minuses, only the failures, only the mistakes that he or she has made.

Sometimes there are people with whom we have problems, it may be the boss or some of our colleagues at work. At home it may be your partner or your neighbours. We all have situations like that in our everyday life. The greatest challenge we have is to relate to people in whom we see shortcomings and faults. In such a situation one important thing is to remember not to be surprised. Why should we be surprised? According to Buddhism, human beings behave in this way due to the three drives of greed, hatred and delusion, meaning ignorance, not knowing or ignoring reality. We all have these three drives in us.

When you see it in other people you realise: "What I'm having, I see in this other person as well." If you can really penetrate this realisation you can feel compassionate for people who display their frailties, their humanness, without getting angry, without creating a wound. The normal reaction we have is that we immediately give them a big minus. This is a very strong habit that we have, and we do exactly the same with ourselves. We don't see the Buddha-nature in us, we almost refuse to see the good qualities, so we need to make a special effort in this direction. In the Buddhist texts the Buddha often mentions the importance of reflecting on the good things that we have done. This can give tremendous

confidence, tremendous joy and considerable lightness and encouragement as well. With this perspective you relate to the human frailties in yourself and others in an entirely different way.

But this perspective can create difficulties as well, because you may use it as an excuse for being reluctant to act when people misbehave. You may say to yourself: "Well, it is due to ignorance", and you don't do anything. If parents are practising meditation they might get the idea that their children can behave in any way they like; or if the boss is a meditator then the people working under him or her may be excused anything, because it is simply due to their greed, hatred and delusion. If the husband is a meditator the wife can get away with anything. But this is not reality.

The question is then: how are we to bring these two perspectives together? One way is that without getting angry, without immediately giving a minus, we might get the person to reflect and to understand why he or she is behaving in a particular way. You'll be surprised to learn that most human beings whom you meet don't know why they are behaving as they are. Their behaviour is simply a habit, it has become a conditioning, and so they behave according to certain patterns; or they may carry unhealed wounds. People are just behaving in a certain way and they don't know why. To give a person a minus and to show your anger and resentment to a person such as this is like taking a crazy man seriously and threatening him just as though he was a sane person.

But some people don't understand this language of understanding, and for such people you need a different approach. The best way to show you this is to relate the story of the cobra. This story comes from the Indian tradition:

Once there was a snake, a cobra that was meditating in a forest. This cobra was meditating on loving-kindness and he was really practising hard, saying: "May all beings be well, may all beings be happy, may all beings be peaceful." He was having a beautiful *metta* meditation and he had such a nice gentle smile on his face.

Then an old woman came along carrying a bundle of firewood. This old woman couldn't see very well, she didn't recognise the cobra and she thought he was an old rope. She used the cobra to tie the bundle of firewood, and as the cobra was practising *metta* meditation he just allowed the woman to do that. "May you be well, may you be happy, may you be peaceful", the cobra thought. When the woman had taken the bundle back to her home the cobra escaped after many difficulties. He was in a lot of pain, bearing many bruises and wounds.

So then the cobra went straight to his meditation teacher and said: "I want an interview." The teacher asked: "What is the problem?" "What is the problem!" the cobra replied. "I was practising your meditation of loving-kindness and see what has happened to me!" In response the teacher said very calmly, "You were not practising loving-kindness, you were practising idiotic compassion. You should have shown her that you were a cobra, you should have hissed!" Sometimes we also have to show people that we are cobras. There are times where you have to assert yourself, otherwise people can start exploiting you. They can take advantage of your so-called loving-kindness. But you have to know when to hiss.

We can see the people we have problems with as our gurus, as our teachers. A teacher or a guru indicates to a person what is going through that person's mind. This is exactly what this guru, the boss or someone else, is doing to you, indicating to you what is happening in your mind: your minuses, your irritations. What a good guru you have in such people!

Rather than focus on what the other person is doing you can look at yourself in the mirror the guru is showing you.

As you are still human you might get annoyed, you might get irritated, you might get angry, you might want to fight with the boss or whoever. If that happens, don't give yourself a minus; make friends with these unpleasant things, try to say okay to them, try to make them the object of your of meditation. You can use the same principle in relating to other people. If you can see the practice in this way your spiritual practice, your meditation becomes so interesting: a really fascinating adventure. You don't fear to make mistakes, you are ready to learn from everything.

One thing I have been encouraging meditators to do is to experiment, to explore, to discover and find out for themselves. Learn to be your own teacher, especially in daily life. Make your own discoveries about unpleasant experiences like physical and mental pain, and also about positive experiences like joy and bliss.

A point related to this is to have what is called "a beginner's mind", or "a don't-know mind." This is about having a mind that is humble. With that humility we have the openness to learn from anything and anyone. We can learn from a tree, a bird, an animal or a child. When you have this openness they also can be our teachers.

In this connection I would like to share an incident that happened to me some years ago. I was giving a retreat and it was the last day of the retreat. There was an elderly woman there, and in our final discussion she told the group that whatever she had learned from the retreat she had already learned from her dog! So I asked her: "Please tell me something more about your dog." She said: "Well, you told us to be in the present moment, and that's how my dog is; you told us to feel grateful for things, and that's what my dog is; you did something in the retreat called yoga, and that is what my dog does." In desperation I asked her: "Is there no difference between your dog and me?" "Yes", she said, "there is one difference. You talk a lot, but my dog doesn't!"

I was very much impressed with her, the way she was really learning from a dog. In our everyday life, to have this quality is something very important and beautiful.

In everyday life there will probably come situations where we might fail in our practice, so what I want to suggest is that if such a thing were to happen to you in everyday life, don't be surprised. We're still human, and as we are still human it is possible that we'll make some unexpected mistake. Here again, without giving it a minus, without feeling bad about it, without feeling the urge to give up your practice because something unexpected has happened, see if you can learn from it. Say to yourself: "What really happened to me?" In a very friendly, gentle way we can learn from our so-called failures.

Often meditators experience calmness and clarity in a retreat situation. They experience a sense of space and loving-kindness and they are hoping to continue that back home. This is the main problem in retreats: our monsters can go to sleep in a retreat, it happens very easily. Naturally, when you go back to everyday life they wake up and are very powerful, very active: "Now it is our chance!" That's why it is important to keep them awake during a retreat, playing with them, working with them, understanding them, creating space for them.

In everyday life they are bound to arise so don't be surprised, don't give them a minus, and don't give yourself a minus. Welcome them and see how far you can work with them, use

them as your object of meditation. Sometimes you will succeed, sometimes you will fail. When you succeed you can say: "Well, the medicine is working." And when you don't succeed you can say: "Well, now I can't take the medicine, but I'll go home and take the medicine later." Then when you go home you can just take your mind back and see exactly what happened, why you got angry, what really provoked you. This is reflecting, this is taking the medicine, and our so-called failures become learning experiences. Life is not like Holland which is always flat; life will have many ups and downs. So when there is a big up, don't give it a big plus, and if you're down, don't give it a big minus. Both are just learning experiences, so try to feel grateful for both situations.

I always emphasise meditation of loving-kindness very much. I also try to use meditation of loving-kindness in different ways. One way is using this meditation to heal the wounds that are created in everyday life when you are bound to have difficulties in relationships. What is important is to discover a tool for healing them. So here meditation of loving-kindness can be something very, very useful.

Another aspect of meditation of loving-kindness is learning to make friends with whatever is happening, especially if it is unpleasant. This perspective can be used in relating to people you don't like and in relating to emotions you don't like. When such an emotion comes, just make an effort to make friends with it, to welcome it. There will be such a difference. When practising meditation of loving-kindness your relationships are bound to improve. To communicate with loving-kindness to others is a beautiful way to relate to oneself and relate to others.

In relation to loving-kindness one can also develop gratefulness. It is such a beautiful quality, but we don't really use this beautiful, wonderful quality. There are so many things that we can be grateful for, even very little things, but we take them for granted. For example, it is such a beautiful gesture just before we eat to feel grateful for our food. Feel grateful that we have eyes to see, there are people who cannot see. Feel grateful that we can hear, there are people who cannot hear. Feel grateful that we have awareness, there are human beings who have problems in their minds and they don't know what awareness and attention is. When you practise awareness, you can feel grateful for being able to do so.

If we can see little things in this way, then we learn to feel grateful for so many things around us. Feel grateful for the computer, feel grateful for the telephone. Feel grateful for the job you are doing, for it gives you a profession and money. Feel grateful for the boss who is teaching you, because you have a guru in the office. Feeling grateful is another way of saying: "No complaints." You are content with what is happening: "No complaints."

A last point that can help you in your practice in daily life is having spiritual friends. It is a beautiful relationship, a beautiful friendship to have, where you learn to grow together, to be a mirror to each other. It's good to join a meditation group, or even to start up a small group yourself. Just two or three people meeting periodically. Sitting together, discussing, doing meditation on loving-kindness, chanting and so on. This can be something that will really help us to integrate our meditation with everyday life.

9: GUIDED MEDITATION: THE MIRROR-LIKE MIND

HURNSE GAPER, HURWENEN, HOLLAND (JULY, 1998)

(to be read slowly to a friend or silently to oneself)

Please spend some time with your body. Feeling the body, becoming conscious of the body. Feel the different sensations and all the movements in your body.

Learn to gently let go of your thoughts and come back to your body. Learning to feel the body. See the difference between feeling the body and thinking about the body.

Let us learn to feel friendly, gentle, tender and soft towards the body. Just accepting the body as it is.

Learning to listen to the body. Allowing the body to tell us what it likes. Just listen to it with gentleness, like listening to the wind or the birds.

Just feel what it is to sit in this posture. Just feel what it is to sit completely still.

When the body is still, the mind may become still, and you may feel the stillness around you. Just allow the body to breathe naturally.

Please spend some time allowing the body to breathe the way it likes to breathe. Not controlling it. Not manipulating it. Not directing it.

You don't have to do anything. Learning non-doing with the help of the breath.

Now please become aware of the different sensations, the different movements in the body as the body is breathing. Do you feel any sensations in the area of the nostrils, the area of your chest, or in the abdomen? Just be with those sensations and movements with each breath.

When the body inhales, you know that the body inhales. When the body exhales, you know that the body exhales.

Experiencing the present moment, the here and the now, with the help of the in-breath and the out-breath.

You hear sounds, you have thoughts, you feel other sensations. Don't try to exclude them. Just let them be there, but the awareness is more and more on your breath.

Let us now let go of our awareness of the breath and learn to be aware of whatever is happening in our mind and body from moment to moment.

Just allow the mind to do what it likes. Like creating a lot of space for a child to do what it likes. Like a friendly mother, just watching, just knowing what the child is doing from moment to moment.

Sounds. Thoughts. Emotions. Sensations. Just letting them be.

THE MIRROR-LIKE MIND

No plus. No minus. Learning to see things just as they are. Having a mirror-like mind.
Learning to reflect things just as they are. Not as they should or as they must be.

In the seeing just the seeing, not 'I' am seeing.

In the hearing just the hearing, not 'I' am hearing.

In the thinking just the thinking, not 'I' am thinking.

In the feeling just the feeling, not 'I' am feeling.