

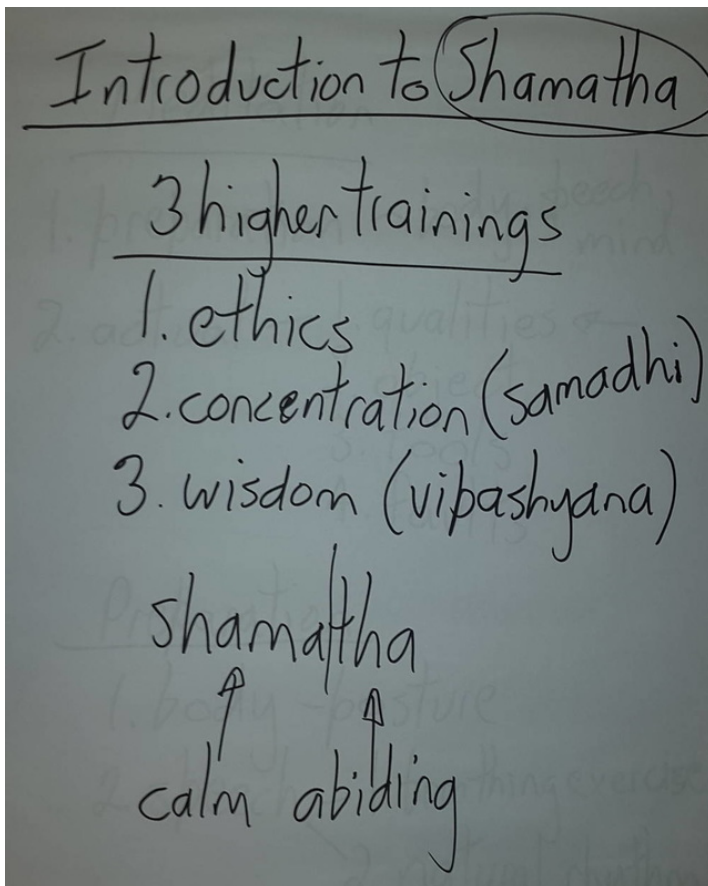
Introduction to Shamatha - Taunton, England 2015 - Glen Svensson

So again, Good evening everyone and welcome to this evening's session titled "**Introduction to Shamatha**". As Neil said, it's going to be a two hour session again and we're going to have a little break in the middle for tea and coffee. And in this evening's session, we're going to do a couple of meditations, so might be useful to check that you've switched off your mobile phones. We don't want those going while we're meditating, particularly.

Okay. So let's start then, by discussing a little bit what is Shamatha? If we're having an introduction to Shamatha, what is Shamatha. In Buddhism in the Buddhist spiritual path, there are three 'core practices' in all Buddhist traditions, called: the "three higher trainings".

That the foundation of all Buddhist spiritual paths is ethics, essentially avoiding harming others, avoiding non virtuous harmful behaviour. And on that basis, the second core practice is: concentration. Developing a calm, clear, focused mind, developing our attention skills.

And on the basis of concentration practice, we engage in the wisdom practice. And 'wisdom practice' in Buddhism is often referred to as 'Vipashana' or in Pali: 'Vipassana' practice. And



that is to gain an insight into the nature of reality. Because the Buddhist assertion is that the reason we're stuck in this unsatisfactory state, the reason we suffer, the root cause is a distorted, mistaken view of reality. So, if we want to overcome all of our mental afflictions and suffering, we have to come to realise the nature of reality, which is the the Vipassana practice. But the basis of that is the concentration practice, because to be able to realise the nature of reality, we need a very calm, clear focused mind.

Concentration in general here, in Sanskrit is called: 'Samadhi'. And Samadhi just means: 'concentration'. And here, we can develop many levels of Samadhi. But the one level of Samadhi we're going to be looking at this evening is: 'Shamatha'.

'Shamatha' is a Sanskrit word, which we can sort of divide into two parts. There's 'Shama'. And 'Shama' really means: calm. And 'Ta' means to abide, to remain. So, often

this is translated as 'abiding'. So, often Shamatha is translated into English as: 'calm abiding', the practice of 'calm abiding'. And this practice is simply - as the name suggests - to develop a calm, clear focused mind.

So that's what we're going to be looking at evening, is: how to cultivate this calm, clear focused mind. That will be the basis of the Vipassana practice, the wisdom practice. Why? Why is this important, this Shamatha to practice?

In a sort of everyday level, it's important because what we're really doing here, in this practice is: developing our attention skills, our ability to focus. And of course, that's important in everything we do in our life. And if we can't focus well, because our mind is either dull or distracted, then we're not very effective in anything we do, we're not very effective at our work. And often, that leads to a lot of agitation and stress. And that can also lead to a lot of mental imbalance. And often, then we end up with some physical problems because of that, maybe some sleep problems. And also, we end up not really enjoying the simple pleasures in life as much as we could.

Whereas, if we really engage in this Shamatha practice, then on an everyday level, we're developing our attention skills. Which means: we will be much more effective in everything we do, much more effective at work, much less stress, much calmer mind, much less mental imbalance. Often we end up in a better physical state - less sleep problems, and so forth. And we end up actually enjoying simple pleasures in life, much more. So in a very mundane level, this practice can bring us enormous benefit.

But of course, here we're talking about this practice in the context of the Buddhist spiritual path. And it's the basis of the wisdom or Vipassana practice. So if we can really develop this very calm, clear focused mind and then we engage in our wisdom practice, our Vipassana practice, we will be much more easily able to penetrate the nature of reality. We will be able to come to realise the nature of reality. If our mind is dull and distracted, we're not really going to be able to do that. And we won't really be able to transform our mind in any significant way.

Because to be able to transform our mind through Vipassana practice, through compassion practice, then we need that very stable, calm, clear, focused mind. Otherwise, we try to meditate and it doesn't have much effect. Whereas if we have a very calm, clear, focused mind and we meditate on the nature of reality or we meditate on compassion and so forth, it really does have a much more transformative effect on our mind. So therefore, it's very important to put effort into the Shamatha practice if we want any of our other meditation practices to work, and particularly if we want to really come to realise the nature of reality.

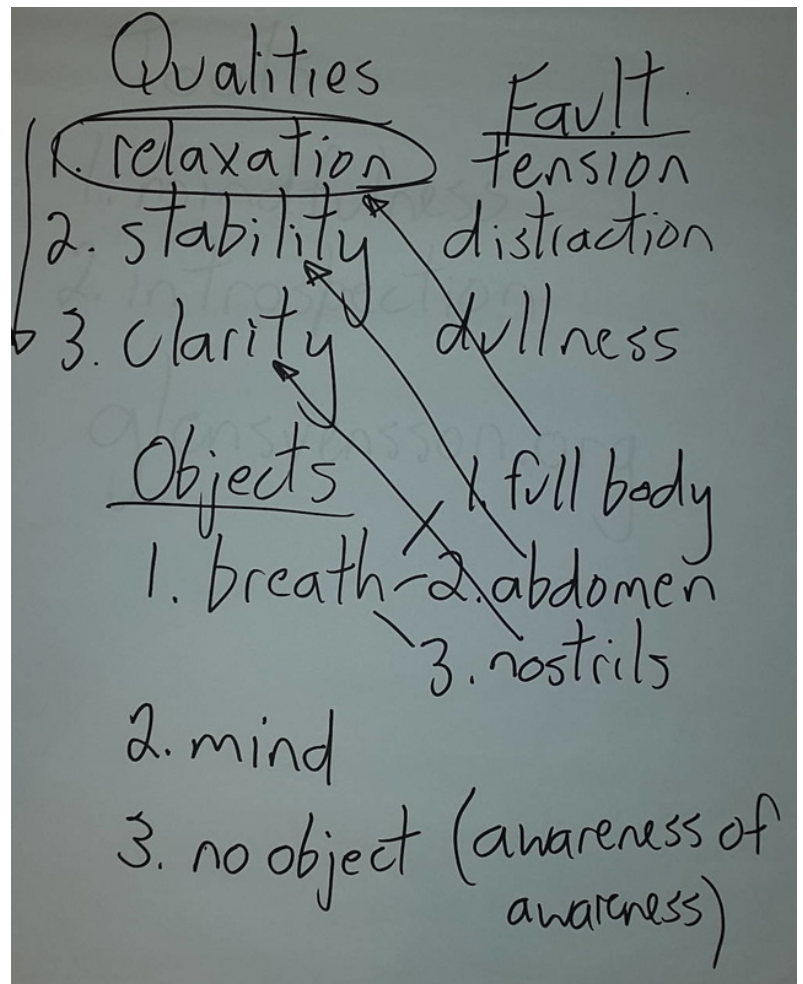
So, how do we go about training in it? When we talk about practice, then practice always has two parts, two components. The first part of practice is: actual meditation. And the second part of practice is: how we integrate that into daily life. So it's important that in Shamatha practice and in all other practices, we do both: we meditate and integrate into daily life.

So what are the elements of the meditation aspect of the Shamatha practice? The first part is: 'preparation' - how we prepare ourselves for an actual meditation session. And here we can talk about three elements of preparation. Body speech, mind - prepare the body, prepare the speech, prepare the mind - and we'll have a look shortly at how to do that.

And it's important to prepare ourselves well for the meditation and then,because it will go a lot better if we do that. So then, on the basis of preparing ourselves well at the beginning of a meditation session, then we can look at the actual meditation session.

And in the actual meditation session of Shamatha, here we're going to look at the elements of the actual practice. And the first one that we're going to be looking at this evening is: what qualities are we trying to cultivate in this Shamatha practice? And then we're also going to look at: what objects should we use in this practice? Because remember, in this practice we're trying to develop our attention skills. So we're going to be focusing on a single object. But of course, the question is: what object should we focus on in this practice? So, we're going to have a look at that. Then, of course we need to know what tools to use in this practice.

And on the basis of the tools we use, then we also need to know: how to overcome any faults in the practice? So these are some elements of the actual meditation session that we're going to also be looking at this evening.



So let's begin by having a look at how to prepare ourselves well for meditation. And this applies to, of course not just Shamatha meditation, but all meditation sessions. So of course, when we talk about preparing the body, we're talking about the actual physical posture. Now there are a number of things important in physical posture. And often when it's described, they often talk about seven different elements. But if we want to keep it simple this evening, we can say there are two things very important with physical posture, when you meditate.

The first is: to keep the back nice and straight. And the second element is: to allow the body to become completely relaxed. Because if the back is not nice and straight, of sort of hunched over like this, then you're probably just going to get very drowsy and sleepy. And also, if you keep the back straight then a lot of the subtle energies in our body can flow a lot better as well, and that balance more. And then of course: to have the body completely relaxed. We don't want any tension in the body when we meditate.

Now, a couple of things will look at in terms of the posture. First is the legs - what to do with the legs? What is often recommended, the most stable thing to do with the legs is, what's called the 'full lotus posture' with the legs - where you put both feet on the opposite thighs. For most of us, we find that a little bit difficult, we're not really used to that.

If we can't really do that, then what many people do is just simply use 'cross-leg' posture, as I'm using here. If we're using the cross-leg posture it's always good to make sure that the knees are at least level with the hips, better lower, so they're actually touching. So you have three points of contact. If you're sitting here like this, trying to meditate, then (its) not very stable, and also that tends to put a lot of strain on the lower back. So, if you're having any lower back pain, then this is probably the reason. And the reason we sort of end up sitting like that, is because we're very stiff.

So if you're not very flexible then sit on more cushions, just add more cushions, so that eventually the knees are at least level with the hips, ideally touching the cushion, it's themselves. Sometimes people find that sitting cross-legged, it cuts circulation off, they get a numb leg or something. An alternative to that is, what's called the: 'Burmese posture'. Instead of crossing the legs, you have one leg in front of the other. So you can have one leg simply in front of the other. And that's also can be very, very helpful, particularly if you have problems with circulation cut off.

Some people have problems with their knees and can't sit cross legged. Then another option is sometimes people have these little meditation stools where you tuck your legs underneath the stool, so that's also possible.

And sometimes people find that doesn't work. Sitting in a chair also is perfectly okay. Sitting in the chair, again, back straight and body completely relaxed. But some people also have back problems and even sitting in the chair is painful, then of course an other alternative is to lie down. Simply lie down flat on your back to meditate, that's perfectly okay.

Using what's called the 'shavasana' posture, the corpse-posture from the yoga tradition. Flat on the back, hands a bit to the side, the back is nice and straight and the body is very relaxed.

So this is some options of what to do with the legs. The hands, what to do? In the Tibetan tradition the sort of the standard thing to do is, what's called the posture: the 'mudra of meditative equipoise' - where you have the right hand resting in the left and the thumbs touching. And this is symbolic of the two aspects of practice: the left hand symbolises wisdom, the right hand symbolises compassion, and the thumbs touching is symbolising that we need to cultivate those together. So right in left, thumbs touching, resting in your lap. Some people find that a little bit awkward, then you can just put your hands on your knees or whatever way you're comfortable with. So again, not so important, it's just to keep it relaxed.

So again, the two things that are very important is: the back straight, body relaxed. Also, head position: make sure if it's too low, you're going to get drowsy, too high maybe get agitated. And the general recommendation with the eyes for meditation is: to have them slightly open. Because if we have them closed, generally that's a signal to sort of go to sleep, so we get very drowsy.

And if they're too open, maybe too much light, too much agitation. This is something we can play with a little bit, according to our own disposition. If we're the sort of person that gets a lot agitated: maybe close the eyes more, if we're the sort of person who gets very sleepy in meditation: open the eyes more.

And if the eyes are open you should find that you're sort of naturally looking ahead, your gaze is in a sort of naturally a slightly downward angle. But that's something that you can play with a little bit. So that's a little bit about the posture. Does anyone have any questions about the posture before I move on?

Student: I've heard it is important..... (rest inaudible)

Glen: So one of those elements - of the seven elements - is sometimes I recommend to have the tip of the tongue touching the upper palate. And the reason for that is that if you do that, (because) sometimes people find they build up a lot of saliva and they're constantly swallowing. So, that can help reduce that. But again, if you find that uncomfortable then no need to do it, it's only for the case if we're developing too much saliva and constantly swallowing - if you touch there, generally that can help. So, that's just a very minor point. Okay, so that's the body.

The next part of the preparation is: speech. And here as 'speech', I'm not really referring to talking. We're talking about 'mental chatter'. And so here in terms of preparing speech, there are two things we can do. The first is a breathing exercise. Sometimes when we come into meditation, we are coming in with a little bit of an agitated, negative state of mind. So it's very hard to begin from that state. So, particularly if you find you're coming into the meditation session with a little bit of an agitated negative state of mind, we can do a little breathing exercise to quiet the mind. And this can take a number of different forms.

In the Tibetan tradition, you may have heard of this: 'nine round breathing exercise', which involves often to have some quite elaborate visualisation.

Another thing to do is: simply count 21 breaths. Another thing sometimes is recommended is, just take three slow, deep breaths. With all of those breathing exercises at the beginning, the goal of them is to occupy the mind on the breath and thereby let go of any negativity in your mind. So that you can bring the mind into a neutral state. So that can be something very helpful. Again, if you particularly come in with a little bit of a negative state of mind in meditation.

Then the next part is to just let allow the breath to flow naturally, in the natural rhythm. Because in this practice, we don't want to be trying to control the breath. So, in this Shamatha practice we're not trying to make the breath rhythmic. We're not trying to make the breath deep. We're not trying to make the breath subtle, we're not trying to do anything with the breath. Of course, there are some meditations where we do breath manipulation, like 'pranayama', and they have their own purpose.

But here in Shamatha practice we are not trying to manipulate the breath in any way. So, you simply allow the breath to flow naturally. If it's shallow, let it be shallow, if it's rough, let it be rough, whatever it's doing, let it be.

The breath knows what to do. Because if you try to control or manipulate the breath, usually what happens is you're trying to make...., often people are trying to make it more more subtle. And then of course they're not getting enough breath. And after trying, we go: "hhhhrrrrh...., hhhhrrrrh... (gasping sound)" in the meditation, because we're not getting enough breath. So, we don't want to be doing this. So just let the breathing do whatever it needs to do.

So this is part of preparing the speech, the internal chatter. Then of course, the third part of preparation is to prepare the mind. And to prepare the mind here, we can also talk about two things, two elements, two things to do here. One is to, of course, set a positive motivation for the meditation. And the second element is to bring the mind into the present moment. Because in this practice, we are going to be focusing on an object. And if our mind is constantly jumping into the past and the future, we're not going to be able to do that.

In fact, most of the time now, our mind is going into the past and the future. And that's not going to be very helpful for this Shamatha practice. So as part of the preparation, then to let go of the past and future. In particular, important here is: to let go of expectations. Because expectation is about the future, you know, "I hope my meditation is going to go well."; "What's going to happen in my meditation?" - if we have this sort of expectation, then that's going to derail our practice. So, if you notice that you're coming into this meditation session with any hopes or fears or expectations, we need to let go of them. Otherwise, we're going to get caught up in them. And we're not going to be able to practice well.

So, these are some elements of preparation of body, speech and mind. And very shortly we're going to go through a very short, guided meditation, where we'll really focus on those elements so that we prepare ourselves well. Because, unfortunately, often people don't do this or not very well, they just simply jump down, sit down and start meditating. And of course, things don't go well, because we haven't prepared ourselves well. So it's very important to take your time at the beginning of a meditation session to prepare body, speech and mind well. And then the actual meditation session is going to go a lot better.

So, we're going to really focus on that in the meditation that we're going to do very shortly, is: spend quite a lot of time preparing ourselves well for the meditation. One more point, before we do that meditation is: I want to look at the qualities we're trying to develop in the actual meditation session here.

So with this Shamatha practice, we are trying to cultivate a calm, clear, focused mind. So, generally here, there are two qualities we're trying to cultivate. The first is: we're trying to develop, to cultivate a stable mind, a mind that is not distracted. So of course, the fault we're trying to overcome here is: distraction. So we're not only trying to cultivate a stable mind, meaning be able to focus on a given object, not becoming distracted.

But we're also trying to develop a very clear mind. So we can focus on the object in a very clear way. So, the second quality we're trying to cultivate in this practice is: 'clarity' - a clear mind that we can focus very clearly on the object. So, the fault that we're trying to overcome here, of course, is: 'dullness'. Our mind being very dull and sleepy and lethargic. So generally, these are the two qualities that are mentioned in this Shamatha practice that we're trying to cultivate, we're trying to overcome these two faults.

But I like to add a third quality, that's normally not mentioned in the texts. And then, is the quality of relaxation. Because the reality is that many of us come into this meditation practice or meditation in general, from a very hectic, stressful lifestyle, our minds tend to be very agitated, very tense, very chaotic. And of course, what we tend to do then is, when we sit down to meditate - knowing that our minds are so chaotic and agitated - then, when we want to focus on the object in this meditation, we do like we do in everyday life when we want to focus, and that is: we tense.

We do that all the time, whenever we want to focus in daily life, we automatically tense because we know that if we don't tense, we're going to get distracted. And of course, if we only need to focus on something for a very short time, that can sort of work. But we know from our own experience, if we have to focus on something with this tension for a longer period of time, we often become completely exhausted and often become very agitated. So this is not the approach we want to do in this meditation practice or in meditation in general.

So the fault we're trying to overcome here is: tension. And generally, the most common problem people face when they begin to meditate, is exactly this. People are too tight, too tense, trying too hard. And if we do that, we get all sorts of problems in our meditation practice. So the very first thing we need to do in meditation, and definitely in the Shamatha practice is: we need to relax. We need to not only relax the body and the preparation, but in the actual meditation session we need to relax the mind; we need to have a cultivated, relaxed mind. Because if we don't have a relaxed mind, there's no way we're going to develop a stable and clear mind, it's just not going to happen.

So that's something that we're going to do now in this meditation session is we're going to prepare ourselves well, and then we're simply going to emphasize relaxation: relax, relax, relax, relax.

Because normally, in our daily life, when we're alert, we tend to be tense. And when we're relaxed, we're quite dull. So what we're trying to do in this meditation is: conjoining the two. We're trying to be alert, and relaxed. Not alert and tense or relaxed and dull. So that's what we're trying to do on the basis of relaxation, then we're trying to be stable and clear. So, this is the order in which we need to emphasise the qualities in our practice. First, emphasise relaxation. When we have a relaxed mind, then we can work on stabilising our mind. When our mind becomes more stable, then we can work on improving the clarity of our focus. So that's what we're going to be doing and we're going to be emphasising the relaxation. Any questions about that?

Okay, so what we're going to do now then is a short meditation, maybe about 20 minutes or so. And we're going to go through those elements of the preparation in a very slow, methodical way. And then we're going to do a meditation, emphasising this quality of relaxation. Okay, so find yourselves a nice comfortable posture.

(meditation starts)

This is an act of loving kindness for yourself. Allow your awareness to descend into your body. And simply become aware of the sensations throughout the body.

And if you notice any areas of tightness or tension in any part of the body, then use the out-breath to relax and release that tightness or tension to the best of your ability.

And then bring your awareness to the area of your face.

And soften and relax all the muscles in the face, the mouth and jaw, soft and relaxed.

And all the muscles around the eyes, soft and relaxed.

In this way allowing the entire body to become completely relaxed, completely at ease.

And relaxing more deeply with each out-breath.

And at the same time making sure that the back is nice and straight.

And then we can take three slow, deep breaths, maintaining awareness of sensations throughout the body as you breathe.

And then simply allow the breathing to settle into its natural rhythm.

Not trying to control or regulate the breath in any way.

Simply allowing it to flow naturally and effortlessly.

And then give yourself permission to let go of any hopes or fears, worries or concerns about the past or the future - for the duration of this short meditation.

And simply allow your mind to come to rest in the present moment.

Through focusing on the sensations of the breath throughout the body. Wherever you most distinctly notice any sensations associated with the breath.

And maintain an ongoing flow of mindfulness of the sensations of the breath throughout the body.

Now, if you've noticed that you've become distracted, then without getting upset, the first thing to do is simply: relax. Then let go of the distraction. And very gently return to focusing on the breath.

So relax, release, and return. Every time you notice that you become distracted.

And if you find that you're simply becoming dull or spaced out, then use the in-breath as an opportunity to arouse and refresh your focus on the breath.

Keeping the back nice and straight. And the body completely relaxed, completely at ease.

And then we can slowly bring this meditation session to an end.

(meditation ends)

And we can continue our discussions together. Does anyone have any questions regarding that meditation session? Okay, then before we go for break, we're going to look at now: what sorts of objects should we use for this practice?

And for this Shamatha practice, the general recommendation is: use the object that works best for you. And probably for most of us, or many of us at least, that object is going to be the breath. Because the meditation texts often say: if you're the sort of person who is highly discursive, meaning: always thinking, thinking, thinking thinking, then definitely the best object for you is: the breath. And I think that accounts for about 90% of the modern day population. We're all living in the head: thinking, thinking thinking, so much so that we've even lost touch with our own body. So, I think for the vast majority of us the breath is probably going to be the best object to use in Shamatha practice. Because by focusing on the physical sensations of the breath, it gets us out of our conceptual mind and into the body.

So, that's a good start. And most of our conceptual thinking is about the past and the future. Very rarely are we in the present moment. And from a Buddhist perspective, living in the past and the future is a source for a lot of unhappiness. The physical sensations of the breath only happen in the present moment.

So, by focusing on them, we get out of our conceptual mind into the body, and we get out of the past or the future into the present moment. So I think that's probably going to be the best object from many of us for Shamatha practice. With the 'breath practice' we have three variations:

The first one - and that's what we did in this meditation - is called: the 'full body practice'. And that is to simply notice sensations associated with the breath in any part of the body. Wherever you notice any sensations associated with the breath, could be in the abdomen, area of the stomach, chest area, throat, around the mouth, nostril area, any way you notice any sensations.

And this particular variation of practice is very good for working with relaxation, to really relax ourselves. Particularly if we find we have a lot of tension in the body, then what can be very helpful here is to use the 'corpse-posture', the 'Shavasana' to meditate: lie flat on your back, hands to the side, very relaxing. And then just really on every out-breath, emphasize relaxing, relaxing, relaxing, noticing sensations throughout the body. So this is very good for helping us to become more relaxed in the body and the mind.

Another variation of the 'breath-practice' is to focus in the area of the abdomen. And this is what we're going to do after the break: is focus on the rising and lowering of the abdomen as we breathe. This is very much emphasised in particularly in many of the Theravada Buddhist traditions, quite easy area to focus. And so that's going to help us to really stabilise our attention. So that's all we're going to be looking at the practice after the tea break.

And the third variation that's emphasised in many Buddhist traditions is: the nostrils, focusing at the entrance of the nostrils. Very small area of focus, much more difficult to focus on, but because of that - because it's a much more subtle object - it's very helpful for improving clarity, making our mind more clear. So these variations of 'breath-practice' are individually very good for developing these three qualities.

Another object that is very highly recommended, particularly in our modern day society, is to focus on the mind, the mind itself. So, in this practice we are simply observing our own mind and whatever is coming up in the mind: thoughts, emotions, memories. Simply observing these mental events arise and pass. Now, this is potentially a very beneficial practice for many of us. Because many of us, again, in our modern day society, are the slaves of our mind, we are tormented by our mind. We are often overwhelmed by our thoughts, emotions, and memories.

In this practice we are learning to be able to become the observer or witness of our own mind, simply observing thoughts emotions and memories as they arise and pass. Now, of course, when a thought emotion or memory arises in our mind, what do we do? We identify with it, we follow it, we get caught up in it. And every time we do that, of course, we are strengthening the habit of all this garbage coming up in our mind. And then, of course, sometimes when unpleasant thoughts, emotions or memories come up in our mind - and we often don't know how to deal with these things - what do we do? We stuff and back down, suppress them. Of course, that doesn't deal with them.

All that happens is: they often then manifest as physical health problems. And then we project a lot of this negativity on to the people around us. And so therefore, we become really the slaves of our mind. Whereas if we do this practice, we will become the observer or witness of our mind. And every time we can observe thought, emotion or memory arise and pass, we're not feeding it. And therefore our mind will naturally become more quiet and still.

You know from your own experience, you can't make the mind still. (If) you try to make your mind still, it just becomes more agitated. So we don't need to fight with our mind. If we fight with our mind, it's like throwing petrol on the fire, it's a lost cause. All we need to do is: step back and observe and not feed it, and it will naturally become more quiet and still, and we will become the masters of our mind. So that's this practice here.

The third object that is particularly beneficial in our modern society is actually: 'no-object.' Sometimes this is called 'awareness of awareness'. In this practice, what we are simply doing is: 'being aware of being aware.' Now when we're aware of an object, we are explicitly aware of the object. But implicitly, we're aware of being aware of the object. All we're doing in this practice is making that explicit, we are just explicitly becoming aware of being aware. And we're not really interested in any objects here. We're just simply resting in the experience of knowing that we're aware, that's all we're doing.

And this practice is particularly beneficial. Because now, when some appearance arises in our mind, we identify with it, we contract around the appearance, and our mind becomes very constricted and small, and we're often tormented by these things.

Whereas, if we can simply rest in awareness, simply rest in being aware of being aware, then that is a very open and spacious experience, and stillness. And so if we can really practice this, we can in our daily life also remain in this very still, open, spacious state, in the midst of all the things that are going on in our life. And we can remain in that very open, spacious still state. So very, very beneficial.

Now, of course, there are many other objects that you could focus on. So, this is not an exhaustive list. And again, the general recommendation is: use the object that works best for you. But I think these three objects, particularly are of great benefit for us in our modern society. Any questions about these objects? Before we go for a tea break.

Student: I only just wanted to ask, I was struggling with the awareness of awareness, I can understand awareness, dwelling in a state of awareness..... (rest inaudible)

Glen: That is awareness of awareness. It is. See, the difficulty here is that this is a very much 'non-dualistic' experience. So, to describe it using language, which is dualistic, is very difficult. So even saying: 'awareness of awareness' is a bit misleading.

So it's difficult to talk about this practice using conception and language because the experience is very much 'non-dualistic'. So, it's exactly as you said, it's like, it's simply resting in awareness, its just 'being aware of being aware'. That's all.

Student: Should I watch the breath as the second practice? Could it be a nothingness? I'm doing nothing for now. Yeah, nothing, the fullest by that? No, I'm doing nothing. It's different. But this is not the same result..... (rest inaudible)

Glen: This practice is, as you said, it's more about 'being', it's more about being than doing. Here we're doing, we're doing, we're observing the breath, we're observing the mind, we're observing the thoughts. Here, it's just being, so we're not really doing, "doing" anything here.

Student: Yeah, its nothingness....

Glen: It's not nothingness! We're not spacing out. It's not like spacing out and becoming blank. We're being aware, awareness is present. Yeah? So that's the difference here. So again, people often find this very difficult, not because it's complicated, because but it's simply...., because people don't know how to "be". We're always "doing", we're doing, doing. And so when this is described, people say: "What should I do? What am I supposed to do here?"

Because we always want to "do" something. And this is not about 'doing', it's about 'being'. It's so simple. That's why people find it difficult. Really, so simple. I mean, virtually we're doing nothing. And that's why people find it difficult. It's not "do-nothing" in terms of simply spacing out and becoming blank. That's not what we're wanting. Okay, any other questions?

Okay, let's take a 15 minute tea break, and then we'll come back, talk a little bit about the tools. And then we'll go back into another meditation, this time focusing on the abdomen. So let's take a tea break first.

(-----tea break time-----)

So in this Shamatha practice, the two main tools were using in this practice: mindfulness and introspection. And to talk about them, we can use this chart here. If we look down the



bottom of the chart, so this is a chart describing nine steps or stages to achieving the goal of Shamatha, which is the diagram in the middle of the top here. If we go right down the bottom, we see the meditator.

And the meditator in their left hand has a rope, and in the right hand a hook. So these two are symbolising these two tools. The rope is symbolising 'mindfulness', because with mindfulness, we are trying to tie our mind to the object - with the rope of mindfulness. So mindfulness is simply our ability to hold the object, without becoming distracted.

But then again, then we need a second tool, because we need to monitor that mindfulness. We need to notice when we're becoming dull or distracted, so that's 'introspection'. Introspection is 'quality control'. Introspection is monitoring our mindfulness, how we going - are we still on the object? Or are we starting to become dull or distracted. So that's the job of introspection. And if we become dull or distracted then we we bring our mind back to the object. And that's symbolising the hook - to hook the mind back with the hook of introspection.

While we're on the chart, I just like to describe a couple of things on the chart here before we go into the next meditation. So, this is describing nine stages to achieving the goal of Shamatha, this state of concentration. Down, the elephant here is symbolising the mind. The fact that its black is symbolising this 'dullness of mind'.

The monkey is symbolising 'discursive thought' in general. And the fact that its black is symbolising this excitement, the the main cause of our distraction.

So we see at 'stage one' here of the practice, the monkey and the elephant are running wildly ahead of us. Meaning: at the first stage of practice, what we notice is that our mind is completely out of control.

And usually what happens is, when people start to do this practice: they sit down, and they have expectation. You know, normally we go into this practice thinking: "You know, my mind's not too bad, I should be able to focus on the breath, okay, maybe I'll get a bit dull or distracted, but I think I can do that okay".

And of course, when we sit down to try to do it, and we try and focus on the breath, and then usually after three or four seconds we're completely gone. And we're completely distracted, maybe for many minutes before we realise: "Hey, I'm distracted, I'm supposed to be on the breath", - we come back to the breath for another three or four seconds, and we're gone again. And so when people have this experience, then often they think: "I can't meditate. I just can't meditate. In fact, it's worse than that, because I must be doing something wrong, because my mind is worse now than before I started meditating".

And then often, people also then open their eyes a bit and look around, everyone else seems to be very still: "I'm the only one who can't meditate. Everyone else is meditating!"

Well, if this is your experience, don't worry, you can meditate. Because the very first sign of progress is to notice how chaotic and how out of control our mind really is. Until we actually do this practice, we live in the illusion that our mind is sort of okay, it's not too bad. It's only when we sit down and try to focus on a single object, do we realise how out of control and chaotic our mind really is. So that is the first sign of progress is to just simply notice that.

So you don't need to despair, it is actually a sign of progress, you've made it to 'step one' of the practice. If we keep practicing, of course, we'll get to 'stage two', where the elephant and monkey are not running so wildly anymore. By stage two of the practice, sometimes we can hold the object maybe a minute or two before we get distracted. But we're still distracted for many long periods of time. By the time we get around the corner to 'stage three', we see the rope of mindfulness is there now. By stage three, we're getting not bad. Meaning: we can hold the object maybe five or 10 minutes, before we're distracted. And when we become distracted, we quickly come back to the object.

By the time we get to 'stage four' our mindfulness is getting very good now, means: we can hold the object the entire session without ever completely losing it. But still, we have a lot of work to do, because the clarity of our attention is not very good. We still have some dullness and a bit of agitation, but we never completely lose the object anymore. And then over the next few stages: five, six, and seven, we are fine-tuning our focus. If we're becoming a little bit dull, we're sharpening the focus, if we're becoming a bit agitated, we're relaxing the focus. So we're fine-tuning the focus. And finding that middle way, in terms of being very stable and very clear.

And if we keep going, then eventually we'll get up to the top here to the goal of Shamatha. And then the last diagram up here is describing the Vipassana practice, meaning: on the basis of a very stable, clear mind, we can then go on to investigating the nature of reality in our Vipassana practice. So there's a lot to be said about this diagram, but I thought I just mentioned those few points. Does anyone have any brief questions on this before we go to the next meditation?

And one little saying from a great Indian master: 'Shantideva' that I think can be helpful when we're trying to do this practice. Because often when we try to do this practice, after some time, we just think: "...it's hopeless, I can never, I can never do it". Then we can keep this in mind from (the) great Indian master Shantideva, and he says: "No matter how difficult something seems, everything with practice becomes easy".

And that is true. All we need to do is: practice and it will become easy. If we have the hope that we will become a master of this practice, a master of Shamatha, without any practice, we're deluding ourselves. Same as if we think we want to become a concert pianist by doing very little training, we're deluding ourselves, its not going to happen. But if we diligently practice then it will become easier and we will become proficient in this practice. What we need to do is: practice, that's all. We don't need to be superhuman or a special person or anything. We just need to practice. That's all.

Okay, with that in mind, let's do another short meditation. So again, we're going to go through the preparation and this time, we're going to focus on the breath in the area of the abdomen. And to help stabilise our attention, I'm going to introduce a little thing called: 'counting the breath' - which can be helpful, it's self explanatory, and I'll just explain it in the meditation. Okay?

(meditation starts)

As always, we begin by preparing the body. So, making sure we have a nice, comfortable posture and keeping the back nice and straight.

And simply allow your awareness to descend into the body. Becoming aware of sensations throughout the body.

And using the out-breath to relax and release any tightness or tension in any part of the body.

Allowing the entire body to become completely relaxed, completely at ease.

And relaxing more deeply, with each out-breath.

Allowing the breathing to settle into it's natural rhythm.

Not trying to control or regulate the breath in any way.

With each out-breath, letting go of any thoughts that may have arisen, happily releasing them.

And without dwelling in the past and without anticipating the future.

In particular, letting go of any expectations for this meditation.

Letting go of all of these things and simply allowing the mind to come to rest in the present moment.

Focusing on the sensations of the breath throughout the body.

Now, narrow your focus and focus on the sensations of the breath in the area of the abdomen.

Focusing on the sensations of the rising and lowering of the abdomen, as you breathe.

Using the rope of mindfulness to tie your mind to the sensations of the breath, in the area of the abdomen.

And using the hook of introspection, to monitor the mindfulness, noticing if you're becoming dull or distracted.

And if you notice that you've become distracted, the first thing to do is simply relax.

Then release the distraction.

And very gently return to focusing on the breath.

So relax, release and return.

Or if you've noticed that you've become dull or spaced out, then use the in-breath as an opportunity to arouse and refresh your focus on the breath.

And if you're finding that you're getting constantly distracted, then you might like to experiment with counting the breath, to help stabilise the mind.

So for this, at the end of the in-breath, mentally note: 'one'. And then focus on the sensations of the breath on the following out-breath and the following in-breath. And then mentally note: 'two' at the end of the next in-breath.

So in this way, we can count the breath from one up to 10. And start back at one again. If you lose the count at any time, simply start at one. So let's now experiment with counting the breath and see if it helps to stabilise our attention.

And now we can slowly bring this meditation to a close, and then we can finish our discussions together this evening.

(meditation ends)

I just want to look at one more thing on your diagram here. It's actually on the reverse side, at the top. And it talks about the various faults and antidotes in this practice. And we can see there in that chart, the first fault is: laziness. And the antidote, the first antidote here is: 'faith'. And that's the same with everything in our life. If we don't see any benefit, (of) some sort, in any activity, we're not going to put any effort into it, we're going to be very lazy when it comes to doing that thing.

Similarly here, if we don't really see any benefits in this Shamatha practice, we're going to be very lazy. So, 'faith' here is: faith that the practice is going to bring us benefit. So the antidote - if you find yourself being lazy doing this meditation - then it's very good to reflect on the benefits of this practice: what benefits will we get from this practice. And if we can really appreciate the benefits of this practice, we're going to have the first antidote: faith. Faith that this practice will benefit us.

And then if we have faith in the practice that it will benefit us, we will have the second antidote: 'aspiration', - we will want to do the practice. And if we want to do the practice, we're going to put 'effort' into the practice - the third antidote. And if we put effort into this practice, we're eventually going to get the fourth antidote: 'pliancy'. 'Pliancy' here is: flexibility and serviceability of body and mind. As we progress this practice, our body and mind become, both of them become much more serviceable and flexible.

The second fault here is 'forgetfulness' - so forgetting the object - so of course the antidote is: 'mindfulness', is to hold the object, to remember the object. The third fault: laxity and excitement here is, the two of dullness and distraction. So these are the technical words for dullness and distraction. And of course, the antidote is 'introspection', is to notice when they arise. The fourth fault is: 'non-application'. 'Non-application' means: we've noticed that we've become dull or distracted, but we don't do anything about it. That's a fault. That's 'non-application'. So the antidote is, 'application' - means: fix it, if you're dull or distracted, fix it.

The fifth fault: 'over-application' is not something that's a big problem for us, as a beginner. But it can become a problem later in the practice, when we're much better at the practice. 'Over-application' means we're actually focusing on the object well, and we're still adjusting our focus unnecessarily. That's over-application. So the antidote to that is: 'equanimity'. And here equanimity, it means: leave it as it is, it's okay. If it's not broken, don't fix it. So this is very briefly the faults that we need to overcome in this practice and how to overcome these faults. And if we overcome these faults, we will gradually progress along these nine stages to achieve the goal of Shamatha. Okay.

And then to finish off this evening's session, just a little bit of advice on how to integrate this meditation into daily life. Because if we want this practice to progress, we need to not just do a daily meditation practice but we need to continue to cultivate this in daily life. And that involves doing a few things. One, of course, is that we need to continue to strengthen our mindfulness throughout the day. So therefore, we need to really work on our mindfulness in our daily life.

And one way we can do this is, we can allow modern technology to help us. Many of us have got smartphones now. There are many apps now that help us to do this. Mindfulness apps, there's one very simple one called "Mindfulness Bell", where you simply program it and the bell goes off at regular intervals through the day. When you hear the bell, you stop whatever you're doing and you do a very short mindfulness exercise - maybe just focus on your breathing for three breaths. And you'll be surprised at how things like this get us into the habit of being mindful throughout the day. So, we can use modern technology to help us there.

Also, it's very helpful for this practice, to have support in our practice. So therefore, to have what's called "Sangha", spiritual community - as you have here - is very helpful. Because with this practice, and all practices, if we're sort of doing it on our own, my experience and the experience of many people is: it's almost impossible. Because we have a lot of bad habits, and we're easily influenced by things around us, people around us. And to start to go against that we need help, we need support. And that's where a spiritual community or in Sanskrit, the idea of "Sangha" is very helpful.

So it's very good to be part of a group such as this, where you meet regularly, discuss, meditate together, you feel supported, you support others. And on top of that, I think it's very helpful to do regular retreats. So, at least once or twice a year, if you can manage it, go and do a retreat for a week or 10 days. And as a beginner, very helpful to do it in a group setting. Because if we try to do an individual retreat at home, again, we're not very disciplined, and you'll find it very difficult.

Whereas in a group retreat, it's led, you just have to turn up, there's structure and you have group energy supporting you. So, you'll find that if you do, if you can do one or two of these retreats a year, it'll give you a real boost in your practice as well. Also, of course, often then people complain, you know, they say: "Oh, I'd like to meditate, but I have no time to meditate, I'm too busy".

Well, I think this is never a valid excuse. Of course it's true, we're all very busy, we probably all have very busy lives. But it's simply a matter of priorities. If we are prioritising, of course, a lot of these other activities, then of course, you're not going to have any time to meditate. So what we really need to do is, have a look at our life: what are our priorities? What do we really want to do with our life? You know, do we really want to spend all of our life working and chasing after pleasures? If that's the case, that's okay. But then we're not going to be able to devote any time or energy to things like this.

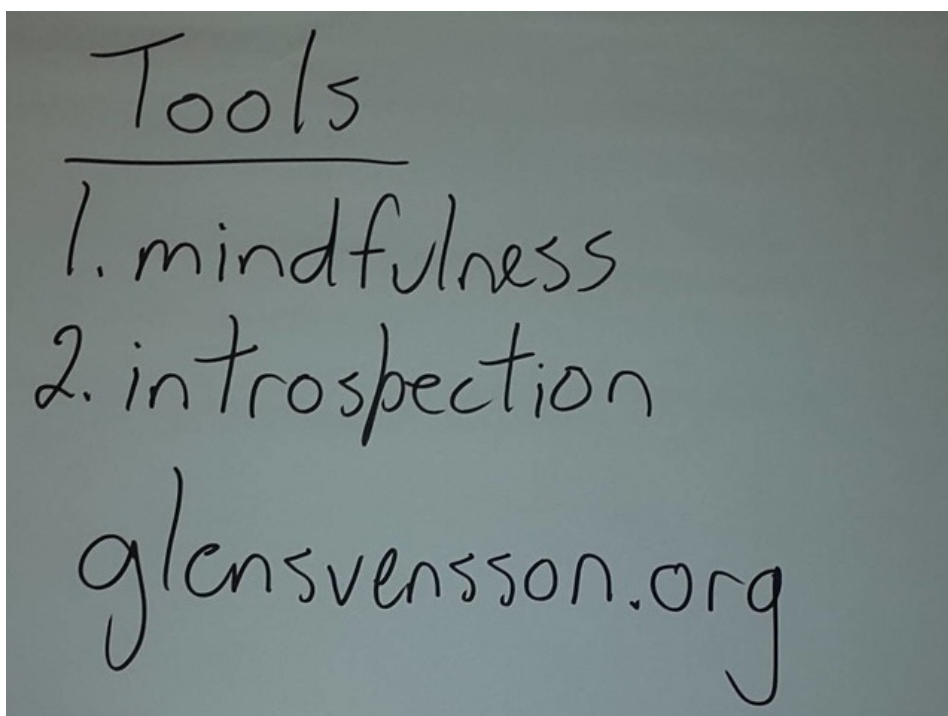
So, if we really reflect on our life, and what really is meaningful for us, what I think you'll find is that a lot of these extra things that we fill up our life with, we're just going to lose interest in them, because we will see they're not really bringing us anything.

And then suddenly, we're going to have a bit of time and energy to devote to meditation practice and more meaningful things in our life. So, that's going to be very helpful here if we find ourselves not having any time to meditate, or being lazy when it comes to meditating. Then really the reflection there is to reflect on our precious human life. And what we really want to get out of this life and we won't want to waste this life.

Now, in terms of the meditation sessions, it's very much recommended that we do them at the same time every day. Because, then we start to develop a habit. If we keep changing when we meditate, we're not really developing a habit. And particularly with this Shamatha practice, it's very much the key phrase, is: "quality over quantity". It's much better to meditate here for 15 or 20 minutes with focus, rather than sit there for 45 minutes or an hour becoming dull and distracted. That's not....., we're working against that practice, if we're simply sitting there, because we think if we sit longer, it's better for us. It's not! Better keep it short, and with focus.

If you want to meditate longer and you're not able to sit in one session, break it into two, with a little break in the middle. Also, it's a very important or very helpful to meditate for a fixed amount of time. The reason....., there's two reasons for that: if we don't have a timer to meditate, then on days where it's not going well we're probably just going to give up after five or 10 minutes. And then that's not good, because one of the things we need to cultivate in the spiritual path is: perseverance. And if every time things get a little bit difficult, we're just stopping, that's not very helpful.

Similarly, on days when it's going well, if we don't have a timer, what do we do is: we keep meditating because it's going well. And then, of course, we keep meditating until it's not going well, and we stop. And the thing we remember most about meditation is: how it ended. So if we're always ending in frustration, dullness and distraction, we're going to associate meditation with these sorts of experiences. We're not going to want to meditate again. Whereas if it's going well and we've set a timer and we stop, that's what we remember, we will be enthusiastic to meditate again the following day. So therefore, it's good to have a timer and meditate the same amount of time.



And the very last point is in terms of this Shamatha practice, if you really want to get into it more, a book that I can really recommend thoroughly, is called: "Attention Revolution" by Alan Wallace. Very good book, (it) describes this Shamatha practice in a lot of detail.

And also I have my own website: **Glensvensson.org** where I will be putting actually the recording for this

evening's session. And these notes, I'm going to put, take a photograph of them and put them on the website as well. So you can download those if you like. I also have a lot of other material and retreats and courses on there, help yourself to whatever you find. And also I have a contact-page on my website if you want to..... If you have any questions, you can send me a message and I'll try and answer any questions you have. So that's all I wanted to really cover this evening. And we've run out of time now.

So I just like to finish by thanking the group here in Taunton for arranging the visit for me, looking after me so well. And I'd also like to thank all of you for coming along here taking the time and energy to come here, time and effort to come here.

And I hope that you got something out of it. And I hope to come back again sometime in the not too distant future.

Transcribed by O. Ai
Checked by J. Smith
Sydney 2019