

Announcer: Welcome to Tricycle Online Retreats. This is the first in a series of retreats that will take place throughout the year. Our first online retreat will be led by Sharon Salzberg, cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. Sharon is among the first to introduce Vipassana, or insight meditation to the west. She is the author of several books and audio teachings including Loving Kindness, Faith, and most recently, The Kindness Handbook. You will now be listening to the first of three teachings, including Guided Meditations on the Practice of Kindness. You can submit questions to Sharon after listening to the teaching. A live Q&A will follow the third and final teaching. May all beings benefit from these teachings.

Sharon Salzberg: So why don't we begin with sitting which I'll guide you through. You just let your energy, your attention settle. Feel your way into that place where you feel kind of up and interested but also relaxed. And you can close your eyes or not, however you feel most at ease. But just begin by listening to sound, whether it's the sound of my voice, other sounds, as we allow them to come and go without interference. You can bring your attention to the feeling of your body sitting, whatever sensations you discover. Bring your attention to your hands. Notice whatever sensations there may be that you perceive directly: pulsing, throbbing, pressure. And then bring your attention to the feeling of your breath wherever you feel it most distinctly: the nostrils, the chest, the abdomen. And just rest. Buddha said, "Rest your attention gently like a butterfly resting on a flower." See if you can feel just one breath and the actual sensations of the breath. If images, sounds, emotions, sensations should arise but they're not all that strong, you can stay connected to the feeling of the breath, just let them come, let them go. You're breathing. If you like you can use a quiet mental notation like in, out or rising, falling. But let your attention really rest in the sensations of the breath. And if something should pull you away or you fall asleep or you get lost in thought, pay particular attention to the spirit with which you recognize that. Is there kindness? Is there judgment? Are you haranguing yourself? Can you be gentle? That's a very important moment. So see if you can recognize it. Let go and begin again. No matter how many times you might have to let go and begin again, it's fine. That's the practice. Just realize you've been distracted, doesn't matter how long it's been, it doesn't matter where your attention went, we can always, always begin again. Well, when I was in college I went to school, the State University of New York at Buffalo, and in my sophomore year I took a course in Asian philosophy. I think honestly because it was like on a Tuesday or something, you know, and I just thought, "Oh, that'll work." And it turned out to be a course in Buddhism. And I was quite riveted because of a couple of things. One was the Buddha's very unafraid, unashamed acknowledgement of the suffering in life because like many people I come from a family where there'd been a lot of suffering and distress and also like many people for many people it was a family system where this was not spoken about so openly. And so I was just amazed to hear, in effect, the Buddha saying right out loud, "There's suffering in life, there's pain." And that was important, of course, because, you

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know, I felt quite liberated by that, I didn't feel so isolated and- and shut down. And then crucially important also was what seemed to me to be the Buddha's open invitation to do something about that suffering. You know, not, of course, the unpleasant experiences and loss and things like that that come our way. They happen. You know, it's a part of life. But the way we can, you know, experience some kind of pain or difficulty and feel so isolated or bitter; feel that we have been betrayed by life whereas really life is just unfolding. The ways we can blame ourselves for not being able to control something where in fact we could never control it to begin with. The ways that we can live with some kind of distorted thinking so that we imagine that, you know, we will be able to defy change, that we will stop change from happening, that we will be able to control the flow of life. Things like that. So all of that, of course, makes for tremendous mental anguish. And here was the Buddha saying, you know, you can do something about that, that there's some very practical tools in terms of how we live and the things we value, the kindness or- certainly meditation practice which will give us the clarity and the presence and the strength to do something about all of that mental turmoil. And so I heard that and I thought, okay, I want to know what those tools are. I want to try them out. And the school had a program, like an independent study program, where you could go anywhere for a year theoretically and come back for your final year and do a kind of cross-cultural study. So I wrote a paper and I asked to go to India to study Buddhist meditation. And they accepted it. So off I went. And that really was the beginning of my journey.

Man 1: Do you still have that paper?

Sharon Salzberg: No, I probably have it in some pile somewhere but Lord knows where it is. I had to write a paper at the end of my journey. I ended up staying more than a year and ended up asking for and getting two years of independent study credit with the presentation of this paper on Buddhism. So I thought that that would be an interesting paper to look at. Kindness is- in many ways it's a practice of generosity. It doesn't need to be material generosity but it's like generosity of the spirit. Sometimes it's very active in that we do something or we say something. Sometimes it's more energetic, like we're very pleasant, we listen and we smile at somebody, something like that. And sometimes it's actually- kindness is actually an act of restraint. Like it- in some situation it might be awfully easy to tell a lie but we don't. You know, so all of those can be vehicles of kindness. And so I often think about, and one can think about kindness and generosity because if we think about material generosity it will offer us many lessons and subtleties about kindness and nonmaterial generosity. So, one of the understandings about generosity that is considered very important in Buddhist thought is that it's very helpful if we know what's motivating us, that we might offer somebody something out of a very beautiful motive but maybe not so. You know, like if I reached down and picked up a book and offered it to you, all anybody sees is my hand moving down and picking up an object and moving it forward. But the question is, what's in my heart? You know, what is really motivating that action? Like maybe I'm offering you the book 'cause I like you and I

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want you have it. Or maybe I'm offering you the book because I don't like you and I think, "Oh, you know, there's that passage in this book that'll probably really disturb you, maybe I'll just give you this book." Or, maybe I see you have a book I want and I think well, hey, you know, if I- if I give you this book, maybe you'll give me that book. Or maybe I just gave this big lecture on generosity in front of all these people and I want everyone to think of me as a generous person. So it could be-- and countless other possibilities. So, from the perspective of the Buddhist psychology, that motivation is where the energy really is. It's not in my hand, it's in my heart in what guided the action or sparked the action to begin with. So classically we would say that's where the karmic seed is planted, that's where the power really is of the action. And so we always look toward the motive. Is it really generosity or is it really kind of martyrdom, like I don't deserve to have anything so I'm giving it all to you. And we can know from looking within. So, the-- you could say like the supreme or the best kind of generosity comes from a sense of inner abundance. That's part of the motivation that we feel somehow that giving is valuable, what we have to give is valuable, and by inference our hearts are valuable as well. And so, one can think of- and I'm sure many people have had this experience of being with people. For me it came going to other countries like Burma where, you know, we can be with people who on the surface or externally have very little materially, but they have some inner sense that they should give, that they can give and they rejoice in that giving. And so for me it was most striking in a country like Burma where when you go- even as a Westerner when you go to the monasteries or the retreat centers you don't pay anything, not even room and board because the act of meditating is so honored by the people that they're just delighted to provide for all your needs. And so every bite of food you have there is an offering. And the way it's often done is-- because in a country like Burma generosity is so prized, so for example on your birthday you don't expect to get gifts, you expect to give gifts. So if it's your birthday maybe you go to the monastery and you offer food for everybody and you just take delight in that. Or if somebody dies, maybe the family will come to the monastery and they'll offer food to everybody in honor of the person who's died. And some of the retreat centers, some of the monasteries, countries like Sri Lanka and Burma, sometimes the waiting lists are like a year long to come and offer food. And it'll be so beautiful because clearly the people often had very, very little and yet they come and they'd watch you eat. You know, they always offered the best of what they could even if it was nothing much. And they come and they'd be so happy. They'd be so radiant. It was so odd also to be there and to be the recipient of that much joy and giving and then to come back here where so often people had so much more externally or materially, but they may not have had that inner feeling that they even had enough. And so they felt like they had nothing to share, they couldn't give, they couldn't relinquish their hold on some possession or something and it'd be such a stark contrast. And it made me think very much of the sense of inner abundance and how important that is. And equally so it is important in the idea of nonmaterial generosity or generosity of the spirit. So, for example, very often when we do loving kindness meditation as a _____ of practice, it's done classically by first offering loving kindness to one's self and then going through these different categories of beings that we offer loving kindness to, usually

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moving from ourselves to someone known as a benefactor. So, a benefactor is someone who's been good to us or maybe has lifted us up when we have fallen down. Or maybe we've never met them but there's someone who's inspired us. So as many times I've given that instruction in doing loving kindness practice and before we go on to these other beings, and someone will come up to me and say, "Well, you know, I chose the Dalai Lama as my benefactor and I was offering him loving kindness and things were going fine and then I thought wait a minute, what does he need me for, he's the Dalai Lama. You know, he doesn't need me." I find that quite interesting in a number of different ways. First of all, how do we know that? Like for all we know as the Dalai Lama he's completely nourished every single day by the prayers and well wishing and loving kindness of others. And also isn't that an interesting thought? Like I have nothing to give. What I have to contribute is meaningless, it's negligible, it's just nothing. You know, and that is the trap that we fall into that so much hinders our ability to offer, to give, to be kind, to be compassionate in an active way. And so one of the first things we really do is look at that. You know, look at that kind of withholding and then feeling that I don't have enough, I am not enough and really work to release some of that as we continue on this path of kindness. I attempt- I mean I- usually I make an effort not to worry so much about what other people are thinking because how would I know. You know, it's like someone knowing my motive and reaching down and offering someone the book. And playing the skeptic, would that make a difference either? 'Cause I'm thinking of one- you know, my own response and my choices and the ways I would react to something else. I mean I guess if I was sincerely curious I would ask them "Really? You know, like that's how you feel? You're not impatient, how do you do that, how do you get there?" But, I'm more concerned with my own reactions in that way. And sometimes it's a wonderful mirror actually, you know. Somebody is sweet and kind. And sometimes it- you know, as you're saying, it's not that enticing because you don't sense from within maybe a complete integrity, you know, to their response. But, you know, I was reflecting just now on this time I was sitting on a train here in New York state coming back into New York City and I happened to be sitting in-between- on my left was a woman who has having an increasingly loud conversation on her cell phone, and on my right was a guy who was getting increasingly annoyed at the woman on my left. And he was like wiggling and muttering and I thought, "He's gonna blow." And sure enough at some point he just screamed at the top of his lungs, "You're making too much noise." And I looked at him and I thought, "So are you." And it reminds me of that quotation attributed to Albert Einstein where he said something like "Our significant problems cannot be solved with the same level of thinking that created them." "Our significant problems cannot be solved with the same level of thinking that created them." And it's our challenge to see if we can get out of the same level of thinking. You know, vengefulness is going to make me strong and I've got to, you know, fight back in this particular way. Or whatever it might be. Or I can never fight back. You know, whatever the habitual hold on our minds is. And so to break out of the old ways of thinking, you know, to really experiment with something new and brave makes me think of kindness, the genuine kindness. You know, which doesn't mean weakness, it doesn't mean passivity, it doesn't mean you don't fight

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back, it doesn't mean you don't stand up for yourself or for others, but we do it from a different place, you know, motivated with a different kind of energy and a different sort of understanding. That's really the nature of kindness. It's also true that awareness of our reactions and our fears and our confusion and everything that arises is what makes our efforts toward kindness or generosity actually a practice. You know, so it's not just good heartedness, which is also wonderful, but it's- it reveals so much about our old habits and how we feel. You know, sometimes the things we've really been comforted by and we think make us so happy, when we actually pay careful attention they're not making us that happy in fact. And so there can be huge learning's all along the way. And I think of this time, my friend Bob Thurman [ph?], who's a professor of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University told the story about going up to Columbia each day and finding that there were a lot of street people around there, a lot of people asking for money. And as he put it, he undertook a yoga, a discipline of just, you know, sticking some money in his pocket so he could give money to the people on the street. And the part of the story I really liked the most was about him just looking at his own reactions. Like, "Oh no, that's like a \$5 bill, I meant to only put in singles. Oh no." But he gave it anyway 'cause that's- that was his practice. And- you know, and so it's the learning which is really the most precious element for our ongoing understanding.

Man 2: <Inaudible>.

Sharon Salzberg: People often ask about forgiveness as an element of kindness practice or an understanding of the nature of kindness. And it's a very complex issue, of course, because we can use that word forgiveness to mean so many different things. As my friend Sylvia Borstein [ph?], one of my colleagues put it so well, she said, "Forgiveness is not amnesia." You know, it doesn't mean that we discount what happened or we say it doesn't matter, maybe it matters really quite a lot. But in a way the process of disentangling from kind of a complete identification with the action is one of really freeing ourselves. And very often when I'm trying to understand something like forgiveness I first apply it to myself. I do kind of thought experiment to see well, what about forgiving myself, or what does it mean when I'm angry at myself and, you know, what does it mean when I'm kind to myself. And that's like my laboratory, you know, to try to get a better feeling for the texture and the nature of these qualities. And so I think about forgiving myself or not forgiving myself and think where's the learning really happened. Does it learn- does the learning happen when I just go over and over and over and over something I did or something I said that was harmful or inappropriate? Well no, you know, there needs to be a moment where I recognize the pain or the harm or whatever it is and I feel for that. You know, I feel the pain of remorse for that. But I need to be able to go on in some way or else I'm just stuck. And in that going on there's an element of kind of saying, okay, you know, there's an element of forgiveness and moving on with some greater determination. So it's very subtle. You know, it's quite a lot to explore. And that's part of the reason I am so interested in the nature of kindness too

because we think that if we're kind to ourselves it's just being self indulgent and we're not going to learn, we're not going to change, we're not going to grow. But is that really true? You know, is haranguing ourselves endlessly or blaming ourselves or just being down on ourselves actually the foundation for growth and transformation? If we really look, not so. That that kindness and that sense of care is a much better platform for making change and, you know, working with the things we need to work with. And so there's a real power there actually that's often unacknowledged. And when we realize we've acted unskillfully, and sometimes we realize it and it's quite a long time later, you know, it doesn't have to be immediately after the action, then there is a pain of regret or remorse that we often feel. And that's appropriate. The Buddha said, I think quite beautifully, "If you truly loved yourself you'd never harm another." And it's true. You know, we- if we really knew where happiness was to be found, if we truly loved ourselves, we wouldn't hurt people, we wouldn't act so recklessly. But we do. And when we recall that deeply, truly then we feel in a way, I think, some of that lack of self-love which was generating it. And it's painful. So, in just that way it's considered quite wholesome or skillful to feel the pain of that, to in effect forgive ourselves and move on with a determination not to do that same kind of thing again, which is different than just being lost in guilt which is considered a kind of lacerating self hatred where we just go over and over and over and over the thing that we did or the thing that we said or the thing we didn't say and now we think we should have. But it's without that energy to move on. And so we really work with understanding-- first of all change is the- it's the fundamental truth of life. The big mistake we make is to consolidate, is to solidify where the realities actually change. So that if you're in the habit, for example, at the end of the day of looking back over your day as though to evaluate, as though to say well, how'd I do today, and let's just say you're in the habit of remembering like the worst, you know, the mistakes you made and the things you didn't say right and- you know, so like, it's almost like your whole sense of who you are and all that you will ever be just collapses around that really stupid thing you said at lunch, at the meeting. And so our work is really to try to get a bigger sense of who we are and to realize that it's not a work of make believe or trying to pretend like, oh wasn't that a brilliant and witty thing I said at lunch. Maybe it was really stupid and there are consequences from that. But that's not all that we are ever. And so we need to open to the recognition of change. And, you know, why do the 50,000 good things not count and only that one that we're holding onto and identifying with so strongly. So even in developing deeper loving kindness say, or awareness, we try to open to say, "Okay, what else happened today? You know, what's the good within me? What else- what is also true?" You know, so we need to recognize change and just sort of intricacy of our own being of all of life.

Man 3: I feel honesty is the supreme virtue. And so if you sacrifice kindness to honesty or if you are kind you feel like you're being dishonest. Can you talk about the relationship between those two?

Sharon Salzberg: Okay, so the question was sometimes it seems as though there are competing virtues like kindness and honesty. And his feeling is that honesty is like the supreme virtue and that if you have to sacrifice one it should be kindness rather than the honesty that goes. And could I talk about the relationship between those two. One of the things that I find very interesting about discussing and exploring kindness is the way that in our society kindness can so often be seen as a sort of secondary virtue. That we might think, "Well, if you can't be beautiful, if you can't be courageous, if you can't be brilliant, well be kind." So it's seen in some way as it's certainly good, it's in the good column, but it's not great and it's not the most desirable. And so our effort really needs to be- first of all, to understand the nature of that quality and how it's not a weakness and it's not secondary in fact. And even if we look at our lives, if we look at the people who've been kind to us and good to us, then we have such an immense sense of the power of those actions. Those are not small things. When somebody sees us for who we are, who we might yet become, when someone reaches out to us, when they're generous or they're truthful, these are really- these are very strong actions. And not only, of course, do we receive them but we can be generating them as well. So, kindness is really a tremendous platform for seeing ourselves differently, for acting in accord with our deeper values, for going beyond the conditions that we find ourselves in so that we're not just defined by what's happening today so that we're really touching something much deeper. I think also of the Buddha and, of course, his life story was one of the legends surrounding his life story was one where it said that his father wanted to protect him from seeing any kind of suffering at all because he knew that suffering is often the goad for somebody to look more deeply, to try to explore more thoroughly the nature of life and where a deeper, more fundamental, more sustaining happiness can be found. And so he didn't want the Buddha to leave home and be making those kinds of explorations. The Buddha, then known as the Bodhisattva, or prince even, Prince Siddhartha. And so he tried to keep him from the sight of any sort of suffering. And the early life of the prince was one of complete sensory self-indulgence where everything was given to him, all pleasure. And the goal of each day was just to have even more pleasure. And he indulged in that kind of life for 29 years. At the age of 29, as the legend goes on, it said that he left home, left the palace and went out with his charioteer and saw in quick succession an old person, a sick person, a corpse and a mendicant, someone who had left the worldly life and who was seeking truth. And in each case of the first three he said to his charioteer, "Does that happen to everybody or is it just that person over there? Is that going to happen to me?" And the charioteer said, "Yes, it's going to happen to you as well." And so this provoked him to leave home and to try to explore a different way to really in effect, you could say, answer some fundamental questions about life like if the body decays and it's outside of our control and at the same time if the mind is just this cascade of different changing emotions and, you know, we might wake up in the morning and be happy and then we're sad and then we're angry and then we're afraid. And, you know, is there a kind of happiness that won't be shattered or won't be broken as the body goes through its changes, as the mind goes through it changes. And so the Bodhisattva then spent six years- having lived in one extreme of sensory indulgence, he then spent

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six years doing his very extreme mortifying practice. It was believed in many of the philosophical skills we endear at that time that if you punish the body enough that your spirit would just soar free and you would be liberated. And so he did that. He did very extreme aesthetic practices, really mortifying, really punishing his body and at the end of six years, he said, "This isn't the way either." So he'd explored both extremes and talked about the middle way, one that doesn't indulge- and one that doesn't indulge in just sort of extreme adulation of sense pleasures, that- as though that were all that could make us happy, these sort of transitory experiences. And also not getting into that kind of self-punishing mode. And he talked about the middle way as being one that is born out of awareness and compassion. It's something that is completely other. It defies both those extremes. So we always come back to those core values of awareness and compassion and awareness and compassion and what we choose and what we explore and what we do. And I often think these days, you know, that in many ways in our culture, in our time, we've replaced to a large extent an idea of kind of debasing ourselves psychologically and mortifying ourselves psychologically for what existed in the Buddha's time, you know, which was more kind of extreme aesthetic practices of the body. And it's almost like this thought that if we could punish ourselves enough or judge ourselves enough or scold ourselves enough, be angry enough at ourselves, that that could be a basis for freedom. But, of course, it's not. You know, and if that worked we would have all been free a long time ago. And so, even as we explore these topics and we explore ourselves and our experience through the meditation, we hold the value of the middle path in working with awareness and compassion and not falling into either of these two extremes of just being driven by what arises on the one side or being in this- being in this spiral of self judgment on the other side. Yes.

Woman 1: <Inaudible>.

Sharon Salzberg: Okay so the comment was about sometimes having difficulty receiving kindness and somebody once said to her that she had the tendency to over thank. So what does one do to more be able to receive kindness? I think that's very interesting, you know, 'cos generosity is also about receiving in a way. And hopefully it's about mutuality, you know, it's not a sense when we are giving of somehow being superior. Or being kind is the same thing, you don't want to fall into that mind state of feeling like superior and immune from any trouble in life and kind of bestowing something on this lesser being who's struggling and, you know, which you will never be. And in the same way to notice what's going on when you're receiving, are you having that sense of, "Oh, you know, I should look invulnerable" or "I should not need anything" or-- I was just telling someone the story not too long ago-- I know many of you have probably sat at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre for some length of retreat or another, which I highly recommend 'cos it's a really incredible experience. But I was sitting-- this three month retreat once and the retreats are silent except for contact with a teacher, you know, or if necessary with the staff, but you don't really talk to one another. And I actually--

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somewhere as is often natural, you know, and somewhere in that three months I started having a very difficult time. I was just looking at a lot of very painful things and it was kind of hard. I was standing in the dining room once and this friend of mine who's from Switzerland just walked over to me silently and gave me this piece of chocolate, he just handed it to me and he walked away and all I could think was, "Oh, no, everybody knows I'm having a hard time, everybody knows I'm struggling," instead of thinking, "Oh, he's from Switzerland," you know, he had all this chocolate, you know. I said, "Oh, God, everyone knows," you know, like, "I'm never going to be able to leave my room." And so, you know, we'd just get into these states of, "Like, no, nobody notice I'm struggling, that's too hard." And I think part of the practice-- you know, we'll do some loving kindness meditation in just a couple of minutes. Often some element of the practice is actually receiving loving kindness. And I think like all these things, you know, we have very strong habits. They will come up, they just reveal themselves. We need to try to be okay with that, you know, to recognize, okay that's the force of habit, now I'm going to move my attention this way or now I'm going to experiment with this or now I'm going to take a little risk this way or now I'm going to stretch that way and that's what makes a path, you know, is that we're willing to make those kinds of experiments.

Q: You were, you know, talking earlier about having the person that you've <inaudible> you try to be open and sort of empathetic towards them and have kindness towards them and I'm always struggling with when that person is like the difficult person. I'm always struggling with how you protect yourself and how you, you know, there's like a few difficult people you always are dealing with and so...

Sharon Salzberg: Mm-hm.

Q: ...I'm just wondering <inaudible>.

Sharon Salzberg: Okay. So the question was about having empathy or sense of compassion for a difficult person. And I think the first thing to acknowledge is it's kind of difficult, you know, it is for a whole variety of different reasons. And so what we're looking for is I think really a combination of all of those qualities of loving kindness and compassion and even sympathetic joy and equanimity. And a lot of it comes from understanding, you know, that we do live in this volatile life and that everything is always changing and that everyone goes up and down and that nobody is immune from that and that we don't have to pretend we don't find that person difficult, but it's more a question of, you know, are we solidifying that self in other image. You know, are we insisting on only looking at their faults? Are we obsessed with their faults? The word in Pali [ph?] is kalaysa [ph?] and in Sanskrit is kalaysha [ph?] and it's-- the very old fashioned translation of it is defilement. A much more contemporary translation of it is-- or much more

accurate translation of it is torment of the mind, you know. So the idea is that when we are lost in certain states of anger or jealousy or fear or greed or something like that, we're actually tormented by them. So I was doing a retreat with this teacher and-- sitting in a retreat with this teacher and I just got into one of those obsessive periods about thinking about someone whose behavior I found very difficult and I would list his faults, you know, like every sitting with great gusto, you know, he's got that problem and that problem and that problem and that problem. Then I'd do some walking and meditation and then I'd come back and I'd go back to, you know, his list and just getting more agitated and upset and unhappy and miserable. And one day I said to myself "If kalaysa [ph?] means torment of the mind, why am I being tormented by his kalaysa? Let him be tormented by his kalaysa," you know. "I need to remove my energy a little bit, like, you know, not be so fixated on that." But we do get fixated on that. And so here I think of the Dalai Lama, you know, in his great common sense and wonderful to Dharma, to practice and where he said something like, you know, "If you have an enemy," which is also the old fashioned translation of what we call a difficult person, "If you have an enemy and all you can do is think about them and what they've done and, you know, you can't eat and you can't sleep and you can't enjoy anything" and he said, "Why give them that kind of satisfaction, you know, your enemy, it's like be free a little bit." You know, so that's a part of it. And sometimes there are ways we can recognize this person's limitation or isolation or confusion and it's really quite painful. And sometimes we can break through that. And one of the kind of odd teachings of the Buddha I always found a little odd was he says something like, "If you're angry at somebody, give them a gift." And I thought, that's peculiar. Every once in a while actually when someone gives me a gift I wonder, "Gee, why are they giving me a gift?" you know. I don't know or-- but in times I've done it it can be very interesting, you know. And that's what I mean by stretching, you know, if people don't like that kind of thing because they think, oh that's like pretending or you're trying to act all gooey or sweet or, you know, doing something you don't really feel, but it's more like an exercise, it's a yoga. You know, and sometimes it's very interesting because not always, but sometimes you give somebody a gift like that and there's a certain almost like shyness or delight that they express like suddenly they're not so defended and they're not so hostile and they're like, "Oh, you gave me something," you know, even if it's quite fleeting and it's a just a way of glimpsing them in a different way and so that can be interesting too although not that easy to do. And, you know, when it's really severe, when somebody's really harmed you or harmed somebody else then, you know, you have to have a balance between taking care of yourself and also just not being obsessed with their action. And I can remember when Sayadaw U Pandita came to Barre, to the Insight Meditation Society for the first time and taught this three month retreat. At the end of the three months he said goodbye to us in a way that was surprising to me but was reflective of Buddhist monastic tradition, which was by asking and extending forgiveness, that's how they say goodbye. So they end time together for the purpose of being able to not carry a whole lot into the next meeting. You know, and so he just got up there on the platform in the last session and said, "If I've hurt or harmed you knowingly or unknowingly I ask your forgiveness and if you have hurt or harmed me knowingly or unknowingly, I

forgive you." And it was really a startling moment because in fact, you know, he had come from Burma, it was his first trip to the west and even though I was sitting, it is my center and I could feel that there were any number of misunderstandings that were going on, you know, between just Western cultural conditioning and Eastern and especially monastic practice and, you know, and every day I could kind of sense something. And so actually, much to my surprise when he said that about forgiveness, at the end I felt this tremendous sense of relief, you know. And I thought, oh, were I to meet him again I don't have to worry that he's the one who's going to look at me and say, "Oh you're the one that started that center where they don't even know how to treat monks," you know. You know, nor would I look at him and think, "Well, you're the one who came to the West and you weren't even, you know, ready to, you know, know where Westerners were coming from." And, you know, it's like we could just start over. And in fact, that's what happened. Even though we've always had a quite wonderful relationship, it wasn't a problematic relationship, but in fact, the next time I saw him, which was about a year later when I went to Nepal and then Burma to do loving kindness practice with him, it did feel like, oh, yeah, we're not carrying what happened before and that was a wonderful thing. And so there are ways in which just out of compassion for ourselves we also try to release, you know, some of that. Okay, so many of you are probably familiar with this practice but just explain it a little bit. In terms of technique or skill, in many ways it's similar to what we did before in that we have an object of an attention, before it was the breath. In this case it will be the silent repetition of certain phrases, so that's different. But we gather our attention behind one phrase at a time and when our attention wanders, which it will, we try to just gently let go and start over and then let go and start over. Okay, so it's the silent repetition of certain phrases that's the gathering place for our attention and the phrases are like an offering. Classically we offer these phrases to ourselves to begin with and we go through various categories of beings and we end with all beings everywhere. And we'll do a bunch next week, so this is really just one example of how to do it. You don't need to repeat the phrases trying to manufacture or fabricate a certain emotion or feeling; the power of the practice is actually in the gathering, to be wholly fully there one phrase at a time. And the phrases are-- being words, they're imperfect of course, but they are serving as conduits for our attention for including rather than excluding, for connecting rather than ignoring. Traditionally the phrases and of course these are all translations or things like, beginning with ourselves, "May I be safe, be happy, be healthy, live with ease." This last, "May I live with ease" or "May you live with ease," means in the things of daily life, like livelihood or family, may it not be a struggle. May I live with ease. So the feeling tone of the phrases is like a blessing. You know, instead of just fixating on what's wrong, it's like, may I be happy. May you be happy. Okay, so you can use these words or any words, but just three or four phrases that will form the basis for that gathering of attention, okay? So let's begin. And you can begin with the phrases directed towards yourself, whatever phrases you may use and once again, one translation that's commonly used is, "May I be safe, be happy, be healthy, live with ease?" You can aim your attention towards one phrase at a time, there's nothing else you need to do. And you can imagine yourself in the center of a

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circle. The circle is made up of the most loving beings you have met in this life or maybe you've never met them, maybe they are contemporary, maybe they've existed historically or even mythically, that's the circle. And there you are in the center and just notice what happens as these beings direct the force of loving kindness toward you. Maybe you feel joyful, maybe you feel embarrassed, whatever it is, you can let the feeling just wash through you as you stay centered on the repetition of the phrases for yourself. And you can take one of those beings or perhaps someone else comes to mind who's been like a benefactor for you. The texts say this is the one whom when you think of them smile, could be an adult, could be a child, could be an animal, somebody who embodies this sense of loving kindness for you. And if there's someone like that bring them here. You can get an image of them, say their name to yourself, get a feeling for their presence and offer the phrases of loving kindness to them. May you be safe, be happy, be healthy, live with ease or whatever phrases you may be using. And then someone here you didn't know before you got here. You may not know their name but you can just get a feeling for them and offer the phrases of loving kindness to them. Here's a being who wants to be happy just as we do, who's vulnerable to change, to loss just as we are. And then everybody here, which involves a whole variety of different relationships, those whom we may know quite well, those whom we don't know at all and ourselves. May we be safe, be happy, be healthy, live with ease. And then all beings everywhere, all people, all creatures, all those in existence, near and far, known and unknown. May all beings be safe, be happy, be healthy, live with ease. So thank you. May you be happy. And just experiment a little bit with this as you're on the subway or walking down the street silently or if you're sitting at home and we'll talk about it next week. So, thank you.

<Audience responds at once>

Q: Thank you.

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