

Q & A

Uncontrived Online Weekend Retreat

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Kim Allen

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Okay, so welcome. See a couple of you here. Perhaps there are others lurking behind their video. We don't know. Any questions? Yeah, Martin. Surprise, it's me. Kim, do you have a any preferred time of day for meditating? I think it's important to try to when we're establishing a practice to sit at the same time every day. I think that's the most important part. It's different for different people where they can fit that in, you know, depends on their life. Sometimes people's minds are fresher in the morning because you haven't piled on a bunch of stuff already. And some people find it more relaxing at the evening when they're able to just let go and decide they're done for the day. Or maybe some other time. I know someone who sits right before dinner. That seems to be an easy time for them. So it really will depend. But it's also important, actually very important not to have the idea that I have to, I can only sit at the time when it's good for my mind, you know, then we get into, oh, I'm tired. I think I'll skip it. It would just be a waste of time because I'll fall asleep or, you know, I try to sit in the morning, but then I worry about the day. So maybe I should try sitting in the evening, but then I'm tired and then you're just running around. So just sit. What matters is that you sit, just sit at some time. Thank you. Good question. I think everyone has to go through that. Audrey, are you leaning forward there? Yeah. Okay, go ahead. Good morning. I have a question just to hear what you have to say. I'm not like, like this, this retreats bit like I'm all over the place. I'm not trying to say for right now. But for I just have a question like what's the first John alike, because I heard it. It's like I used to think like never ever me. But then I don't know I hear people do it. You know what I mean. So I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that. Oh, yeah. So, John is possible for lay people, even in daily life, it's probably easier on retreat. But it can be done. Kind of depends on course it depends on practice, but it depends also on kind of your proclivities. So, different teachers are going to say different things about John. So I just want to qualify that. And it can also come with sometimes an attitude of what I'm telling you is actually the right way and all those other people are wrong. So I don't know what our take of that. But there are certain qualities that are, first of all described in the text so that we can know what the qualities of the first genre

are, and then there are also ones that are just useful to know in order to distinguish it from, say, access concentration or you know kind of more broad kinds of somebody. So actually I have the module here. I can pull the description of the first John. We can contemplate that for a moment. mindfulness of the body. Sorry, it's taking a moment here the Johns. Okay, so quite secluded from sensual pleasures secluded from unwholesome states, a practitioner enters upon and abides in the first John, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. So that's the first, that's kind of the description it's a little cryptic and that's why there are so many things about it, but it very clearly says first of all that certain kind of thought of Vitaaka and Vichara are not absent in the first John. So we are not eliminating all thoughts. However, discursive thought is not there. For sure. Also, we can look at some of these other keywords which are understood from other texts so secluded from sensual pleasures secluded from unwholesome states. That's a code for the hindrances have been abandoned. So the five hindrances are not present in the mind. Central desire ill will sloth and torpor restlessness and remorse and doubt are all absent. They are gone forever from the mind but they are temporarily in abeyance is what said so a lot of the practice of preparing for John is to allow these hindrances to subside. So imagine, you know what does the mind feel like when it doesn't have those five things. Wow, it's beautiful it's very clear, open, pleasant, no central desire, no ill will, no tiredness, no restlessness, no doubt. It's a beautiful mind. So that's not sufficient for the first John. So then we also have this rapture and pleasure born of seclusion so that's why we bring up the joy we connect with that we allow it to fill and suffuse the body. So those are kind of the qualities that are there, but what you asked your question was great you said what does it feel like what is the experience of the first John. So we're just ticking all those boxes. The main experience of John that I think is important. The other distinguishes it is that it becomes something where the meditation is proceeding by itself. We have to let go of control, a little bit to get into John. First John is kind of, you know, a transitional, let's say, but as the mind gets close to John, I will have been abandoned the 500 says you'll experience in mind without that, not quite in John yet. But that's called access concentration. You're not going to lose the object. Yesterday I had that image where the mind is like an upside down bowl and as soon as we deviate, you know, we fall right off, then it becomes flat in access concentration, it becomes concave, convex, whichever way it is, that is upward. And so when the when the breath, like when we go away from the breath there's actually a force that brings the mind back. That's why it's called undistractability. We have the ability not to be distracted. So it really just feels like it's right there. And then we have to let go of something in order to enter and abide. That's the language we enter into something. So we let go into a new different state of consciousness. And you'll, you'll know what it is. It's a

different feeling. And then it's like, oh, oh, this is a collected mind. And then from there, then there are things that have to be let go off to move into the next, you know, then we start realizing, you know, having a little bit of applied and sustained thought there is a slight amount of, I don't know, being this and bringing the line together to hold it there a little bit. Then if we let go of that, that's the Vitaaka and Vichara. Then we get more of the rapture and the pleasure and then we can slide into the second Jhana, but its meditation is proceeding by itself. It's not something that we're directing our mind to. So, is that along the lines of what you were looking for? Can I answer anything else? Yeah. No, thank you very much. It's kind of like your mind's like, no, I want to do this. Yeah, it's exactly. Do this. Is it kind of like that? Yeah. It's like, yeah. And that's why people get attached. It's very pleasant, very, I mean, we like the feeling in everyday life where we get concentrated, right? You know, I don't know if you do any art or sports or music, you just get so into it and it's just, you know, you're just with it and it feels so good. And, you know, those ordinary activities are just, you know, that's a function of the mind. It has the ability to get concentrated. It's a faculty of mind. Everybody can do it, but can we do it on a meditation object while sitting on a cushion? That's a skill that has to be developed. Don't, don't not go into Jhana or be worried about it. Not you, Audrey, but others who might be listening to this because you're afraid that you'll get attached. That's a terrible reason not to do Jhana. It's not, it's, we're all attached already. What do you, what do you attach to? Well, probably something less refined than Jhana. So I don't worry at all about that. You know, and it's self limiting if you have a good be a positive teacher. You know, do Jhana for a while and then, you know, you get pointed toward using that. But essentially, that, you know, this really transforms the mind. First of all, I mean, Jhana is very transformational on letting go of attachment to sense pleasures, on letting go of all kinds of poor behaviors in life. And then we'll get healed over through somebody, and Jhana in particular. And then it also, you know, has, it deepens the mind enough that we can have really liberating insights when mind is that focus when we come out of that and pointed at looking at reality for we can really see in ways that we just can't in modernary consciousness. So it's, yeah, I definitely encourage it if you're interested in it, you can find Jhana retreats of various styles, different teachers are going to be very different. So you'll have to see what works but I'm Lee Brazington, he just Jhana retreats Richard Shanklin. There are some like Shaila Catherine teachers more the powwow style. There are different kinds, different criteria, some teachers will say, you know, teachers generally say whatever level they say Jhana is that is the right one and teachers that accept the lower level aren't really accepting Jhana aren't really, you know, they're really including things that aren't really Jhana and people that demand higher than what they teach is they're demanding too much. So that's the message you'll get. But I think I'll stay out of

the John awards and just offer those things great question. Thank you. Other questions. Donna your hand itself. Yes, hi. I was wondering, is it's like in some of these wisdom meditations like with the elements or with the 32 parts of the body. Is it helpful to bring in the conventional self sometimes to make analogies or not like for example, I think, like if you, in a walking meditation, if you're noticing the liquid part of your body has the full volition to move the grounded part earth part forward. Those kind of observations is it just creating more of a story or is it helpful to like note the others kind of a mind energy and some of the elements. Oh, that's interesting. When you said the liquid part is has a volition I wasn't quite sure I understood that. I guess, like it seems like, for example, like you could just put your heel down and it would just kind of stay there unless your muscles and your kind of fluids kind of push your body forward it seems like. So it almost seems like there's some of the movements in the water, which makes me think of, like there's some sort of volitional quality in terms of that or else we would just be stuck. I don't know like, or maybe I think I could put it in a different way to like, I think this part is unconstructive sometimes with like, sometimes the 32 parts of the body meditation seems like you could really connect your stories to the parts of the body which seems to be unhelpful to me then it feels like I would be putting too much emphasis on the conventional self. Do you know what I mean so I'm just kind of trying to find. Is there even a place for the conventional self in the spectrum of these meditations or not really you should really just divorce yourself. Okay, okay, I think I'm starting to understand you're exploring in what you're talking about. I hear the exploration of a very interesting aspect of practice which is the relation between the mind and the body. And for sure we want to separate we want to be able to see the difference between the material aspect and the mental aspect of our experience. The material liquid part doesn't move the solid part, but the mind does a corpse doesn't move. So even if it still has liquid and solid and all the parts in it. So we'd be looking at then the kind of the relationship between. So you'll be looking at intention essentially, if we sit there waiting to walk. And I will get to your question about the cell, but I want to point you toward an important insight that we start to develop is to know which parts of experience are coming from the material and which parts are coming from the mental. So if we stand there at the beginning of our walking path. We don't actually walk until the mind does something. And even if the intention is there interestingly sometimes we still don't walk. I remember doing a practice period of looking at intention. And I was actually doing a doorknob I was came up to a door, and I was waiting to watch the intention to grab the doorknob and open it. And I stood there and I watched the intention arise again and again to open the door and my hand didn't move. So I understood then that intention and movement or actually have multiple parts to that. You know there can be and we can see this also you know we intend to do

something we desire we want to at some level but it doesn't happen in the body. So there are other things going on in order for things to come about actions to come about. So it can give you a very interesting exploration. But to move on to your. So yeah I just want to make sure we distinguish mind and body, but to move on to your question about the self it is true that there are ways of doing body oriented practice and you're focusing in on certain areas of the body, where we'll we'll find the aspect of mind that comes forth from that. And this is well known, it was actually even known in the Buddhist time he just doesn't use quite that language so to use more modern language we would say that certain experiences we had earlier have been stuck in the body or stored in the body. This is well known in trauma understanding, you know and when people meditate and they're asked to bring their attention into their body. Sometimes these memories will be evoked from certain places in the body. So I do know that there are 32 parts meditation but I do know some teachers who teach the parts meditation more like that, like, you know, touch that part and see if there's anything that comes up from that. And that's a sort of a healing, a healing technique of touching into the body, and whether or not you do that deliberately will, it may come anyway, you know just being with the breath, if the breath touches so many areas going into the chest, the belly. And that's always where a lot of the emotions are have been stored. So as we breathe, we may touch sadness in our heart, or we may touch an old injury that was, you know, from a car accident and then suddenly we remember the car accident in the injury in our hip, you know that we were feeling this is all totally normal and part of practice and we can just hold those things in mindfulness there are techniques, you may want to use various trauma based techniques like somatic experiencing. There's there's nothing wrong when that happens, but it can be handled, you know, can be handled and processed it's not the point of meditation but it can be. It's very supportive we'll need to do some of that in working through our mind body system. So I changed a little bit the way your question was framed. And the, but I kind of put it more in line with how I understand Dharma practice unfolding. Does that help or do I need, can I can I say more. No, that's exactly what I was trying to ask. Yeah. Okay. Yes. Yeah, that's fine we don't need to be afraid of those things. They do come. That is part of having a body and having had a history with it. We don't need to make it into our project, but it is something that will come and that is part of the healing and growth that happens through the Dharma. It's not, not a mistake. Other things on your mind things that maybe came up in meditation. How is how are the instructions working. Were there any challenges. Or wonderful insights. Kim. I just wanted to address something that I find it's profound and I'm pretty sure it's missing in a lot of meditation instruction. You mentioned it at the beginning about five to seven minutes of prep. I'm also looking at your website right now with your five guidelines for inner safety. And like I say, in my experience, what

you're saying there's unique, a lot of meditation practitioners will just say, well, three breaths, ground and meditate. But you're pointing to a deeper process. And I'm wondering if you know that's unique or profound and I think your comments on how you came about that because it's very I'm finding it incredibly important. I'm glad that you're taking seriously the notion of needing to do a few things before we start. It's actually not only me let me let me since I have module here in front of me. Let's see. So I could say at the beginning of m in 10 for example the instructions on mindfulness. So we might just skip over that as kind of old language but what it means is get somewhere secluded. You know, don't meditate in your kitchen while other people are cooking. Go and sit in your room close the door, you know tell people you need to be secluded. So we sit somewhere secluded. So sit down, having folded his legs crosswise and set his body erect. Okay, we don't literally have to sit with our legs crosswise sometimes that's a painful position but we sit down. So we're going to sit we're going to be in a position that's not moving you can also stand or lie down that's okay to set the body erect. Isn't that one of the preliminaries I talked about so setting up the posture. So that's what I'm saying is establishing mindfulness is to the four. So that's setting up the mind we have to bring to mind that we're going to be meditating, etc. These are he's always speaking to monastic so they've already got kind of a purpose for their practice this is their life, but I add that in for lay people. And then it says ever mindful he is in mindful he breeze out. And then we have an understanding that we're going to be with the breath we've chosen our practice. That was just one quick example but there are other cases where he says, the person sits down and they establish compassion for all beings. And then they meditate. So there are all kinds of little examples in the text that could be unfolded more into a deliberate practice. And then we tend to just kind of gloss over it. Oh yeah, language, you know sits down folds the legs crossway says the body erect sitting at the root of the tree, blah blah blah blah okay where's the instruction. That was already instructions, those are part of the instructions. So, I've adapted them a little bit for modern life, but I think I think the Buddha meant for us to set ourselves up for success. I don't think it's original for me. Oh you're still muted. It's just more thorough than usual thank you. You're very nice we need that. Definitely most appreciated Kim. Donna. So, I was wondering, you know how in the farther along paths, I think it's described that the meditator becomes very pliable, and like, kind of flexible. Do you know what I mean. I was kind of curious at the beginning stages, you know when our instructions say don't move around don't stretch don't fidget just kind of like stay put, and we become kind of very rigid. I think that helps us become a container for the insight, like, is there a purpose for the rigidity that was beginners feel or am I just making things up. I think rigidity is a sign that we've grasped a little bit. But, you know the container feels comfortable and safe

for an experienced meditator wants to sit still because fidgeting agitates the mind slightly. So, the next analogy is if we were, let's say we're learning how to do pottery, and so we get some clay and we're going to learn to make something with it. When we first do it. The first thing that we shape is probably going to be thick and lumpy. It's going to be a little clunky looking. And then we we look at, you know, a pot that's made by someone who's done pottery for 2030 years. It's so delicate, it's so smooth, well shaped, etc. And we look at our clunky thing that looks like a kindergarten or made it. Oh, you know, so this is this is an analogy to kind of at the beginning, our way of approaching meditation is a little bit blunt. And we don't have the subtlety to shape the mind really well right away. So when we hear instructions like sit still and you know bring the pot to stay in one position, hold the mind on the meditation object, we're doing it kind of like this, you know. So there's this feeling of rigidity, I have to sit still, and I have to hold the mind on the object. And it's, whereas, you know, it's, it has more of a natural feeling, after we've done it for a while. We sit down, feel so nice just to sit still. And then we sit on the object. Ah, mine just, you know, goes there, not that it does this every time. I don't want to idealize anything but you know we have sort of more ability to do the instructions at a, in a way that doesn't feel tight rigid, or isn't too loosey goosey, either. We have more that ability to balance. So we do our best, we do our best at our level of skill, and then over time it starts, we start to see more dimensions of it and we can say, Ah, okay, I get it I just need to adjust slightly or sitting still I can relax the body and not have that rigidity, rigidity is what makes it hard to sit still because then the mind gets sore, the body gets sore and tight. And then we can just relax a little bit or. Yes, thank you. Yeah. So keep at it and that's that's what the soften instruction is about relax is a terrible instruction we can't relax on command. So, I say soften, I think that's easier to imagine and to make into a visceral experience. I think you really keep softening it. Actually, we want to sit still with a body like that. Anything else on your mind. Jenny. I couldn't find my unmute. I can convey my question well enough, but I noticed a lot of benefit from yesterday's concentration. I'm not going to practice right now in my life as opposed to when I practice insight which has been probably 99% of my practice in the last three years. My mind really wants to answer those questions that aren't to be answered by thought. It's almost like when I sit. My mind's like, oh great, we get to think. Oh yeah. And then I start going. No, we're sitting and it becomes a battle. But, but even today. From yesterday's benefit. There's been a little quieting. I'm wondering if one can look at what I just said and go, maybe I should practice more concentration. Or before I go into an insight meditation practice session to do more concentration before it. I don't know if I'm making any sense at this point, but if there's any guidance on. You know, I don't want to say this is good, this is bad. Right now and there. It's not like that. Yeah. Yeah, but and yet, you know, your

experience seems to be pointing that right now, you benefit from some degree of doing some serenity practice ahead of time. So, do you sit, how many times a day do you sit right now in your regular life. Once mornings. Okay, then I would do like half of that sitting serenity and half be possible. You can just switch into, you know, it's a time or anything, but just a guess is sort of about halfway through switch over, but yeah commit to doing that first part. And then you'll probably get more out of the second half than than if you had tried to do the whole thing be possible. Yeah, that can be a good way to do it. There are different, the mix of serenity and insight is going to be different at different times along our path. So, you know, it might be that for a few years it's really what we really need is to do serenity practice and just go through that and really steep in that and then at some time, you know, it's kind of less interested and it's like, oh, let's do some sake, Donna. Or maybe, you know, the whole way along we're going to do sits that are 50%, 150% the other who knows it shifts over time and part of getting skilled in our practice is to read how it's going from our mind to kind of notice, you know, which one seems to be more beneficial right now and if some serenity would be helpful. And great bring it in. Thank you. It was, it was just kind of like a so much relief, I guess from, yeah, it is right. Experience, which was just, you know, and then I was like, should I feel relieved. So, so really you should feel really, I know the benefit of this amazing meditative happiness and also it sounds like you're able then to let me ask you in the vipassana practice that we did today. Did you have more sense that you could experience a Nietzsche or the other things directly, like in the body as opposed to through the cognitive mind was there. Yeah, yeah. And it was, it was kind of a different feeling. It was, it was very different. Yeah, I mean there's a certain kind of insight and understanding that can come from just from thinking in the ways that is offered in the sutta as that's part of right view but the direct experience in meditation is really meant to be is the one that's really transformational and we have to be able to let the cognitive mind have a little rest and serenity practice really gives the mind that rest that's what the relief is your relief not to be thinking. Yeah. Yeah. That sounds great. It sounds good. Thank you. Okay, well maybe we'll, maybe we'll finish here. Thanks.