

John Travis: I will make an effort, touching into myself so that there is a language and presence which is clear and heartfelt. So you all *wake up!*

We start with 1 intention and it is very like shooting an arrow; once the arrow has been shot it goes but then we're here. There is a quote from the Tao Te Jing which goes:

When the mind is still the whole universe surrenders

In some way here there is the truth that we have to come here and first there is going to be this settling in process, and that settling in process will then allow some collectedness or concentration, then from that there is some insight. Fortunately it is 9 days, because it actually takes some time to kind of untangle the tangles which we have accumulated. There is fundamental purpose here, really based on the fact that there is something in us which is- there are parts of us which are closed. Because there are parts of us which are closed we have this process of opening. We come here in the container to open what is closed to us. Sometimes it is parts of our body, sometimes the contractions or the layering of the heart and the understanding and the awakening to the nature of our minds. We have to open that.

There is also: we are rather reactive creatures and so part of the process here is- these reactions, they are part of us, we are not trying to get rid of them, we are trying to give ourselves permission to allow some kind of intelligence to find its own stability, its own equanimity, its own balance.

There is this capacity to our reactivity- to find a way to balance it. That is a learning which has to happen here and it takes time.

The 3rd of these pieces is the fact that we come here because there is so much we don't know so there is actually a kind of the body and heart and mind and different states and the mystery which is holding everything. Sometimes we go around and get so caught up in our little narcissistic complexity and if somehow we can loosen it up – then there is the possibility to realize you are walking around in a world which is much bigger than you realize; to recognize that we are self-limiting creatures and there is more possible to open and awaken to, so there is this possibility of this 3rd piece of exploring. We are explorers to the nature of our bodies, our hearts, and our minds, and the nature of awakening.

These are the fundamentals which we have come here to...this is not, in some sense, a 'doing;' maybe more about just allowing it to unfold on some level, whether it is opening or if it is the emotional reactivity we have to things- to stabilize that- and then the interest and the capacity to explore the mystery of this thing called 'living in this planet and body and these relationships, this time.'

I know you are all...this first night, it just goes in one ear and out the other. I understand that and at the same time, I have to push a little because we are here... this is a process which is based on that the fact that, inside there you *want* to wake up. I'm here to say 'OK, let's get to it.'" In that way, there is a part of me which has to name it and make

sure it's...we know what we are doing on this level- not what is going to happen- what we are doing here as a process. I'm going to hand this over to Heather, if she has comments.

Heather Sunderberg: Mostly I just want to say 'Hello' and what a delight it is to have the opportunity to sit with you here; many of you I know, and some of you whom I will know by the time our journey is over so I just want to add my welcome. Whatever you have brought here – every part of you is welcome here. Whether it is your 1st or 50th retreat, wherever you have come from, whatever you have or have not done in your life, whatever part you have unconsciously left outside the dharma hall here- maybe it is not Buddhist enough- or whatever it is that you might have left behind, I'm inviting you to call it in because it is all a part of this practice.

I know from my own practice that I can welcome you and invite that all evening but the truth of the matter is that we have to welcome ourselves and we have to include every part of ourselves here. The awakening I am interested in and passionate about is the awakening which includes everything- that is why my intention [when we stated our intentions for the retreat earlier] was 'inclusivity.'

I'm happy to have the opportunity to be here. For those of you who don't know me, I'm the new teacher for Mountain Stream Center in Nevada City. John and I teach together through that center. I was trained and did most of the years of my earlier practice at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. I was trained by those teachers and John and I both teach as well at that center.

What is a bit different in my role in this retreat- at Spirit Rock the model is that all the teachers have equal teaching time- it is the model held there and it is a great model. I felt, however, since I am newer to this community, and out of respect that many of you have very long term relationships with John, it felt more appropriate for me to let John do more of the teaching in this retreat. We will both be teaching, but you will be hearing from him more. Just to acknowledge that because there are also age and gender differences – so for you to know the intention behind why we are doing it this way- feels important for me that you know.

It was convenient that it worked out this way, however, because those of you who know me know that 6 wks ago- quite a sudden decision- I had major surgery to have my thyroid removed. I am especially grateful to be alive, to be sitting here – I really could not know if it would be possible for me to be alive and sitting here, but I *am*. For those of you who know me and who have been sending me love and worrying: please know that I am well and healing and that my practice this retreat, on a personal level, is to hold that balance of taking care of this body. This is the only vehicle each of us has for our practice and our awakening. I really trust my ability to take care of that and to take care of you. I wouldn't be here if I was not confident that this was true, so you can just drop the worries: I'm OK.

John Travis: Before I came in here, I went over to their shrine room [retreat at Padmasambava Peace Institute – the residents have regular practice in their own shrine room] and went in to do my connecting and my prostrations to the Buddhas over there and I would also like to thank the center – I have a very old relationship with the teacher's father here, Chagdud Rinpoche. Actually when he first came to America, he came and lived in a little apartment in Grass Valley and there used to be, like, 3 of us who used to come for teachings. He passed away just a couple years ago in Brazil. He was really a great, great lama who was quite a luminary.

Part of our process here in coming together is that, again this is about striking intention, that we have the capacity as a community here to point ourselves in a specific direction. This particular direction is based on the fact that.. one thing, that there is this Buddha of 2500 years ago who, through his own efforts, he woke up. That acknowledgement and empowerment has been passed down through generations and generations and is still alive today. Because it is still alive today, these teachings are thriving, alive, and well, and that is really the Dharma which we have come to know and experience. We are also collective here so we are also empowering not only this lineage but also the Dharma and a Community. It's a package deal here.

The thing I like about this word, 'the Buddha,' which simply translates as 'the awakened,' that we have no idea what that means, you have none – it is beyond your capacity to get that, but we know that it is something...that the mind has the capacity and heart, to break through the confusion which exists. That is something which can be looked at in 3 ways. Traditionally we talk about this as 'taking refuge.' Refuge is simply saying: I trust. I trust that this, in essence, works. It is that simple. Have to trust somehow. In that we take refuge in....statues are statues and tankas are tankas, but there is a teacher 2556 yrs ago who awakened and was able to clearly teach what he experienced. I think there is the Buddha of 2500 yrs ago and also the fact that he had to go through a process which we are all somewhere in. That process, you could simply say, is part of an archetypal journey called 'the journey from confusion to awakening.' Someone who was exemplary of the journey was the Buddha of 2500 yrs ago.

The 3rd aspect of taking refuge in Buddha is – if you will just take a moment and put your attention in your body; just feel yourself for a moment. Recognize that there is no separateness, that Buddhanature, or the truth of this capacity for awakening, is something which is also a seed, or some knowledge which is in you. We take responsibility for this essence and that is this taking refuge in the Buddha.

You can see it either as this person of 2500 yrs ago or this archetypal process, or this seed within you – that is what 'taking refuge' is about in the Buddha.

There is also this word 'Dharma.' It can be as simple as these very clear teachings, which have been passed down through centuries which the Buddha, this Gotama Siddhartha of the Sakya Clan passed on which are available to us. In those teachings alone there is something to take refuge in. A lot of them are archetypal stories which are simple teachings; they are also about nature, and nature is our capacity to study the

cycles, the science of how things arise and pass away and also in that the dharma or truth of that- there is awakening, that it exists as part of dharma. Nirvana which the Buddha experienced is not something fancy but rather it is apart of everything which is part of nature, exists as part of all of this. So there is taking refuge in the Dharma as that.

And then there is Sangha, and taking refuge in Sangha. The word first of all means 'community.' There are many levels to community. They say the primary ones are the ones who are awakened. Of course, how do we know any of that? Kinda mysterious actually. But the fact is: there are awakened beings here and now. There is also the fact that there is a community out there, particularly the monastics, who take on a discipline which exemplifies the process of awakening. So you can take refuge in the community for their dedication to this discipline and process.

And then there's us chickens, y'know? We're here together; we're here to support each other as a community which is dedicated and whether it is in collective silence holding it for each other or just good heartedness of being here and recognizing how this came about – that it was through the dedication of the community which allowed this to happen this way- so in a sense you are being fed by the community, you are being housed by the community, you are, in essence, here as a monastic in the purest sense of the word- that this is a gift from others but that is the practice- that is pretty cool. I'm grateful that something like this could occur in this kind of society.

What I'd like to do here is: we are going to take the refuges as a practice, which is, again, an aiming for the community as a collective, that this is the direction we are taking, and that that is holding us and it touches into the mysterious power. I don't know how else to say it- there is a mysterious power which holds us. Heather and I actually- we are not here as separate individuals, we are here as a reflection of those who trusted in us before, and that's a huge piece. Just as that happens, so it is with each of you. We are all held in that 1000's of years of dedication and commitment to this process of awakening.

[Refuge ceremony is done.]

Heather Sunderberg: As John indicated I'm going to talk about the ground rules. What I love about these ground rules which are titled: 'The 5 precepts of non-harming,' is that they are both the ground rules and the manifestation of an awakened heart and mind at the same time. So, on the first night of a retreat, taking on the intention of these 5 precepts of non-harming which I will describe, may feel more like ground rules but you will start to see as the retreat goes on, as we collect our intention, our hearts, our bodies, around non-harming, around kindness, around an ethical integrity – what naturally happens is that the mind starts to settle, you start to relax, there is more focus available through the simplicity, of these 5 trainings of the 5 precepts, and then out of that is the fertile ground for insight and wisdom to arise. So they are beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end as these teachings have been described by the Buddha.

The 1st precept of non-harming is: the precept encouraging and inviting us not to take life of any kind while we are here on retreat, and I'm sure for many of us – for the rest of our lives. This precept of not taking life. All life- so I would say: if it breathes, and maybe even if it doesn't, because there is plant life and soil life here as well- that we treat it really carefully and realize that those small beings which may be an inconvenience to us in this moment have their home and their life, and their path and we can support every beings life and path by treating it with respect and not taking life.

The 2nd training is to not take that which is not offered to us. In short, this means: if we don't know for sure that it is not community property and we know for sure that it is not our property, that we *leave* it there. It is a beautiful thing to leave a pair of sunglasses there- we put them down and we will come back 2 hrs later and those sunglasses will still be there or they will be somewhere more obvious for someone to find and with a note: "Anyone lose their sunglasses?" Such kindness, such mindfulness and integrity in that not taking what doesn't belong to us, which is not offered to us.

The 3rd precept on retreat is a precept of celibacy. It is acknowledging that, as human beings, whether we are engaged in any form of sexual activity in our lives or not, as human beings, sexual energy is a part of our aliveness. It is valuable, precious, we can include it, not leave it outside the door, as we needn't leave any of our energy outside the door. It is to be used for our practice, so we are saying: for this period of time, in cultivating simplicity and respect in our relationship with ourself and everyone around us, energetically as well as through our actions, that we are committing to keeping our sexual energy to ourselves through our actions in all ways. It is a really wonderful thing to be in a community this size, coming together, we've never had this group before- and we can trust that harm will not be caused through sexuality during these 10 days. That's an amazing thing, really to be treasured.

The 4th training is a training around communication. On retreat specifically, around speech, although there are adjuncts I'll mention later. I'm sure all of you know, even if it is your first retreat, that while we are here we are committing to the training and practice of 'noble silence.' What that means is that we will not be talking during this retreat except to John and I are always available. If something comes up or you need to check in- we are not exactly included in that, since we are here to serve you.

We are not talking with eachother. We get to drop the social mask. For me, on my first retreat, this was quite a relief, which was a surprise to me because I enjoy people. But to get to drop into the silence and realize: "Oh." In those moments when cups are moving, we are going through the food line – we don't need to communicate about it; somehow it all works out, what needs to get done gets done. We over-rely, in this culture, on speech to communicate and we start to see: 'Oh, there is a rhythm which happens in the community which isn't based on speech. We don't talk to eachother, write notes to eachother, we don't even look at eachother. It isn't that we aren't wishing well to each other in our hearts, we are – as much as possible – but we can drop the social mask, you don't have to wonder: "Should I smile and look friendly now?" If you feel like being

friendly, be friendly but you don't have to send it out, you can just offer it to yourself or the trees, or the animals, or whatever else you are going to get to know on this land.

The encouragement is also to avoid writing and reading – if you can abstain from them it is an incredible training in simplicity. When we write, some of us have journal practices which we are quite committed to – I have off and on over the years – I've learned that not writing during retreat is a break from telling myself my own story over and over again. We are going to sit here aalllll day and tell ourselves our story off and on – we don't need to memorialize it; we can trust that the confusion might be able to be worked out without writing about it. The insight will somehow be digested without being documented, whatever it is. If you feel resistance to this, just try it on for a few days, I'm not saying: "You must do this." It is to be practiced with and investigated. The same thing with reading – we are usually reading someone else's story. Keep it simple and trust that these trainings that we are doing with the sitting, and walking, and qigong, and the teaching we are going to do every day – might it be enough? Might it be enough in a world which is always encouraging us to do more, take in more – can this be enough?

The 5th training precept is a training precept of abstaining from intoxicants which cloud the mind. We always say, really important: if you are on prescription medication for the health of your body- please continue taking it. If I thought: 'Oh, don't take any medication,' and so stopped taking my thyroid medication, I'd be in dire straits. We are talking about recreational use of drugs and alcohol. We all know through our experience that when we commit to that level of awake-ness through not clouding the mind and the body through these things- it is an incredible support which we may not have in the rest of our lives. I also want to respect that there are a number in the room who take that precept of abstaining from drugs and alcohol all the time. So, for those who in daily life it is not true, it is tremendous support for the entire community that *everybody* knows there is going to be sobriety here and that safety we are providing, that trust.

So, those are the 5. [precept taking ceremony follows]

John Travis: You're in it now... I want you to take a moment to check into your heart. I think, ultimately this awakening process is not separate from this heart and that we can, first of all... I know many of you are tired- it has been a long day – to extend some kindness to yourself, just to this body, to your own heart, and also the complexity of this body- we can extend some kindness, love, and care. Also, with these precepts and this collective of direction, that through that we create a power, and energy, a merit which we understand it is not just for ourselves alone – we do this for the benefit of all those we come in contact with and that they may benefit from our time here. And that we may rest in peace tonight. May all beings be happy.