Through Doubt, Through Contentment

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Thank you all for your fine dharma efforts. It's wonderful to be back here at Ladywell, together, in person.

The theme for this retreat is 'Through Doubt, Through Contentment.' For Zen Buddhist practice, doubt is essential. Without doubt one cannot really work on a koan. However, I would also like to take up contentment; that is, in Pali and Sanskrit, *piti* and *sukha.* These terms refer to a kind of joy, happiness, contentment; this is considered an access into deepening practice.

Doubt and contentment may seem like two contrary or opposing approaches. But as we go through it in actual practice, I trust you will see they're not really so different – they complement each other.

Going through doubt in Zen practice is **not** a matter of mere intellect, indecision or wavering mind: 'Well it could be this and it could be that...' Rather it is a natural need to know, to truly know, to get to the bottom of ourselves and of everything. It is in the end our own doubt, the doubt that is us, the doubt that we are.

But what if you don't feel that way? Simply put, the problem for those who don't really feel this kind of doubt, is that they may then feel the need to imitate it, to try and force some kind of doubt, to try and borrow someone else's doubt. This does not work. There is a way through doubt – but it has to be your own, it has to be genuine. And there is a way through contentment – but this also has to be taken to the end. Thus, the theme for this retreat: through doubt, through contentment.

Let's begin with a classic statement from Boshan about this doubt. Although he emphasises this great doubt, Boshan was a Sōtō Zen teacher, not a Rinzai Zen teacher. He flourished during the Ming Dynasty, 400 years ago in China. He spoke thus:

> *In Zen practice, the essential point is to rouse doubt. What is this doubt? When you were born, for example, where did you come from? You cannot help but remain in doubt about this. When you die, where will you go? Again, you cannot help but remain in doubt. Since you cannot pierce or penetrate this barrier of life and death, suddenly doubt will coalesce, will solidify, right before your eyes. Try to put it down, you cannot; try to push it away, you cannot. Eventually you will break through this doubt block and realize what a worthless notion life-and-death is – HA! As the old worthies said: 'Great*

doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening.'

I trust this, one of many possible statements from the Zen school about the importance of doubt, is clear. It gives the example, common in Chinese Zen, of many who, often as children and after the death of a loved one, came to this doubt as 'in birth, where did we come from? I don't know. When we die, where will we go? I don't know.'

The problem here is it can sound like a question about before birth and after death, perhaps even rebirth or some such thing, but it's not pointing to that at all. The point is, **right now**, we cannot help but remain in doubt if we are honest and open. We don't fully know. And yet we have a genuine need to know, not just intellectually but in our bones. So, **from here** the doubt is inevitable, it cannot be avoided. Right here, great doubt naturally manifests underfoot – if we are open to it.

But what if it doesn't? What if we don't feel this great doubt at the bottom of our being? That's fine. It's pointless to try and imitate it or try to stir up something that's not there. As we will see, there are Zen teachers who speak very clearly about the dangers of wrong-headed doubt, of trying to force some kind of doubt from the outside.

I trust this gives you at least a sense of what this genuine doubt is, and the central point that it plays in practice.

Let us now look at what appears to be the opposite approach – through contentment. There's no need to quote Zen texts, but here's a brief statement from the Chinese *Zazen Manual*, pronounced *Zazengi* in Japanese. It is the classic manual on how to do zazen in the Zen school:

Zazen really is the dharma gate of ease and joy. If you become ill from it, you are not doing it with proper care. Done properly, your whole body naturally becomes light and at ease, spirit fresh, mind clear. The 'flavour' or 'taste' of dharma sustains, and you are calm, pure, and joyful.

It's important to see that this kind of joy, contentment, or ease is not the ordinary sensuous experience of, for example, feeling gratified after a delicious meal, some kind of a sensuous desire that has been satiated and which often leaves a feeling of emptiness or of wanting to have it again. That's not real contentment at all. It's just a symptom of the self's dis-ease. The contentment that we are addressing is precisely what arises from **not** grasping on to something that we desire, or avoiding something that we dislike. It's precisely **not** doing that.

If we are practising properly, it doesn't take long to experience that peace. If we continue to give ourselves to the practice, it becomes very calm, very clear.

This is sometimes called ‘access concentration.’ This contentment, however, needs to be deepened, refined. Likewise, great doubt is not an end in itself. Great doubt must be resolved – to where there can be no doubt. In the same way, this contentment is not simply feeling calm and blissful. That itself is just a temporary state that you go into and out of, and then maybe want to return to and dwell in – a profound symptom of dis-ease. That’s not true contentment at all. True contentment is deepened, refined, until it is finally released of itself.

When these two approaches – through our own genuine doubt or through the refining of contentment – are actually taken to the end, they’re not so different after all. They’re two sides of the same coin.

Some people are driven by deep doubt. This isn’t good or bad; there’s no better or worse here. Doubt, however, can be the way – if taken all the way. At the same time, practising properly and experiencing profound contentment – yet not sticking with it, but continually refining it – well, see where you end up. That’s also a place where doubt itself is undone – as is the very need to be content.

It can’t be just sitting in a state of psychological or mental peace. Nor can it be a matter of doubt, doubt, doubt! That doubt must come to its own end. That’s why Boshan says you finally see through what a worthless notion life and death is. HA! But this must be experienced in our bones. Just as that contentment must be refined more and more subtly until it gives itself up. Then it’s not some state that we are seeking to get to; it’s where we are coming from. It’s unavoidable, we can’t get out of it.

DAY 2.

Last night we addressed briefly the issue of great doubt and true contentment. Let us now go further so that it can become clear through our own experience.

You already have trust, faith. When I say trust or faith, I don’t mean blind belief: ‘I want it to be this way, I hope it will be this way, oh please...’ No. Trust or faith is based on our own experience. Is that experience perfect, complete? It doesn’t need to be. But you have some experience. Let that experience be the basis.

As you become settled in the practice, you can’t help but feel a kind of contentment. Not just manipulating the mind, trying to prevent pain or something like that, but really settled in *samadhi* or concentrated oneness. There’s a profound peace, a joy and happiness that comes, as mentioned last night, not from indulging in some sensuous experience. Precisely from **not** seeking for or running away from anything. This contentment arises from the depth of our being. Confirm it. Refine it. What is its source? Where does that come from?

Do you also doubt? Don't run away from it! In some religions, doubt is a no-no. In Buddhism as well, wavering intellectual doubt is considered a hindrance. But great doubt – it's called great for good reason – actually becomes what the Edo Period Japanese Zen teacher Hakuin and others call 'wings on the way.' It's not something to be ignored or denied, pushed under the rug or swept under the carpet. Rather, if that doubt is genuine, it opens the way, just as contentment does.

As a matter of fact, when you take the experience of doubt or contentment all the way you find they're not two. But you've got to take them all the way. If you're going to dawdle over intellectual doubts, indulge in peaceful mind states, you'll just continue to go round and round.

Base the practice on your own experience. Then you won't go wrong. Keep eye and heart open. Then let your own experience show you the way you must go.

Once again, the point is to go all the way. For example, with doubt, just doubting is not enough. It must be a genuine doubt that comes from out of the depths of your being and naturally comes to include everything. Then it can come to a head, to a consummation, to its fulfilment. And then, as we heard yesterday 'HA! What a worthless notion life and death is!' There can be no doubt.

And if the experience of contentment is profound, continue to refine that. What is its source? Where does it come from? Until contentment itself falls away. Otherwise, contentment becomes a state you seek to attain or maintain – it contains the root of its own dis-ease. It's not true contentment.

Which way is right for you? Give yourself to the practice and find out through your own experience. Which way do you need to go? Either way you must go all the way. Then you will see they're not two different paths in the first place. But they must come to their own end. You can't just sit there trying to manipulate physical or mental states. It's got to become total and complete so that the doubt can then dissolve, so that contentment can open up its own source. Otherwise, as you already know from your own experience, you just go round and round in your head, going nowhere fast. That's not practice. It's escape from practice.

If we look at Gautama's struggle it's clear: he was consumed by great doubt. The record of his life is semi-legendary, but we can get a good sense of it if we see it through our own experience. Of course, the technical Zen term 'great doubt' is not used, but that's clearly what drove Gautama in his quest.

He had everything. Everything. A beautiful wife and son. A mansion for each season. He had entertainment, women to play him music and offer anything he wanted. It's said that his father, ruler of the domain, tried to shelter his son from any kind of negativity so that he wouldn't become a world renouncer. He had been told by a

fortune teller: your son is going to either become a great ruler or a great enlightened being who renounces the world. His father didn't want his son to leave the world.

The young Gautama was given everything – but eventually he came to see ageing, sickness, death. And birth itself just continues this same, endless cycle. He was shocked to see he really had nothing. He couldn't find his way through. So, he left the world and went through severe ascetic practices, eating nothing or just eating a palm full of food once a day, not sleeping, not lying down, even stopping his breath. He ended up almost killing himself. His navel was touching his backbone. He realised that far from getting enlightened, he's dying, he's losing his vital energy.

It's said that he did as much as anyone had ever done in terms of ascetic practices. And yet, he still suffered. What then happened? He then spontaneously recalled a childhood experience when he was comfortably seated under a rose apple tree. Some versions say he was watching a ploughing festival, but the details are not so important. The point is, comfortably seated under the shade of a tree, he spontaneously entered a profound meditative state, free of sensuous attachment. Joy, profound contentment, naturally arose.

Gautama, remembering this childhood experience, wondered to himself whether this was what had been lacking in his practice. He asked himself if he should be afraid of it. No, he realised he should not be afraid of it. In effect, it showed him the way he must go. So, he bathed in the nearby river, took nourishment, and then sat through and awakened. Very interesting. After all those ascetic practices that he went through, the final spur was triggered and inspired by this effortless experience he had as a child.

And we've all had similar experiences: walking in the woods, watching a sunset and so on. At least for the moment, we lose ourself – and find ourself, so to speak. For some people that experience causes them to consider deeply: 'Wait a minute – what is the source of that? Where does that come from?' Others rest in that contentment. Neither one is better than the other. Buddhism, however, teaches us how to refine that experience of doubt or contentment until it finally is released.

Gautama had great doubt; that's what drove him. But he also had great trust – and that childhood experience of contentment was the final spur to fully awaken in this very life (in Pali *sammāsamBuddha*: fully awakened one; *diṭṭheva dhamme*: here and now, in this very life). We're not talking about the future, let alone a past life, but here and now. This is living Buddhism, and it's where Zen comes from.

To return to great doubt, this is how the thirteenth century Chinese teacher Gaofeng described it:

> *In India and China* [back then, this meant the world]*, in the past and the present, of all the worthies who spread this light* [the dharma], *none did*

> *anything more than simply resolve this one doubt. The thousand doubts, the ten thousand doubts are just this one doubt. Resolve this doubt and no doubt remains. With no further doubts, one is neither more nor less than Shakyamuni* [Gautama Buddha], *Maitreya* [the future Buddha], *Vimalakirti* [the great Indian layman] *and Layman Pang* [the Chinese layman]. *Not two. Inseparable.*

This makes clear the need, especially in koan practice, for naturally rousing "this one doubt." Not doubt about this or that, but the one great doubt. First of all, this doubt encompasses you, it must be you – then it comes to include everything in a marvellous way. Here, all that you think you know, all that you think you are, marvellously dissolves.

However, that doubt can be corrupted. Improperly applied, it can turn into something wilful and wrong-headed. Several hundred years after Gaofeng, the Japanese Zen master Bankei had this exchange with a monk:

> *Men of old said that great doubt leads to great awakening*. [Literally '*at the bottom of great doubt lies great awakening.*' Compare the above quote from Boshan, who lived around the same time in China.] *Why don't you take up this great doubt in your teaching?*
> Bankei: *"Long ago, Nangaku went to the Sixth Patriarch and was asked 'Who has come?' Nangaku was completely lost. His doubt lasted eight long years. Finally, he could answer: 'Even to speak of it as* ***this*** *misses the mark.' Now that's great doubt and great awakening!"*

Bankei is not denying great doubt-great awakening; on the contrary, he's trying to show the questioning monk what it really is. Bankei continues:

> *Suppose you lost your only kesa* [a surplice that identifies you as a priest. Your teacher may write something in calligraphy on the back; it's a cherished possession] *and you couldn't find it anywhere. You couldn't help but search and search without let up, without stopping. That's real doubt!*

Now, returning to the monk's original question of why Bankei doesn't use this great doubt in his teaching, Bankei hammers it home:

> *People nowadays say they need to have doubt because people in the past did. So you cultivate a doubt. But that's merely an imitation of a doubt, not real doubt,* ***so the day never comes when you arrive at a real resolution****. It's as if you were to go off looking for something you hadn't really lost, pretending you had.*

This reveals what genuine great doubt is – and that it must come to its own resolution. It also makes clear the danger of trying to imitate or artificially generate it. Enough said.

DAY 3.

Good morning.

> *Zazen really is the dharma gate of ease and joy. If you become ill from it, you are not doing it with proper care. Done properly, your whole body naturally becomes light and at ease, spirit fresh, mind clear. The 'flavour' or 'taste' of dharma sustains, and you are calm, pure, and joyful.*

This statement from the classic *Zazen Manual* was mentioned in the opening dharma talk. But if you are not settled in practice, you may well feel zazen is **not** the dharma gate of ease and joy! It's full of soreness and pain, drowsiness and confusion.

The physical posture is the first point to work through. We have a body. Yet people tend to deny it in their practice, then they go into their head or use force of will and all kinds of problems occur. We have a body. Sit with the body, settled in the body, not in your head. In beginning zazen, it is good to feel yourself settled in your body, not in your head. Then find the physical posture that works for you, that is proper for you. No one can tell you this.

In the classic *Zazen Manual* there is a brief section giving directions on how to sit in full lotus or half lotus, but of course that's not the only way. You have to find out with your body what works for you. For me, hatha yoga stretches were very helpful to get limber and sit comfortably in full lotus. For sustained practice, this [full lotus] is the best posture.

Learn to sit properly for your body. Find the posture that allows you to give all of yourself: use the body in a way that supports the practice, opening up the hips and allowing the belly to really breathe and find focus. Everything about this posture has been tried and perfected over centuries and centuries: the way we hold our eyes, naturally just looking down in front of us, half closed, not looking at or for anything. It can take some time, but once you get used to it, you'll see it is the natural way for the body to disengage from the visual sense without closing it off completely.

The same thing with the ears. We don't put cotton in our ears. If the fire alarm goes off, we hear it and respond. The problem is not with the sense input: the sound of the birds, or a motorcycle or lawnmower. That's not really the problem, is it? It's what the mind does with it.

Find how the body naturally supports this practice. Find the posture that works for you and then, at least for the sitting period, don't move. That noble stillness has its value. Through proper practice you realise the virtue, the value, of stillness in penetrating practice. And when the sitting is done, get up and move. The movement

also naturally comes out of that practice. It's not something limited to the seated posture.

If you have to change posture once in a while from one sitting to the next, that's fine. Use a chair if you need to, stand if you need to, stand on your head if you want – as long as the practice remains constant. That's the point: not to stubbornly maintain some physical posture, but to keep the fundamental practice constant – **whatever you do**. When you lay down to rest, relax. Get fresh for the next zazen – **but don't drop the practice**. You're leaving the seated posture, it's true, but you're not leaving the practice if you're practising properly. You can't leave the practice if you're practising properly. Confirm this for yourself.

Now to bring it home. There are many koans, but they come down to this: mind like a shining jewel. Everything flawlessly reflected in this gem. We can come to this through great doubt, where everything finally becomes translucent. We can also come to it through deepening the practice of genuine contentment, until finally that contentment itself is translucent.

The koan then is this: when mind is like a shining jewel, finally, what do you do with it? Consider this well in the depths of your great doubt, in the depths of your great contentment. Mind, like a shining jewel; now, finally, what do you do with this precious gem?

Another example, in this case an exchange from the early Zen tradition, to help you on your way. A monk came to one of the early Chinese Zen teachers who's important in the development of Sōtō Zen. Sekitō is the Japanese pronunciation of his name. The monk asked in a modest, traditional manner: *"I have learned something of the vast Buddhist teachings, and have also heard of this [Zen teaching of] direct pointing to the heart of the matter, seeing the true nature and awakening.*" The Zen teaching is attributed to Bodhidharma; it characterises the unique character of the then nascent school. The monk concludes his request with: *"I don't yet understand that. Would you kindly instruct me?"* In short, he is asking what is Zen.

At this time, at this place, for this monk, Sekitō responded: *"This way will not do, any other way will not do, none of it will do. Now, what do you do?"* The monk didn't have a clue. Sekitō responded: *"Your karmic affinity is not with me; go to the great master Ma* [that is, Mazu, or Baso in Japanese]*."* Baso is considered one of the great forefathers of what became Linji or Rinzai Zen; Sekitō, the forefather of what became Sōtō Zen. They lived on different mountains, and, as is the case here, sometimes sent monks to each other. It was so common that classic Zen histories record: "Anyone who has not encountered these two great men was considered an ignoramus."

The monk did as he was told. Meeting Baso, he naturally asked the same formal question: *"I have learned something of the vast Buddhist teachings, and have also*

heard of this direct pointing to the heart of the matter, seeing the true nature and awakening. I don't yet understand that. Would you kindly instruct me?" Baso's response: *"As for me, sometimes I raise my eyebrows and blink my eyes, sometimes I don't. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.*"

Completely different from Sekitō. Sekitō in effect took every possibility away. Baso, knowing well the situation – I reckon the monk faithfully reported the previous exchange with Sekitō – turned it on its head, turned it inside out. Baso was known for hitting people, knocking them down, yelling at them. In that sense he's considered the forefather of what is called classic Zen. But here he doesn't do that. Rather, he gives complete free flow to the situation with simple words and daily gestures. He said: *As for me, sometimes I raise my eyebrows and blink my eyes, sometimes I don't. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.*"

And with that the monk awakens. The monk then says: "*When I was with Sekitō it was like a mosquito trying to bite an iron bull.*" Sekitō didn't give him any room to put his probe. Sekitō had told him: *"This way will not do, any other way will not do, none of it will do. Now, what do you do?"*

This is an important early *mondō* or exchange in the Zen tradition. That monk went on to become a great Zen teacher himself. He visited both of the outstanding teachers of the time, Sekitō and Baso, and it was through that interaction you might say that he was able to realise, to awaken. Unfortunately, I've seen commentaries explain that Sekitō failed while Baso succeeded. This completely misses the point. If you have the eye of experience, it's clear that without Sekitō's adroit challenge, it's highly unlikely that the monk would have awakened when he heard Baso's statement. Sekitō taking away everything is as important as Baso giving it all back. See into the delicate interplay of these two teachers, on different mountains but able to forge monks into one.

This is a splendid example of the natural dynamic of Zen. One could interpret Sekitō's challenge in terms of rousing great doubt, Baso's statement as a marvellous expression of great contentment. But however we interpret it, we have to go through our own experience and find it there.

DAY 4.

Good morning.

In what sense does practice arrive at a definitive end, a resolution? And in what sense is practice endless? This is something for us to look into today and make clear for ourselves. To confuse the two is a tragic blunder. I've seen people waste decades – even become certified teachers – without real insight into either one. It's a tragedy.

Once again, in terms of our own practice: in what sense does practice arrive at a definitive end, conclusion, resolution? And in what sense is practice endless? Early Chan (Chinese Zen) philosopher Zongmi used the metaphor of giving birth. It's fitting, although metaphors have their limits.

When we're pregnant – nice for me as a man to be talking about this, isn't it? Speaking of first-hand experience. [LAUGHTER] When pregnant, doubts may arise, worries and concerns, the baby may kick inside the stomach. If we mistake the kick in the stomach for childbirth, we're in serious trouble. But that's precisely what happens in much of the Zen world today. There's a kick in the tummy and we think we've given birth. We haven't. Pregnancy is not childbirth; childbirth is not pregnancy. One leads to the other, but being pregnant is not giving birth. When we've given birth there is no doubt: there it is solid and real, right in front of us. It's definitive, conclusive, decisive – there's no doubt about it. There is a qualitative change, to say the least.

And yet we've given birth to an infant. Now it's necessary for that child to be raised, so that it can learn to walk, to talk, to be of service to others. As important as that birth is, it's the beginning of something as well, isn't it? You must be clear through your own practice: **what is it to give birth?** And then: **what is it to raise that child and finally to let it go?** Consider well in the depths of your own practice, with all humility and sincerity.

Another early Zen teacher, Reiun was his name in Japanese, had practised for decades, very severely. Nothing. Then one day, after a long training through the winter, he was coming down the mountain into a village in early spring. The peach blossoms were in bloom. As fate would have it, his eyes fell upon those delicate blossoms, and BOOM!

His enlightenment poem, using the metaphor of a master swordsman:

> *Seeking the sword master for thirty years.*
> *Over and over leaves fell, branches broke.*
> *But ever since seeing peach blossoms –*
> *Never another doubt!*

I trust it's clear enough. So clear that Nanshinken in my lineage a couple of generations ago, responded to that last line *"Never another doubt!"* with this: *"I always doubt."*

Do you see? What does Reiun mean when he says *"Never another doubt!"* About what? And what did Nanshinken mean when he retorted: *"I always doubt."* If it's not clear, don't be lazy in your practice.

There are endless koans (speaking of endless practice) that cut through this issue. In various ways, from various angles. For example: *"Cut in two, what do you do?"* Kind of a samurai koan. A crazed samurai bursts into this room and slices you right down the middle. He's not about to, he just did it, he just cut you right in two. **Now**, what do you do? It's got to be clear, through and through. If there's any doubt, the least hesitation, it won't do, will it? This isn't just a bizarre koan about a crazed samurai causing your death. It's about how you **live** every moment of your life.

There's another interesting koan that may help illumine underfoot:

> *A monk attained satori upon hearing the sound of falling firewood.*
> *His enlightenment poem:*
>
> *What falls does not differ from satori.*
> *Vertical, horizontal, undefiled.*
> *Mountains, rivers, the great earth*
> *reveal the body of Buddha completely.*
>
> *The great Chinese master Kidō (in Japanese) added: "This master is just like the poor scholar fortunate enough to gain access to the emperor's library. But there's one word, one character right in the middle, that's out of place."*

What does Kidō mean by that? Sure enough, the monk has gained entrance into the emperor's library. Like a free pass to the British Library. But there's one character, one word not quite right. Where is Kidō when he dares to say that? To put it simply, what is lacking? The monk had a pretty thorough satori upon hearing falling firewood. And he clearly expressed it: "M*ountains, rivers, the great earth reveal the body of Buddha completely."* So why does Kidō come along and say that it's not bad, but it's like entering the emperor's library when one cannot quite read yet...

What is lacking? You must see into this through your own practice. Is this where the practice goes on, freely and happily, forever? Put simply: '*With one fingertip, move the whole universe!*' Or '*With one phrase, express the whole universe!*' How can you do that? From where? Where do you stand when you say that, when you do that? This is the pith of beginning Zen practice. Then, see all the way through, **all the way through**, patiently, humbly.

This retreat is a marvellous opportunity, together, to do just that. To get to the point where there can be no doubt. And then move on from there.

DAY 5.

Good morning.

Through doubt, through contentment. I trust you are coming to see through your own experience what that really is.

To return to one of the questions yesterday. When I went to Japan in 1981, I was desperate. In a way, that was my salvation. But if you're not desperate, what do you do? Try to pretend you're desperate? Try to borrow somebody else's desperation? Read a lot of stories about desperate people?

No. You have to open up to what is at the bottom of your own heart and follow that. You don't need to borrow someone else's doubt, or contentment. You need to see what really lies at the bottom of your own heart. If you do, and if you practice properly, with proper guidance, soon enough this great doubt cannot help but arise. We are human beings: we have trust – and we have doubt. To deny this is to deny our humanity.

For some people, it's natural to go through that doubt because it really grabs them and won't let go. This can be difficult and frustrating at times, but it can also provide an excellent path – most direct, straightforward. If you really are caught up in genuine doubt, not wavering mind but the genuine doubt at the bottom of your own being, well, sleepiness is not a problem, pain in the knees is not a problem, wavering mind is not a problem.

Of course, there is the practical discipline of *samadhi*, concentrated oneness, entering it again and again, deepening it again and again, sustaining it over time. But that is simply to help open you up to what is at the bottom of your own heart, be it great doubt, or great contentment. It comes down to the same thing when you take them all the way.

As I said, I was desperate when I went to Japan. I don't know that it made it any easier, but I couldn't give up – even when the path seemed impossible and I felt utterly inadequate. There was no alternative. I had already tried everything and nothing satisfied, so there was nothing to go back to. I had burned all my bridges, so there was only this way to go. If we are genuinely driven by our own need, nothing can really hinder us. It does take patience, sincerity, humility. If you don't begin with them – I was sorely lacking – proper practice will provide them, in time.

For some of us, that contentment is strong, that feeling of really being at rest when we sit. This is fine as well. Go through it all the way to the very bottom. What is its source? See it all the way through.

We've had many examples, illustrations of this from the other speakers, and I have introduced a bit. All of these stories can be helpful, inspiring, encouraging, something is often touched in the depths of our own heart. This is valuable. But we must go through ourselves, there's no other way. Each one must go through themselves. So please take up those stories, consider them deeply – see what they have to do with you, how they apply to you, here, today in your struggling practice. If they can be helpful, please take them up. If not, leave them aside. You have the essentials, what you most need, in the depths of your own heart, I assure you! It is shining bright and clear, no doubt about it. The point now is to really see it – and live it.

And if you're genuinely desperate, direct it properly. It can't be an imitation, it can't be someone else's. It's got to be your own, and it must be directed properly to its own end in a wholesome way. In the same way with deep joy and contentment that arises in the depths of our meditation. We can't just try to float on the surface forever, or it becomes its own dis-ease. We must take it all the way.

Then great doubt and great contentment dissolve without a trace. And we find ourselves here with this – **not bound by anything**. Not even great doubt, great contentment – or even great awakening. They are all like last night's dream. And here is where we work from. Not towards, we work **from** here.

Today is the last day of the retreat. In the previous dharma talks I did not consider questions or concerns about returning to the world, how to practice in daily life, and so on. Those concerns are irrelevant during retreat. Now they are relevant. We are coming to the end of this retreat, so naturally the question arises of how we return. When retreat ends, that's when the real retreat begins – when you have to return to the world. How do you continue this out there, so to speak. Well, first of all don't try to imitate this out there! You're probably not going to be sitting twelve or more hours tomorrow. You don't need to, you just did. There are other things to do, the work you do in the world, your family, your friends, they are no less important than this practice.

Don't go back with some kind of shouldered enlightenment thinking how much wiser you are than those poor souls who you are returning to. No, when you go back, go back to them, see what you can learn from them. What did they experience over the last few days while we were sitting on our butts and they were taking care of things? What was their experience? Don't bring something that you experienced here back there. Find it there. Then you won't trip over your own enlightened feet.

There will be challenges, unexpected things, that's right. There's the real practice. That's the great invitation – now, what do you do? We have found a firm foundation these last few days, sitting, for most of you much harder than would have been possible by yourself. It's precious, this *sangha*-community working together, with and for each other.

Returning to the world – that is a *sangha* as well. Perhaps it's a little bit looser, but it is also a *sangha* no less valuable than this one. They don't have to be practising Zen Buddhists. Open yourself up to the real *sangha*. Then your practice will take a turn naturally.

You'll start to see those hindrances, those obstacles, as the invitations that they are. Paths to discover and learn from. When you've really given yourself to the practice, nothing can get in the way. Nothing. Sickness? No. Death? No. Death is not outside of this. When you've sat all the way through, it's clear: death itself is calm. I don't mean trying to remain calm as you face death. Living and dying are calm of themselves.

We still have some time during this retreat. Please, right up to the end, give yourself to this practice and then give yourself to returning to the world. It takes time but you will see that they are not really two different things either.

(Transcription by Martin Jordin)