

Maple Seeds



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Preface

I first encountered my teacher, Soryu Forall, in 2013, when I came to his newly established residential program at the Center for Mindful Learning for a one-week retreat. I had heard of CML - but not Forall - through Shinzen Young, a meditation teacher whose clear and science-friendly approach to teaching had appealed to me. Danny "Taishin" Morris, with whom I would later have the privilege of training with at CML for over a year, picked me up. As a Basic Mindfulness facilitator, Taishin knew much more about Shinzen's system than I did, so I asked him to explain a few things. At the end of the conversation, I still didn't understand the finer details and so he recommended that I read Shinzen's manual; I hadn't even known that Shinzen had a manual. I devoured the manual during that retreat, and made it the basis of my practice for some time, until I came to CML again in 2015 to train full-time.

When I came to CML again to train, I saw that a similar pattern had occurred. While I had met Forall, and had become familiar with what was at the time called Basic Mindfulness (now Unified Mindfulness), Shinzen's teaching framework, I had not fully understood Forall or his teachings. I had vaguely heard of something called Awakening and Responsibility, and thought I'd come to train at his Center anyway for the meditation. Little by little, I absorbed teachings like "Lose your life," "Live your vow," and "Follow your breath." But it came in pieces, and never at one time, and never with a clear and thorough explanation like the one that I received by reading Shinzen's manual.

During my second year of training at what is now called MAPLE, the Monastic Academy for the Preservation of Life on Earth, Forall went on an extended solo retreat in a cabin in rural Vermont. We did not see him for over two months. This was, of course, not a long time for him - he had done two previous solitary retreats in the mountains for 100 days each, and trained for about nine years in monasteries in Asia - but it was a long time for us. I suspected that when he came back, he might be a different teacher, but I did not know how. After his return,

he began to share the fruits of his effort.

As he expounded these teachings at several times, in several settings, with different contexts and details¹, I grew more and more engaged and enlivened by the depth and vitality of the teachings. I have found everything within these teachings, from the broad overview, to the most dry and granular details of the practice, to be extremely helpful in my practice. While I know that, as with Shinzen's system and Forall's teachings, I have far from fully understood the depth of these teachings, they seemed too clear and too valuable to forego sharing with the world.

This book is the way we have arrived at doing that. It consists of edited transcripts from Forall's talks, and brief comments on each transcript: about the background of the talk, or about particular ideas that you might want more information or context on. There is also additional material, including several appendices at the end, which serve as a reference and you may find interesting or useful to look at as you read this book.

May this book be of use to you, and to all practitioners who aspire to deep insight and real service in the world.

¹ It is important to note that many of these talks were given to a monastic audience - people dedicating their days, months, years, and lives to living this practice.

Awakening and Responsibility

This transcript is a general introduction to Forall’s story and his teachings. It pre-dates the other teachings in this book, but gives a broad context for the specific ideas and methods that follow.

Transcript

When I was four years old, I was standing in the kitchen near the wastebasket looking up past the edge of the kitchen counter at my mother while she made dinner. I told her very clearly, “**We must do something right now.**” I was referring to the human destruction of life on earth and the fact that we need to stop it. This moment of clarity as a four year-old became a guiding event in my life.

I think that this sort of experience happens to all of us. All of us have moments of compassion and clarity as children. What is unusual about my life isn't that it happened, the unusual point is that I'm telling that story right now. It's not that that happened, and therefore it changed my life; it's not that I live this life because that happened; it's not that that story is significant because it changed my life. It's that **I made that story significant by telling it, and telling it, and telling it again. By telling it, I made my identity. I made my life.** Why did I tell that story and make this life? There have been about one hundred million ten-second spans in my life; why did I choose that ten-second span to remember and to talk about? This is one of the deepest questions that we can ask of ourselves and of the stories that we tell about ourselves.

The purpose of life is to go beyond our own perspective. If we have a human perspective, if we identify as a human being, then our goal must be to escape from a human perspective, to escape from being a human being. Therefore, the purpose of life is to die. The purpose of our identity is to come to the end of that identity. And by coming to the end of that identity, we become more capable of seeing others in their identities. By coming to the end of our story, we become more able to see others’ stories clearly. And in doing that, we're able to care for others; and in caring for others, we become even more truly

ourselves; we tell a story that we can even more truly believe in. We can have an identity we can be even more proud of. And then we begin that loop again, escaping from our perspective, to care for others even better, and in so doing becoming ourselves more fully.

This loop is the essence of the structure of spirituality. We create positive feedback loops that end themselves; create a positive feedback loop between the way we perceive and the way we behave, so that we perceive certain things and therefore we behave in certain ways, perceive ourselves as being someone who cares for others and therefore we behave in that way and therefore that's what we perceive.

Loops grow exponentially, and exponential growth is a fundamental aspect of growth in nature. Exponential growth is growth creating even more growth. This loop continues as long as resources are available, but **there are limited resources. There are limited resources in the physical world, and there are limited resources in our minds, our subjective experience. Our stories control the resources of our minds, and our minds control the resources of the physical world.** Therefore, we must use the resources of our minds.

What do I mean by that? I mean that the number of times I could be four and say that to my mother is quite limited. But within my mind I can repeat that story dozens, or hundreds, or thousands of times. I can repeat it to other people so that they repeat that story in their own minds, so that they see me as that kind of person. Furthermore, they're given permission to tell a story about themselves as people who also deeply care for life on earth. And then that story, **"I care for life on earth,"** spreads, and because it can spread through minds, it can grow in its power. As this happens, our behavior is changed along with it. Because we share our experiences through story, those experiences become a shared view that we live by, and as we live by it, we change the world. Exponential growth requires resources and more resources; we can collectively allocate subjective resources through sharing stories. As these mental patterns grow, they change how we live, and alter the world that we create.

But in order for it to have great power, it has to be an automatic loop;

it has to be a loop that happens in our subconscious, not merely our conscious, minds. Conscious attention is very limited, but when a story is played constantly in our subconscious, in our interpretation of things, it gains enormous power over our lives. And when subjective stories are shared so fully that they enter the collective subconscious, the collective set of assumptions, our behavior changes, and the world changes accordingly.

Even if all of this is clear, we must ask further: Are these stories good stories? Which stories should we be telling? How can we know? To answer this question, we need a place outside of all stories, from which we can look at the stories and find out if they're the right stories. In order to do that, we have to go beyond what we believe and what we prefer. We have to go beyond what we want, what we assume, so that we can see what stories are most true and useful, from a place that's independent of them. We must go beyond opinions and prejudice. The experience of losing opinions and prejudice, shedding assumptions and preferences, is the end of stories. That's the end of identity. The stories are, in one way or another, fabrications, and fabrications contain lies. But that which is completely independent of stories, that which is completely independent of fabrications, is independent of lies. Therefore, it can be trusted.

Every loop ends at some point; every story ends at some point; every positive feedback loop producing exponential growth at some point collapses. **The greatest skill is the construction of stories that loop back on themselves and then end in peace, allowing us to be free even from them.** We in our society believe in certain things very deeply, so deeply that we may not believe they are beliefs. They've completely entered our subconscious set of assumptions. **Capitalism is a paradigm that we believe in and act according to; science is a paradigm that we believe in and act according to. But these are loops, these are stories, shared explanation, popular assumptions; they're constructions, they're fabrications, and they will end. The question is, will they end in suffering or in peace? Will they end with the elimination of life as we know it or will they end with the flourishing of life on earth? A good story ends by freeing us even from itself. A bad story imprisons us so that we will provide it with resources.**

Writing a story that ends in peace is the greatest skill of a human being. This story is written with two aspects: the Awakening aspect and the Responsibility aspect.

The Awakening aspect has two sides: on the one side, Love. We embrace others' perspectives. By learning to hold to others' perspectives, we become more capable of letting go of our own perspectives. And by letting go of all perspectives, we become more open to receiving others' perspectives. We come to the point when we enjoy understanding the views of others. We enjoy that. We enjoy seeing things from other people's perspectives so fully that we act accordingly, and those actions care for them. Care is Love.

The other aspect of Awakening is Wisdom, and Wisdom is the experience of holding to no perspective whatsoever. Nothing is perceived, and nothing is achieved. There's nothing accumulated, everything is gone. But this isn't what we imagine nothing to be. Anything we imagine it to be is something imagined, something we have fabricated. That's not insight. Insight is vibrant, and clear, and shining, and brilliant. Through experiencing Wisdom, Love arises naturally.

The Responsibility aspect has two sides: on the one side, Love. On the other, Power. Power means that we clarify our own perspective so that others will follow it. We hold to our own perspective. We compel others to see according to our perspectives, so fully that they do what I want them to do. This is Power. Power is the ability to get people to do what we want them to do. This isn't good or bad in itself. Power on its own, unconnected to Love, is simply selfishness. Power based on Love is of the greatest service. To link Love and Power together, the ability to hold to other people's perspectives, and the ability to hold to my own perspective: this is what we call Responsibility.

We link Responsibility to Awakening, so that we have a stable place, a clear place, from which to know. Ourselves, me, this person, this identity, this is a story. To commit that story to the highest good, to commit ourselves to fulfilling our purpose, to tell the story that is our truest life, that is realizing our vow. Our vow is our most authentic and kind life. And we must realize this before we die. We must realize

the purpose of our lives before we die. We must put that at first priority, and be willing to lose everything for the sake of our vow. To realize it, we see from our own perspective and from others' perspectives equally. Our purpose in life isn't just what we want to do; our purpose in life isn't just what others want us to do. Our purpose in life is the place where what we want and what others want meet, where there's no conflict between inside and outside. To live from that place is the threshold to fulfilling our vow. But even this isn't sufficient: to live our vow we also must gather the skills needed to achieve it.

Our vow is our life, but the loss of our life is how we find it. **We tell our story; that's our life; we lose our story; that's our death.** This death is safety, it's peace, it's joy. And it enables our vow. **As long as we are wrapped up in stories, in fictions, we'll protect those stories and fictions; but when we've let go of everything, when we've lost everything, there will be nothing left to protect, nothing that could push away from achieving our vow, there will be nothing that can compel us to ignore what we know is right. In order to experience each of these components, we require discipline. We use our conscious attention in order to cultivate a path that is often called "Mindfulness."**

We all know how limited our resources are in terms of willpower. Therefore, we make use of the most foundational tool in the practical methods of going beyond ourselves and achieving our vow. That basic tool is community. We connect with a community, caring for others and allowing others to care for us. Sometimes caring for us means making us comfortable, giving us certain opportunities; but sometimes it means something deeper. This deeper kind of caring is also needed for us to fulfill our potential. This means that others see us, are inspired by us, and see in us what we can achieve; they then expect us to do it, and don't give us the opportunity to make excuses for why we can't. They ask us to go through and beyond discomfort to a place we cannot currently believe in. We can go beyond ourselves, we can go beyond our limitations, because there are others who are supporting us, even if that support is uncomfortable. And when it is both comfortable and uncomfortable, we have a relationship that we can truly depend on.

We have both sides: the comfortable side, when we become more and more intimate with others, and the uncomfortable side, when we use that intimacy to go beyond ourselves. To truly go beyond ourselves is to die. We fulfill our potential so that we die. And for others to support us in doing that is the greatest love. We often think that love means that people support us, but we know that ultimately, we need to go beyond this. **There's a kind of love that asks us to go beyond our own identity, beyond what we want, beyond what we think is true.** If we can go beyond it, it's not me. If we can go beyond it, we won't be attached to it. If we can go beyond it, it's not ultimately true.

As we move through this path, we may experience challenges, and we may experience suffering. But that suffering, if we experience it skillfully, is what enables us to do what must be done. It's what enables us to achieve our vow. When we experience suffering for ourselves, we know "I can't wait until later to resolve this." **It doesn't make sense to think "I'll deal with this tomorrow." We know this has to be dealt with right now. We have a sense of urgency, and that urgency is what allows us to fulfill our vow.**

The more deeply we experience a sense of unavoidable suffering, suffering that we want to avoid but can't, the more deeply we are able to connect with others when they do. Further, the more deeply we experience that, the more deeply we can transcend it. There's no need to aim for suffering, but when we receive it, we accept it, we learn from it, and **we know that this vow must be achieved right now.**

We must do something right now.

Sunday Sit

The first time that we saw Forall after his cabin retreat was at the Sunday Sit, our weekly event in Burlington, VT for our larger community. We didn't know what he would present on - we just called the event a generic title, "Mindfulness with Soryu," and waited. After he came in, the eager, nervous chatter gradually quieted down. "Let's all be quiet and look at Soryu," someone said to jokingly acknowledge the silence. "That's what I've been doing for the past few months," Forall jested. Everyone laughed with relief.

After an extended period of silence, Forall shared some stories from the past few days after exiting the cabin, and some poems that he had written during his retreat. He did not say much about his experience of the retreat. However, during the guided meditation section of the event, he did share, for the first time, part of the technique that came out of his time in the cabin: he shared steps 1-10 of the technique ("Posture" and "Purify").

This was new to me, and to the group. I had heard Forall talk previously about the content of the Purify section, where you systematically check each of the Five Hindrances, to make sure it is absent or, if present, to deal with it; but I had not heard him teach that technique, nor had I heard him share each point about checking your posture. I had a sense, too, that there was more to this technique, which, for convenience, I will call "the Forall Method."

During the question period that followed, Forall gave a thorough account of the step that precedes aligning your body ("Posture") and aligning your mind ("Purify"): Step 0, asking the question, "How do I give my life completely to Great Love?" This is also the first item in the conceptual framework discussed in the previous chapter. So I will begin this book's account of the Forall Method with his account of Step 0.

Transcript

SORYU FORALL: This is a time for questions, comments, discussion, or silence. Anything is fine.

PARTICIPANT: I have a question about the pancake story. When you were talking about ethical choices, what came immediately to my mind was thinking. It seems to me I'm a clearly ethical person, because I make ethical choices a lot of the times. Sometimes I don't make them, but a lot of the times, I do. But sometimes my thinking is extremely unethical. Sometimes I feel that gets in the way of my -- I know it gets in the way of a pure life. Can you comment about that?

SORYU FORALL: Absolutely. Thanks for bringing it up. In the traditions that I trained in, that's considered the most important kind of choice: it is through the activity of our minds that the most benefit or damage is done.

In Buddhism, they say there are three doors. They also say that there are six doors. The six doors are what comes "in." "In" is a metaphor, of course. Through our eyes, our ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. We receive perception, sensory impact. That's what comes in.

There are then three doors going out, our impact on the world. There's our body. We do things with our body. We pick things up and we do something with them and then put them down. There's our speech, which is communication of any kind. It isn't just about words, but it includes words. That's a way that we impact the world. We may not do something, but we could influence someone to do something. Even if they don't do it, we can still influence them to say something. Or we can say something that has the influence of making them think or feel something, and that is also a kind of impact. Finally, there is the door of our own minds, and regarding your question, in particular our thinking.

There's a certain teacher who I talk about a lot even though I never met her. She passed away when I was young. Her name was Peace Pilgrim. Maybe you've heard of her. But she said something very nice, that I really love. She said -- I'm paraphrasing slightly, but this is

the meaning: "If people knew the power of thinking, they would never again think a negative thought. But we don't know. We don't understand how powerful thinking is, so we think negative thoughts."

It's an excellent teaching. The influence that our unethical thoughts have on our lives, and therefore other people's lives, is much more consistent and powerful than most of us know. Because we don't know that, we end up being lazy and sloppy around our thinking.

There's a Buddhist text called the Vitakka-saṅṭhāna Sutta, which is about the importance and the methods of dropping attachment to negative, unhealthy thinking. In it, the Buddha said that it's important that you come to the point when you only think what you want to think, and never think what you don't want to think. He says that an experienced meditator should be able to do that. Now, it can require a lot of work to get there, but the first step in doing the work to get there is the realization of how important it is.

Many of us have the impression that our thoughts are impotent: "I'll just think this thought. It's not useful or true, but that doesn't matter because thinking doesn't matter." In modern times, we tend to invalidate the subjective world. That half of the world isn't real, we think. That's why I use the phrase, "compromised conscience and half-hearted happiness." This is a good example of compromised conscience and half-hearted happiness, that "I won't do it, but I'll think it, and that doesn't matter, and it's not possible to overcome negative thinking in any case." But it does matter. And we can do something about it.

There are two enormous benefits to the experience of not having those thoughts. The less powerful -- this is going to be the less powerful one -- is that suddenly, it will become easier to behave in beautiful ways, because there won't be a conflict between our inner behaviors and our outer behaviors. It is going to become much easier to be beautiful in our outer behaviors, which means that we can make further changes internally, and those will be expressed as well, and we will gain the great joy of integrity.

When we talk about ethics, it isn't that there's some static way of

living that's just better and right. I believe that we should be making ethical adjustments constantly, incessantly, from now until when we die. There won't be a day when we get it right, for two reasons. One, we have the humility to know that it's hard to achieve purity, but even if we attain Buddhahood, nonetheless, the way we behave changes because the world is changing.

You see that in the Buddha's own lifetime. He made rules which he later changed because things were changing. The world was changing. Society was changing, partially because his teaching was changing it, but also, society just changes. We're constantly making adjustments. If we approach this in a healthy way, then there's a never-ending opportunity for further progress and creativity.

There is always something that we should be doing that we're not doing, or that we shouldn't be doing and that we are doing. Again, this is true partially because we have work to do on our own ethics, but even for buddhas, things are always changing, so behavior needs to change. This moment is the opportunity to do that. Today is the day. We should be incessantly, constantly making these changes. We should make these changes, and we should make them quickly and completely.

We want to take a small change, small enough that we can make the change completely and immediately. Peace Pilgrim does not recommend making a change over a long time. You make a change in a moment. That's it. This is the last time. Never. End it. Define a small enough change that you can do that.

With something like thinking, maybe you can't say "I'll never again have a negative thought." There are certainly people who have achieved that, who have gone decades without a single negative thought, literally. That exists. Peace Pilgrim was one of them. But that may be overwhelming to us, so we make a smaller commitment. We say, "Okay, from now on, never again will I have a negative thought between 8 o'clock and 8:01 in the morning. Ever. That's it. I am making the change. That's it. For one minute a day, I won't tolerate a single negative thought. That may be hard. I may have to turn on really loud positive music and yell positive things to the world, just

yell 'Thank you' 60 times," once a second. Then, good news, the minute is over, go back --

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: -- to misery.

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: You know, that is fine. But make the change. And good news: when our thinking is changed, it will be much easier to make change in our outer behaviors.

The other, which is even more powerful, is that you'll be happier. This is something I saw there in the cabin. There are things in my life that are hard, that are not the way I want them to be, and I would think about that. Eventually, there was a point when I thought, "Wait a second, I already suffer from these things. I'm in a cabin without these things. This is my chance to not suffer. I can suffer a month from now, or whenever I go back; I can go back and suffer. Good news, me: I'll be around people who are doing things that cause me pain, and I can suffer a lot when those people do those things, when these situations happen. But now, let's not suffer." And those thoughts faded.

When we have these thoughts, oftentimes, they are not serving any purpose. They are causing us suffering. And we get to drop them and be happier. There are these two kinds of good news. Externally, behavior changes are easier when our thinking is cleaned up. Internally, we are happier even before the behavior changes happen. The internal getting better has a larger impact on the world, because that impact is an impact on everyone that we meet. They're generally impacted without knowing it, yet, even without knowing why, they're a little bit happier. Then their decisions are made a little better. Therefore, their actions impact the world in a different way. We have to pay close attention to see this. But until it is seen, until you've made the change, we have trouble seeing how much power thinking has, and so we have to have faith to begin. Is that useful?

PARTICIPANT: Yes. But I struggle a lot.

SORYU FORALL: Right, exactly. So struggle. That's fine. We didn't get there. We went through about ten steps, depending on how you count it, steps that we could do. But one of the later steps works with this. There's that the point about not having a negative thought, but as we train ourselves, we have a negative thought anyway, and then it's hard to bring your attention back to something like your breath or a positive thought or whatever focus space you have defined, whatever you're doing at the time. That's hard. It's also hard because you can get lost in those thoughts and spend who knows how long in them. That's all a struggle.

One of the steps is that when your attention goes there, bring it back. Then it goes there again, and then you bring it back, right?

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

SORYU FORALL: One of the challenges is that, if you want to really take this path far, then make that process fun, like a game: "Oh, I wonder if I can do this -- oh, negative thought, can I bring attention back to focus? -- I did it! And again? No, I didn't do it, okay, another chance is coming right up!" It's fun.

I play tennis a lot. This is like tennis. Hitting the ball is fun. Maybe you miss. Okay, good news, there's another one coming, try again. You miss again, okay, you missed, no problem. Or you hit it in, that's fun too. In any case, it's fun to play tennis. Concentration should be fun in the just the same way. Sometimes we maintain it, sometimes we don't, but in any case, the game, the exertion, is fun.

Integrity comes up just because we're working on it, and that integrity is fulfilling. Rather than suffering the negative thinking, we get to indulge in the positive experience of having integrity. That's fantastic.

It's fun setting the thoughts of hatred aside, "Lost, back, lost, back, lost, back, what an adventure, here we go, wow." Thinking of greed, "Oh, I want this thing, why can't I have this thing that I want? Oh, set it aside, ha! I did it." It gets to be like a game, and that fun is essential

if you want to go far on this path.

It sounds like the struggle isn't as rewarding as it is difficult. I advise you to look for the reward, not from succeeding, but from struggling. Make the exertion more enjoyable than difficult. That doesn't mean it's not difficult. It can be really difficult, but it can also be fun.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I'll tell you, it's nice to make a game into something that you're focused on for something to change, yeah.

SORYU FORALL: Yes, this is really important, it should be fun, because the challenge needs to give us pleasure. Otherwise we look for pleasure in negative thinking. There's a certain amount of pleasure that we get out of negative thinking.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, that's the problem.

SORYU FORALL: When it stops being hard, it doesn't mean there's no exertion. We want to be happy, we want to rest. Your mind is going to search for happiness and ease. Whatever you do, it's going to keep on trying to be happy and get rest. When it is having the negative thinking, it's trying to be happy, trying to do the easy thing. That's actually what it's doing, and there's nothing wrong with those goals. You're doing your best and the goal is good, but there isn't much skill in achieving the goal. You say, "I don't know how to be happy right now, but wait, I could think negatively about this thing, and then I'd have some happiness, some relief."

If you have some fun exerting yourself in this way, then that starts to fill the need of happiness so the pull towards the negative thinking decreases. And beyond that, we discover that a little bit of effort makes life much easier, so in the long-term, and even in the medium term, this effort results in less effort. I don't know of anything that saps our strength more than negative, complainy thinking. Does that make sense?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, totally.

SORYU FORALL: You're beating the negative thinking in two ways.

You're beating it because you're getting better and better at bringing your mind back, but you're also beating it because you already have the thing that it offers you. It doesn't have a good negotiation position anymore. It can't say, "You won't be happy unless you pay attention to me." It can't say, "I am the path of least resistance." You're already happy, and you already are in a place of less resistance.

If you just keep on going in this way, there's a point when this is actually simple. It's an ordinary experience. It's not an amazing experience, and it is a life-changing experience. It's simply ordinary, that the offer on the table, the fun of bringing your attention back is simply more than the fun of negativity. The negative thinking can't provide as much happiness as this, and then the conflict just vanishes.

PARTICIPANT: Oh, I see.

SORYU FORALL: The moment that happens is ordinary. It's like you go to the store and there's this item and that item. This one is a better item at a lower price, so you just put it in your shopping cart, and it's not a big experience that you tell people about later.

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: Not impressive. That sense of exertion is experienced as rewarding, and is somewhat exhilarating.

PARTICIPANT: Okay. Well, thank you.

2ND PARTICIPANT: Even with bad pancakes, there's still the maple syrup.

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: Exactly. Even with bad pancakes. Pancakes are a big part of my life. I've made pancakes since I was a kid, and when I was a kid, I made bad pancakes. You could imagine. A little kid in the kitchen, and my mother would try to help me. I didn't want that: "I am going to make pancakes the way I want to." So I would. It was such an interesting thing to do that I loved the pancakes even more.

Apparently, I don't remember it this way, but everyone else in my family does, apparently the pancakes that I made were terrible.

Really bad. They were awful because I tried all of the ingredients in the kitchen. I didn't know what goes into good pancakes. I would put anything in, just to check. Orange juice, rice, vinegar -- I was very open-minded.

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: It was years, I think, before I discovered baking powder.

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: I was just going to try this in the kitchen. I know there's flour, so I'd put the flour in it, and then it was open season. What's this, what's that? Vanilla, just pour it in.

2ND PARTICIPANT: Ewww.

SORYU FORALL: There it is, vanilla. These are going to be vanilla pancakes. Have you tried pancakes with a whole container of vanilla? That's a lot of vanilla.

I would have a great time making terrible pancakes. But, significantly, I thought they were good. I loved the pancakes every day. I don't have any memory of making bad pancakes. I remember making delicious pancakes, and I didn't know why no one would eat them. I thought they were just being nice, letting me have all of the great pancakes. I did all the work, after all. But I wondered why everyone ate the pancakes my father made, even though he had worked hard on them, too.

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: "You made them, you can have them, it's fine."

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: "Fine, more for me."

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: "But we'll have daddy's pancakes."

(Laughter.)

SORYU FORALL: It's the same way with meditation. When we start off, we're going to make terrible pancakes; but it's fun just to make pancakes. If you're having fun just making pancakes, then strangely, even the bad pancakes are good. You will enjoy them, even though you will enjoy the ones you make in a few years more, because they actually will be good, and you had fun making them.

That's the exhilaration that you want to find in the process of purifying your mind. Then, yes, you have maple syrup too. Vermont maple syrup, yes?

PARTICIPANT: Of course.

PARTICIPANT: It's kind of like when you first start meditating, and then you discover a new suffering for whatever reason in your meditation, but then you or another teacher introduces you to curiosity. That transforms everything.

SORYU FORALL: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: Then you actually can have fun being curious, and it changes everything.

SORYU FORALL: That curiosity is another element of this fun, or exhilaration, or excitement. It's the same. This word in Pali is "piti," and it has all of those meanings together.

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

SORYU FORALL: I am not an expert translator, but I believe the best translation of that word is "exhilaration," but you could say "curiosity" or "interest" or "fun." Professionals usually translate it as

“rapture.” It is very important.

Because people don't use piti, we don't have any substitute, any other option, than sensual pleasure. That means the best way forward is materialism, and that leads to the extinction of much of life on Earth. If we cultivate this experience, we at least have another option than the underlying craving that most people have, that is depleting our planet of life. Meditation is that important. To experience this happiness and ease and fun is actually a radical political move.

It's a fundamental shift in our way of perceiving life to find a kind of pleasure that's greater than sensual pleasure. Since we don't have that, we have our economy, and the military, and everything that is destroying our beautiful home. This happens because we will search for happiness. You don't get to choose; you're going to search for happiness, you're going to try to get it. You need a way to fulfill happiness that leads beyond searching for and fabricating states of happiness. That's how we save the world.

Framework for Practice

Shortly after Forall's return, we had a group of prospective residents come to visit the Monastic Academy for a weekend. Forall began the weekend by delivering a talk containing a conceptual framework for practice at the Monastic Academy, an adaptation of Shinzen's Unified Mindfulness system for our purposes of full-time training. Knowing that I had not received the benefit of such a talk before coming to train with him, I thought that this was an immense gift to the potential residents, who, as he pointed out, were considering giving their lives to practice these teachings. He structured the talk around the numbers one through seven⁵: seven sets of items that are useful for training here, and for following a spiritual path more generally.

When he gave the talk, he repeatedly asked the potential residents, at every step, "Does this make sense? Do you understand?," which I have largely removed. He said during the talk that he said that he asked the question "'Does that make sense?'... a lot because I want to be sure that you're really following, because if you're not, then you should interrupt. I won't be offended. Feel free to ask questions."

Transcript

This will be an overview of the practice that we use here, which we'll have an opportunity to explore later this evening. This system of practice was developed by a teacher named Shinzen Young, who lives in the area. He is very involved in what we do. You will have the chance to meet him if you spend just a little bit of time here.

He has made many different iterations of this system over the years. It is currently called Unified Mindfulness. The reason he called it Unified Mindfulness is that he has done his best to create a form of mindfulness that integrates the various spiritual mystical traditions of the world, bringing them together into one framework that people can use. With this framework, people can take whatever practice they already have, and make it even more effective. It also allows different

⁵ Forall later added a number Zero to the Framework - see the Overview.

people to have a conversation with each other about their practice in a way that makes sense to everyone. He is very clear that he wants to use the practice that he has created in order to guide people to awakening, to what he calls classical enlightenment, which is a very deep experience.

We use it because we can include many different styles of practice with it. But we also have our own unique reasons for and ways of using it. Something that we emphasize here, which I mentioned when we had tea downstairs just now, is the vow: using that awakening, that enlightenment, to be of service. Therefore, as we move into this practice, it is important to know that I and we emphasize the question of giving our lives: "How is it possible for me to give my life to Great Love? How is that possible? How can that be done? How can I live a life that I can't currently imagine that is connected to all living things?" We use this system to bring us to a deep experience so that we can do a better job expressing the love that we have for life on Earth, for all living things. This is important to clarify up front, as we enter this path.

As we throw ourselves in, as we give ourselves to this more and more, there are various approaches that we need to use. The approaches that I'm going to talk about right now are those of Awakening and Responsibility.

Awakening is enlightenment, insight, clarity. Responsibility is service, dedication, the ability to make a difference in the world. It is very important that these function together. Right now, because we're here in the Zendo, and we're talking about a certain kind of practice, what I will be discussing is primarily this side, the Awakening side. There is a practical use in splitting them apart, as long as we then bring them back together.

How do we actually achieve this Awakening side? How is that actually done? There are a few different techniques that we use, and you can divide them up in a number of different ways. But it is quite useful to divide them up into some small number of ways, a small enough number that you can talk about them. The number that we're using right now is four, although that can change. One of the

interesting qualities of the system that Shinzen has made is that it is constantly changing. I like this because there is a humility there, that we're doing our best, but someone will give a suggestion, and we'll realize, "Oh, that's true, we should do it that way."

This is one style of talking about it; maybe next week, we will have another one. But I think that this will be useful to go over. As we're trying to move toward the sense of Awakening, one of the things that is very important for us to do is cultivate certain qualities. Now, if we're aiming for Great Love, then we can, as we sit in the Zendo and even as we practice through the day, we can cultivate feelings of friendliness, of compassion, of love.

For example, it is possible to bring that up right in our bodies. It is also possible to say loving things; to use a mantra, for example, that helps us to feel the sense of love. Or we might cultivate images in our minds. This is very common, for example, in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition: to see very clearly images of beings, entities, who represent Great Love, so that that can be a part of our lives.

But we can cultivate other things: a sense of peace in our bodies, or a sense of energy. In fact, when we are practicing Responsibility, when we're changing the world through actions, that is still a kind of Cultivation.

Before I continue, does everything make sense to the two of you so far? This is a basic way that we can do a spiritual practice. We can intentionally cultivate certain qualities.

This is a very common tradition through the world. Prayer is another example of a kind of cultivation. You're praying for something, you want a certain thing to happen, and you're going to bring up specific words in your mind, specific feelings in your body, in the hope that somehow that might help. Maybe it will help directly, or maybe it will help you to take better actions so that that will happen. That is a kind of Cultivation. When we try to encourage ourselves to have more positive thoughts, that's a kind of Cultivation. If we set certain goals, and remind ourselves to do it, that's a kind of cultivation. Therefore, you see this is very fundamental as an approach to a spiritual path.

With Cultivation, we cultivate certain qualities, certain content. Another fundamental method that we might use is to Observe. We're not cultivating anything. We're not trying to make a certain thing happen in terms of what we're experiencing, but we are trying to make a certain thing happen in terms of how we're experiencing. We're going to observe what is happening. That would mean that we're not saying I'm going to change it, but we are saying I want to carefully see it, carefully perceive it, accurately perceive what's happening.

What would this be? Well, maybe you've tried a certain technique called a body scan. That would mean that you attend to how different parts of your body are feeling at this time. Have you ever tried that? Maybe not. Yes, so now you're doing it. Maybe my face feels this way, my neck feels this way, my chest feels this way, my belly feels this way, my legs feel this way, hands feel this way. Now you know.

You are not trying to change how you feel, which you would do with Cultivation. You'd try to make yourself feel, for example, love, maybe through your whole body. Observation, you're not trying to change it. You are observing it very carefully. Because you're observing it so carefully, you gain clarity about what's happening; because you have that clarity, because you're attuned to what is really happening, you gain two benefits, even in terms of this, of coming to Great Love.

One is that you can see what the obstructions are. You need that information. It can be hard to gain that information while you're cultivating, because you're manipulating with cultivation. With this, you are not manipulating what you're experiencing.

But furthermore, with observation taken far enough, you can perceive that the world is Great Love. You can see that that is there. Even though it has been in front of us and inside of us this whole time, we never noticed it because we weren't experiencing this moment clearly enough. We were experiencing our assumptions and our preferences very strongly, so we couldn't see what was beyond or before our assumptions and our preferences.

We have the Observation technique. Observation is a very good partner with the Cultivation technique. Each of these has many

different varieties, of course, but you can see how they are fundamentally different in approach. Science is very good at Observation. When you do a scientific experiment, it's very good at observing: "Ah, that's what is happening", right? This is a fundamental approach to understanding. Cultivation, observation.

But there is a further technique, which is to Inquire. You ask questions. When you're asking questions, you are bringing up something, but it is not what you expect it will be, because it is a question. You are looking for an answer that you haven't seen.

Now this inquiry, this inquiring, happens in lots of different ways. Of course, a scientist will have a question, say, "What is the reason that this phenomenon happens?" Then they'll move into Observation to try to learn that. If you go to someone and say "What's the schedule? What time are we supposed to be there?", you're doing inquiry. You're asking about things, and you don't know what's going to come back, and you don't have any particular predetermined preference. It isn't like cultivation, where you want a certain result. With Inquiry, you don't know what the result is. This is a very common practice.

Maybe you've heard of Ramana Maharshi. He was from Tamil Nadu, in South India, and I was in South India, so I speak a similar language, Kannada. He would ask the question, "Nānu yāru?" which I believe is pronounced "Nān yār" in Tamil. Nānu is me, and yāru is who; so "Nānu yāru?" means "Who am I?" He'd recommend that you ask that question, and ask that question, "Nān yār?", "Nān yār?" continually investigating, "Who am I?" Then you get a certain answer, and then you say, okay, that's a good answer, but even deeper than that, "Who am I?"

I recommend that you fully accept each answer but then go beyond it until you aren't even sure what the question means anymore. "I'm a good person." "Okay, good! Good answer." Then you ask it again: "But who am I?" Then you get another answer. "I'm a bad person." "Okay, good answer, but who am I?" You say, "I'm no person." "Oh, that's an interesting answer too. But who am I?" You keep on diving deeper and deeper.

Or there are koans, which are designed to make it impossible for us to understand the answer intellectually, or with our heads. Maybe you've heard of koans, a Japanese spiritual practice, originally developed in Tang Dynasty China, coming to maturity in the Song, and developed into a curriculum by Hakuin Zenji in Edo period Japan. Questions are asked of you that don't make any sense, and then you ask that question of yourself again and again and again.

One of the most famous koans is, "What was your original face before your mother or father were born?" They would say, "What did you look like before your parents were born?" You have to actually answer that question to the teacher.

Or in another koan, a Zen master, Wakuan, was looking at a picture of Bodhidharma, and asked a question. There's a picture of Bodhidharma downstairs, you may have noticed it. It's where we had tea. He has a big beard, remember? In any case, you can look. He has a beard. The Zen master went up to the picture and asked, "Why does that man have no beard?" This question is a koan; it's inquiry.

I am not teaching Zen; I am not a Zen teacher. I have neither the qualifications nor the intention to teach Zen. But we can consider koan practice to be an inquiry technique, and the significance of that inquiry, asking "Who am I?", or any question, is to encourage us to dive down to see what we haven't seen. This is a fundamentally different technique from Observing or Cultivating. You're not Observing without interference, and you're not Cultivating something specific, you are questioning, deeply questioning, and eventually, you don't even know what you're questioning. You're just questioning. Then, finally, the meaning of the question clarifies independent of, and beyond, human knowledge and thought. You can then begin to come to terms with the answer, you can come to terms with the fact that there is an answer, and that human thought is merely the reflection, the shadow, the residue, the uncompleted aspect, of that real answer.

The final technique of the four is what we call Do Nothing. Sometimes, you don't use any technique at all. Sometimes there is no technique. If you're talking about Cultivation, you're interested in

improving two things: you want to improve what you're experiencing, and you want to improve how you're experiencing.

That you want to improve what you're experiencing means you want to experience more happiness, more love, more energy, more peace. That you want to change how you're experiencing means that you (1) want to experience it with more Concentration, you want to be more focused, not distracted; (2) you want to be more Clear, meaning that you can track with increasing precision what is happening right now, and (3) you want to have more Equanimity, which means that you accept things as they arise, and you let go of things as they pass away, without clinging or resistance.

These three, Concentration, Clarity, and Equanimity⁶, these three skills are what we're cultivating, along with cultivating the content of what we're experiencing. For example, we want to feel love, and we want to concentrate on that love. We want to feel love and feel it just as it is right now, truly. We also want to have equanimity, which means maybe other things will arise too. We might not feel love only. Anger might come up, or frustration, or exhaustion. Well, let that come up. You don't fight it, you don't resist it, and yet you continue to concentrate on whatever love is present. You're cultivating these three skills, and you're cultivating positive content in your awareness.

With each of the techniques, there are two possibilities. You might change what you're experiencing, and you might change how you're experiencing. When you do Observation, you are not trying to change what you're experiencing. But you are trying to change how you're

⁶ When Forall talks about Concentration, Clarity, and Equanimity, he is matching Shinzen's system, Unified Mindfulness. But we talk about these three characteristics in another, very important way: as Wisdom, Love, and Power. Clarity corresponds to Wisdom; Concentration to Power; and Equanimity to Love. We say that the integration of wisdom, love, and power is the skill of becoming trustworthy.

Concentration / Power: Our attention is the basis of our decisions, so power over attention is power over behavior. The most important type of attention to control is one's own. Therefore, concentration is power. Clarity / Wisdom: Wisdom is knowing things as they are. Clarity is knowing this moment's sensory experience accurately, and is the foundation of all other forms of knowing. Equanimity / Love: Conditional love is caring for living things; unconditional love is non-conflict. Sometimes we develop conditional love in cultivation techniques, but we always cultivate fundamental unconditional love, which is not pushing and pulling on perception itself.

experiencing. You're trying to change how you're experiencing, because you want to observe with Concentration, with Clarity, and with Equanimity.

But with Observation, you're not concerned about improving the content of what you're observing. You want to be clear about it, but you're not trying to change it. If you're doing an Observation technique of a body scan, for example, and pain arises in your leg, do you try to do anything about that? No. There's just pain, and you have Equanimity with that. If joy arises, you do not try to increase the amount of joy, or to hold onto it. It is just joy arising.

You are not changing what you're experiencing, but you do want to be very concentrated on that pain. You want to focus on it, and you want to then clarify, "What does it really feel like to be in pain?" We find that as we clarify it, that what it actually feels like is what it already was, but we perceive what we hadn't perceived before.

It's like if you look at this wall. Whether you've never been in this room before, or even if you've been in this room for hundreds of hours, everyone here can look at one of these walls and see something we've never seen before. Every one of us. I have seen in the last few seconds about a dozen things I never noticed before about that wall, and I've looked at it hundreds of times. Did I put those things there? No. I see a shiny place I never noticed before. Did I go up and rub some oil there? No. I didn't change it, and yet, even though it was already there, I noticed it because of Observation. I didn't try to change the wall, but by observing it, I saw what I hadn't seen before.

Inquiry is very hard to explain, so I won't.

With Do Nothing, you do not try to change what you're experiencing. You're doing nothing, after all. You do not try to change how you're experiencing. Again, you're doing nothing. In fact, you're not even trying to do nothing.

With the Do Nothing technique, any time that the intention to control your attention arises, you drop it. If you're trying to Do Nothing, you drop that intention, just like that. If you're trying not to think about

something, drop that intention. If you're trying to think about something, drop that intention. If you're trying to feel better, drop that intention. If you're trying to concentrate, drop that intention. If you're trying to clarify, drop that intention. If you're trying to have equanimity, drop that intention. If you're searching for intentions so you can drop them, drop that intention.

Yes, don't even try to find intentions to drop. Any time you notice the intention arising, though, then drop it. It is very natural to ask, "Well, what if I can't? What if I have to try to drop the intention, I have to work at it?" Don't! There it is. Drop the intention to drop the intention.

This technique is fun because even though what I just said may have sounded like it didn't make any sense, it actually does make sense if you try it. You realize, "Oh, that technique actually makes sense."

This technique is very common around the world. You are not asked to do anything in particular. As Shinzen says, you allow insight to come to you. Or, sometimes he uses the word "God." You don't try to find God, you let God come to you.

All four of these techniques have their own value, and all four of these are particularly useful in different contexts. Imagine that I am sitting in that interview room. One person might come and say "I'm having trouble dealing with this kind of pain." What do I do? I might suggest one of these techniques to them. Another person might come in, and say "I'm having difficulty with this kind of pain." It's amazing: the exact same words. But I know them. I know their history, so I would suggest different techniques, because we are all different.

One of the most useful things about this structure is that it's adaptable. We can adapt it to the needs of a given person at a given time. This system is very formal, but the basic idea is not new. I trained in a number of monasteries, and the teachers at every one of them would be constantly adjusting techniques to fit the needs of the student. It isn't new, but it is useful that it's so systematic.

Because it is so systematic, it's a little bit hard to learn. You should be

know now that there are a lot of different details to learn here. There's some work up front that you have to put in to learn it before it gets fun. Because you have to put in some work, and it is complicated, with lots of details and definitions to learn, it can feel overwhelming to some people. But it is worth it in the end.

(Then one of the potential residents asked Forall to explain Inquiry.)

Well, good news. As we talked about downstairs, we take hypocrisy very seriously around here. That question was not at all hypocritical: you inquired about inquiry. Good job. The first thing to say is you just did it, so you know what it is. Now we're just going to say out loud what you already know.

Inquiry has a Responsibility side and an Awakening side. This theme could be applied to any of these techniques. Regarding Inquiry in terms of Responsibility, if you want to get stuff done in the world, then you ask questions like, "Where is the supermarket?" Whatever you need to ask, you ask to people who might know.

That's a worldly form of inquiry, or a Responsibility form of inquiry. You use it because you want to be able to get stuff done more effectively. There is also an Awakening side, or a spiritual, a transcendent aspect of inquiry, and that's the kind that I was talking about. You ask a question that a human being can't answer. You ask a question that the human mind can't figure out, and because of that, you're put in a position where you're forced to Awaken to a mind greater than the one that you're currently identifying with.

You are forced to. The question forces you to. Many people who do Inquiry have the sense of becoming more and more confused, until you get to the point when you don't even think the question itself has meaning anymore. For example, if you ask, "Who am I?", "Who am I?", "Who am I?", after a while, you don't even know what it means anymore. Yet the question is being asked. It is encouraging us to open up to a perspective greater than the one that we are accustomed to.

Does any of that answer your question, or did I miss the point? You sure? Nothing left out? Okay. If you realize that something needs to

be clarified, then just let me know, okay? Now I am inquiring, you see, so as to not to be a hypocrite.

(Laughter.)

Any other questions on these four⁷, or on these three, or on these two, or on this one? Okay. Very good. Then we're going to move on to five. We're on a roll.

There are five kinds of experiences that are particularly worth knowing about consciously. Of course, we have these experiences all the time. I am not going to say any experience that you haven't had before. While we don't always analyze our experience in this way, doing so turns out to be very helpful - not from a metaphysical perspective, necessarily; but just from a practical perspective, it is very useful to be able to divide our experience into these categories.

One aspect of it is See, Hear, and Feel. In this case, we're going to include the chemical senses, smelling and tasting, in Feel, in body experience. We actually have all five senses in these three: Seeing, which for human beings is very important (not for all living things, but for human beings, seeing is extremely important); Hearing, also very important to us; and Feeling, which, as we practice, often becomes more and more important to us.

It turns out to be surprisingly useful to intentionally start to analyze your experience in terms of these three gates, these three doorways, these three mediums, or media, of experience.

Now there is nothing here that is confusing. These are all experiences that you have had before. What's an example of something that you see?

(One potential resident responded, "The trees outside.")

The trees outside, exactly. Anything else?

⁷ If you are interested in learning more about the four approaches or Four Ways, you can watch Forall's Four Ways Forward one-day retreat on YouTube.

(One potential resident responded, "The room.")

The room, excellent. Anything else?

Well, let me add one more here. Both of the things you just said are in a category that we call "Out." You saw things in the outer world, outside of yourself, didn't you? Anything else that you might see?

(One potential resident said that you might "realize something.")

Yes, see as in realize is interesting. Right now, we're dividing things up into just sensory experience. You could realize something by seeing, in a way. But usually, when people say see as in realize, they could mean see, even though they experienced something through hearing. That's a little bit different.

Anything else that you might see sometimes?

(One potential resident responded, "Eye floaters.")

Ah, yes, very good, the eye floaters, the flowers in the sky. Do you have eye floaters, sometimes?

(The potential resident responded, "Yes.")

Yes, I have them often, too. They're very famous in Buddhism. But I suppose that's still Out.

Anything else that you can see that isn't Out, that isn't in the outer world? Well, I will make a suggestion. Why don't you close your eyes. Do you see anything now? Do you still see, or did seeing just stop? What do you think? Did seeing end, or did you still see something? What was it?

(One potential resident responded, "It's dark.")

Oh yes, it is dark. Excellent. It's dark, very good. Actually, let's do another one. Close your eyes, and I'll just say a word. Ready? Banana. Did you just see anything? What did you see?

(One potential resident responded, "A banana.")

Excellent. That is what we'd call "In." We see things in our minds. Does that make sense? Okay, good. Let's do it again.

Hear: what are some things that you hear?

(One potential resident responded, "The birds.")

The birds. Is that out or in?

(One potential resident responded, "Out.")

Out. Anything else you hear?

(One potential resident responded, "Thoughts.")

Thoughts. You can hear thoughts. That is exactly right. Is that in or out?

(One potential resident responded, "In.")

That is In. You can Hear a lot of other things, but this division within Hear encompasses all of that range. One of the things that people talk about a lot with meditation is mental chatter. People will say, "I am trying to sit, but I have these incessant thoughts that come up; what do I do?" I get that question a lot.

(Laughter.)

But a lot of the time, we still Hear Out; that's happening right now as I'm speaking, for example.

What about Feel? What is something that you Feel?

(One potential resident responded, "This blanket.")

Excellent, the blanket, for example. You touched it and now you feel it. Is that Out or In?

(One potential resident responded, "Out.")

That is Out. Anything else that you can feel?

(One potential resident responded, "Emotions.")

Emotions, that is right. Is that Out or In?

(One potential resident responded, "In.")

That's In. You can See and Hear the world, and you can See and Hear thoughts. You have visual thinking and auditory thinking. You can Feel the outer world, and you can Feel emotions, what people call feelings. If you divide things up this way, it is very, very useful in a number of ways.

First of all, if you can divide things up, it is very easy to determine what you're going to concentrate on right now, and to know if you're doing it. Let's say that you're going to attend to Feel Out. Then it is very easy to know if you are doing that, because if you start paying attention to emotions, you know that's not in this focus space.

It also helps with Clarity, because even if you're not attending to that, even if you're attending to emotions or thinking, you know what that is, and that awareness of what you're attending to right now is Clarity. Awareness of what's arising at this time, tracking that, exploring that, is Clarity. You can be easily aware of what it is.

Then finally, Equanimity: as long as you can observe what's happening in terms of these categories rather than observing what's happening in terms of their content, it is relatively easy to maintain Equanimity, which means the ability to not fight with what's happening. When you get involved in the content, then it is easy to start fighting with it. But if there are thoughts in your mind, "I'm this" and "They're that," and "This should have happened, but it didn't, and now I have to do this," all that's happening, and you can hear it. If you're listening to that as content, it is very hard to have equanimity with it.

But if you're listening to all that and it's just Hear In, then it's just another thing you're hearing, like the birds; it just happens to be on the inside. Then it is relatively easy to let it come and go, and then the resistance and the tightness can fall away.

Having these categories is useful. But in fact, this is not five things, right? There are actually six things. See out and see in. That's two. Hear out and hear in. That's two. Feel out and feel in. That's two. We have six different kinds of experience here.

Now that we have See, Hear, Feel, Out, and In, let's move on to seven. There are two more that I want to talk about, and then, everyone will congratulate you because we've covered an enormous amount of material.

(Laughter, coming from the residents, who knew that it was.)

Are you tired?

(The potential residents indicated that they were not.)

No? That's amazing. This is actually a lot of material.

Flow. Flow in this case means the experience of energy. You have the experience of feeling energetic sometimes, right? You feel energetic in your body. Now, energy is something that you feel, but any time that you see something moving, that is flow. It's movement.

Consider the experience of hearing a sound. Of course, you could attend to the content of the sound. That's a bird. Or you could attend to the image of a bird that comes up. But you could also just attend to the fact that that sound is getting louder and quieter a few times each second. When you're attending to that flow, to that change, that is the experience, of flow, of energy, of a wave form. You know that a sound is a wave, right? Flow is the experience of things as waves, as changing, as energy.

You can experience Flow in terms of seeing, in terms of hearing, or in terms of feeling. A great deal of cultivation techniques are about

cultivating specific kinds of energy, especially in our bodies.

Finally, Rest: restfulness is very hard to define in general, because its various forms are quite different, but I'll give you a few examples, and then I think you'll get a sense of it. In your body, sometimes you have that energy. Maybe sometimes you're meditating and you just feel like you need to move. You can't stand this anymore, you have to get up and run away. I know I've experienced that quite a bit. But you might have a different experience. You could be very calm, tranquil, and relaxed. That experience of relaxation is what we'd call Rest.

You can see why it's a little bit hard to define this one. It has many different varieties. But if you know what they are, it all holds together somehow. You noticed when you had your eyes closed that you saw darkness. Compared to seeing objects, compared to seeing thoughts, that experience of seeing darkness is a restful experience. It is somewhat restful.

It is possible that darkness can start to swirl and move, and then we'd call it Flow. But sometimes, it is very restful: that's another kind of Restfulness. You can hear me talking, talking, talking, talking, and then I could stop talking. ... There are still sounds, but when the talking stops, you can also hear quiet. If you listen for a moment, you can hear the silence. ...

Compared to the talking, compared to the thinking, the silence is a restful state. There are lots of restful states. I have gone over just a few. But do you see how these all fit together, even though it's hard to group them all together with a description? Relaxation and silence, how are those the same? Of course, it doesn't really matter if you know how these fit together as long as you know that we can categorize them as restful. Because if you know what they are, then you can Cultivate them. Or you can simply Observe them. Also, you can deeply Inquire about them. There are a lot of interesting Inquiry techniques you can use around restfulness. Or, you can Do Nothing: let the restful states be there or change into flowing states or objects can arise, and that's fine.

We've gotten to seven, which I think is enough for now. It begins and

ends here, with the question: "How do I do this? How can my life be fully dedicated to service to all beings in the way that's most true?" Then, we say, "I don't know the answer to that question. Since I don't know the answer, I'm going to live in a setting where I'm held accountable to Awakening and Responsibility, and am asked to integrate them." This is that setting.

We develop skills in order to achieve that. These three skills are absolutely essential. We have to be able to concentrate. If we're distracted, nothing will become clear. We need the Concentration so we have the Clarity about what's happening. Once we're attuned to what's happening, we can Cultivate the ability to experience it just as it is without fighting with it, because as long as there's a sense that I'm fighting with experience, Great Love won't emerge fully. If fighting is inherent in my experience, Great Love can't emerge fully.

These four ways, Cultivate, Observe, Inquire, and Do Nothing, are a good list to begin with. We divide up our experience into manageable pieces so that this is a feasible path. It's not just a hope, it's feasible. See, Hear, Feel, In and Out are a good place to begin. It's also good to know about Flow and Rest, to know that flowing and restful states may arise.

As we do all of that, we come to be settled, tranquil. Even if there's a lot of energy, there's still peace. We come to be a little bit selfless: we stop grasping after the next better experience. We stop trying to acquire something more, and we start letting go of things. As we let go of things, we can enter a deep state called samadhi. Do you know the word samadhi? It's a deep state of concentration. Once we've done that, we're in a position to answer this question truly.

Soon we'll move into the period of interviews. Thank you for working so hard. You traveled far to be here today, and this is a lot of material to cover, so thank you for paying such close attention. Now, as we move into the practice, as the period begins, choose, from everything we've gone through, what would you like to try first? Make a selection. It doesn't matter what it is. There's no wrong choice. Just choose something and begin. Get started with that, and we'll see how it works for you.

Exultation

Forall's talks on retreat are usually centered around a particular text. Ordinarily, it is a text like the Diamond-Cutter Sutra, or a poem by St. John of the Cross. But in April 2015, he based the retreat on a text that he wrote himself. It is not a text that I understand, but I thought it might be useful to include here. Forall has said that this text is ultimately intended to be memorized.

Text (Version 1)

When we go into this, we go into it with faith that it is real. It's not made up, and it's not true only under certain circumstances. Therefore, words cannot contain it, yet even words contain it. Everything we can point at is an obstruction. Yet even to think, "Everything we can point at is an obstruction," is an obstruction.

Nothing is left out of this. A person must take one thing and totally end it. Then he can say what it is.

When we study this, we must be serious and thorough. Everything must go. What is "everything"? ALL THE WAYS IN WHICH WE SEE ARE THE THINGS THAT HAVE TO GO. Everyone has used it, has known it, since the beginning, but they still think they don't use it, don't know it. What is this "it" that I'm talking about? Those who don't know it think they know it, while those who know it actually don't know it. What a jumble I've written about knowing and not knowing. But I don't write this for no reason.

-

We see things and then we study them and see them more clearly. Things become more clear, less imagined, and a whole new world opens up. Those who are strong explore this world. We see each thing more truly, and eventually see this one thing in all things. In other words, we focus on one thing and then after study and strengthening, we see it in all things. We then let go of the idea that we are focused, and after that let go of the idea that there are things, and then we see the world for the first time.

We realize that it's like we had been watching a puppet show for our whole lives. It's like the whole thing had been a dream. Those who are unusually strong continue on and see even more truly. At this stage, we must dig down deep enough to find the bedrock. Eventually, we become comfortable in the bedrock. When we sink into it completely with nothing left out, it cracks. We finally meet the master, meet the puppeteer.

This is the time when most people quit. Most people just aren't strong enough to continue past this stage. This is terrible. Most practitioners of every art in the world believe that we should stop here. But not just arts: religions, too. In the minds of slaves, once you meet the master you are supposed to quit. We have the strength to create conflict and suffering in the world if we don't have the strength to do what must be done after we have met the master.

As the bedrock crumbles, we come to know the master. We understand his art more clearly. We realize that we have walked past him on the street every morning but just never noticed that he was the one.

We see that it is he who makes eyes see and ears hear. We see that it is he who makes love good and hate bad. We see that it is he who has perceived our lives and met our friends. And we are shocked by the first and deepest realization: those who have met him and those who have not met him are exactly the same. Oh, how proud we become! I have seen it! we chide over the heads of others. And even you are just as wonderful as me! we cry out. It's pitiful, but an important stage to experience fully. Very few are capable of continuing on beyond this without being untrue to the depth of their past experiences.

Until a person has seen through even this, he is not able to move even one step, not able to take even one breath. He hasn't even dreamed of what it would be like to understand.

A person must see and see without any sentimentality that the puppeteer is a normal guy. The puppeteer is just one more guy walking down the street. And what does it mean to be a normal guy? It means that this one, this one who pulls and releases all the threads,

the storehouse of every perception, the arbiter of every decision, the master of every action: he dies. He dies like we do. He dies. He is inside of you and outside of you, holding you as you laugh and cry and want and know, and you must kill him. Until you have killed the master, finally slicing through your own throat, it's still all a dream for you.

In truth, knowledge never arises. No one has used anything. And knowledge never fails to arise. Everyone has always been free to use whatever they want. All of this is one simple obstruction.

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Dive in and don't give up. I write in this way because I feel the drive and integrity and yearning in your hearts. If I didn't feel that, I wouldn't write this.

May every living thing be happy.

Text (Version 2)

When we go into this, we go into it with faith that it is real. It's not made up, and it's not true only under certain circumstances. Therefore, words cannot contain it, yet even words contain it. Everything we can point at is an obstruction. Yet even to think, "Everything we can point at is an obstruction," is an obstruction.

Nothing is left out of this. A person must take one thing and totally end it. Then she can say what it is.

When we study this, we must be serious and thorough. Everything must go. What is "everything"? ALL THE WAYS IN WHICH WE SEE ARE THE THINGS THAT HAVE TO GO. Everyone has used it, has known it, since the beginning, but they still think they don't use it, don't know it. What is this "it" that I'm talking about? Those who don't know it think they know it, while those who know it actually don't know it. What a jumble I've written about knowing and not knowing. But I don't write this for no reason.

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We see things and then we study them and see them more clearly. Things become more clear, less imagined, and a whole new world opens up. Those who are strong explore this world. We see each thing more truly, and eventually see this one thing in all things. In other words, we focus on one thing and then after study and strengthening, we see it in all things. We then let go of the idea that we are focused, and after that let go of the idea that there are things, and then we see the world for the first time.

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past experiences.

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A person must see and see without any sentimentality that the puppeteer is ordinary. The puppeteer is just one more person walking down the street. And what does it mean to be ordinary? It means that this one, this one who pulls and releases all the threads, the storehouse of every perception, the arbiter of every decision, the master of every action: she dies. She dies like we do. She dies. She is inside of you and outside of you, holding you as you laugh and cry and want and know, and you must kill her. Until you have killed the master, finally slicing through your own throat, it's still all a dream for you.

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Dive in and don't give up. I write in this way because I feel the drive and integrity and yearning in your hearts. If I didn't feel that, I wouldn't write this.

May every living thing be happy.

Appendix 1: Overview

With this book, we intend to share two things with the dedicated practitioner: a conceptual framework for practice, and a technique, a method for doing that practice. It will take reading the rest of this book, and real experience through your own diligent practice, to understand these sufficiently to know why you might practice in this way, and how you do it.

Still, the words that indicate both the framework and the method can be stated quite briefly, and, as you read the talks and meditations in this book, it will be helpful to have a kind of guide to the big picture. This overview is intended to provide that. Keep it handy as you read Forall's exposition of practice and his method.

Framework for Practice

- Zero Conflict: There is nothing anywhere worth holding onto. There is nothing anywhere that is comprehended. There is nothing anywhere that is mine. There is nothing anywhere that has self-existence. There is nothing anywhere that is dependable. There is nothing anywhere that supports me. This is safety. This is security. This is happiness. This is peace⁸.
- One Goal: How can I give my life completely to Great Love?
- Two Trainings: Awakening and Responsibility
- Three Skills: Concentration / Clarity / Equanimity. These are the meditative methods that cultivate the qualities of power, wisdom, and love, respectively. These three qualities, when integrated, make us trustworthy.
- Four Ways: Cultivate / Observe / Inquire / Do Nothing
- Five, Six, Seven Modes: See / Hear / Feel / In / Out / Rest / Flow

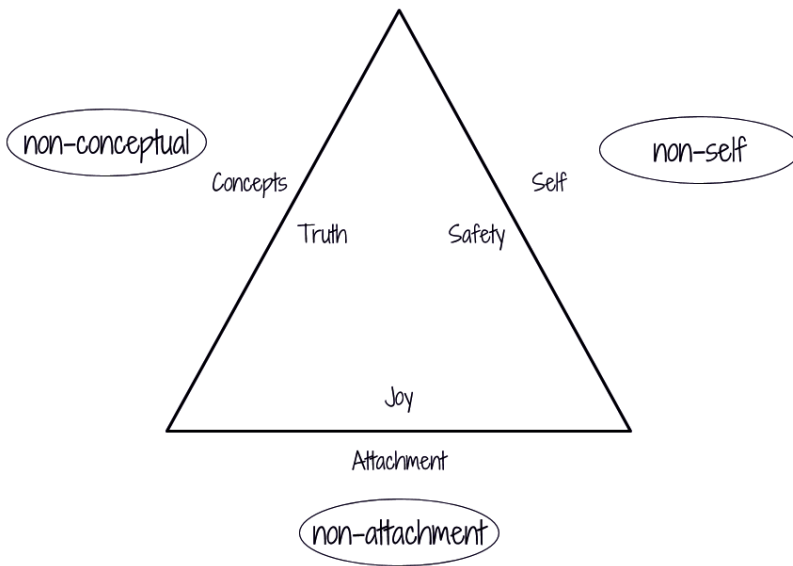
⁸ This teaching even applies to this teaching. We should use teachings, then once they have served their purpose, let them go. Yet we shouldn't be attached even to non-attachment.

Table

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Am I trying to improve the "what" of my experience by creating specific positive content?</i>	<i>Am I trying to improve the "how" of my experience by changing the way I am relating to whatever content arises?</i>
Cultivate	Yes	Yes
Observe	No	Yes
Inquire	?	?
Do Nothing	No	No

Target

The path as Forall presents it consists of two trainings, Awakening and Responsibility. When we practice for Awakening, we strive to enter a state called samadhi. Entering samadhi is essential, and is our first job of the Awakening aspect of the path. There are many ways of understanding the path of entering samadhi. Forall most emphasizes three points: cut through 1) concepts, 2) self, 3) attachment.




The Forall Method

Step 0. **How can I give my body, mind and life completely to Great Love for the benefit of all beings?** To the extent that you know the answer, let it guide your actions, so that any actions, thoughts and feelings, or aspects of your lifestyle that are not in accordance with what you already know and believe are actively put in accord.

Whether your steps are big or small, take them incessantly and completely.

To the extent that you are doing this, the following will have meaning and power.

Step 1. Check each of the following twenty points, using the five points in your body as a mnemonic device. **Align your posture, align your mind, align your breath, and rouse heroic motivations.**

	<u>Posture</u>	<u>Purify</u>	<u>Breath</u>	<u>Motivate</u>
	5 Elevated	6 Want	15 Whole Body	16 Great Renunciation
	4 Open	7 Hate	14 Playful	17 Great Compassion
	3 Centered	8 Agitation	13 Centered	18 Great Doubt
	2 Rooted	9 Stupor	12 Energetic	19 Great Energy
	1 Stable	10 Doubt	11 Calm	20 Great Faith

Step 2. **Settle awareness on the focus space⁹.** When distracted, use thinking to bring it back. If you are aware of ideas, self, or attachment (and especially the extreme case, *attachment to ideas of self*), you are missing the target. If you are aware of your focus space, you are hitting the target. Have fun. If grossly distracted, start over¹⁰.

⁹ Use the breath as the default focus space, but the focus space may change for many reasons.

Step 3. **Enjoy the challenge of self-control based on bringing your attention to the focus space and laying it on the focus space.** Spread the joyful exhilaration of *fun and integrity* through your whole body. While in this stage, attachment to things of the world becomes obsolete, so one no longer feeds structures of injustice.

Step 4. **Abandon thinking** (including subtle distraction). Spread joyful wonder of *concentration and ease* through your whole body. While in this stage, self control becomes obsolete, so one no longer feeds the perception of fighting against oneself or others, trying to fix oneself or others.

Step 5. **Abandon self.** Spread peaceful bliss of *oneness (not-two-ness) and freedom from hope-and-fear* through your whole body. While in this stage, one's mind is dead.

Step 6. **Abandon attachment.** Spread peaceful honesty of *no pleasure-and-pain and unhindered clarity due to perceptual non-interference* through your whole body. While in this stage, one's mind is gone.

Step 7. **Answer the question.** Three paths:

Affirm self and world.

Negate self and world.

Question self and world.

¹⁰ Subtle distraction is any idea or thought about the practice or your experience of it. Gross distraction is awareness of anything other than your experience of the practice, or thoughts about it (subtle distraction), without bringing your attention back within 10 seconds.

Appendix 2: Influences

Forall's teachings are influenced by a number of teachers and traditions; he is grateful for the gifts many teachers have offered him.

Before I came to train with him, I had heard of some of these influences, and I hadn't heard of others. I researched this list in order to provide a list of those influences, as well as a brief description of each of them.

Harada Roshi

Taigen Roshi, usually known as Shodo Harada, is Forall's primary teacher; Harada Roshi's teacher was Yamada Mumon Roshi. He received transmission from Mumon Roshi in 1982. He is the head abbot at Sōgen-ji, in Okayama, Japan, but he also teaches at other locations in the United States, Germany, and India. He is one of the most senior, and most deeply respected, Zen masters in the world.

Academic Science

Forall was exposed to the scientific traditions through his undergraduate education. He received a degree in Economics with a focus on Environmental Science from Williams College.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

B. R. Ambedkar was a major figure in India in the last century. He is most famous for his central role in the writing of its Constitution. Born into the most oppressed group in the caste system, Ambedkar considered his most important work to be his work against the caste system and its discrimination against the Dalit peoples (Untouchables). He converted from Hinduism, which enabled the caste system, into Buddhism, sparking mass conversions by Dalit peoples and the formation of what is sometimes called the Dalit Buddhist movement, Navayana Buddhism, or Ambedkar Buddhism. Ambedkar Buddhism considers social engagement and economic justice to be essential and central aspects of spiritual training, and is a major source of inspiration for the Monastic Academy's emphasis on

using contemplative practice to serve the world.

Bodhi-Dhamma Bhante-ji

Forall trained with Bodhi-Dhamma Bhante-ji, a teacher of Ambedkar Buddhism who has trained in Zen under Harada Roshi (see above), at the Sariputta Ambedkar Monastery in southern India.

Bhante Bodhidhamma has founded several monasteries, including Sariputta Ambedkar Monastery in southern India, where Forall trained with him. He has led movements in South India of hundreds of thousands of people, and has been arrested for protesting caste injustice.

In this way, having changed communities, he is a remarkable demonstration of the integration of deep practice and social impact. His goal is the creation of an enlightened human society that has overcome discrimination and oppression, and demonstrates justice for all people.

At Sariputta Ambedkar Monastery, Forall served as head monk, led peaceful protests and organized community efforts to overcome the injustice of the caste system. He also helped to raise thirty boys with the understanding that all are inconceivably valuable, regardless of family circumstance.

The Religious Society of Friends

Forall first learned about spirituality as a child from the Quaker Meeting in Burlington, Vermont; that Meeting happened to be the first home of the Monastic Academy. Quaker Meeting is largely silent, and ministry is delivered spontaneously by the participants, who are considered to be sharing the word or spirit of God. Quakers often refer to each other as "Friends," and their organization is also known as "The Religious Society of Friends."

Peace Pilgrim

Peace Pilgrim was a spiritual teacher and pilgrim in the last century, most well known for crossing the country multiple times as she shared

her message for peace. She vowed to "remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace, walking until given shelter and fasting until given food."

Native American Traditions

Forall has been exposed to the Lakota, Diné, and Abenaki traditions, and has had the honor of participating in several Native American ceremonies, including the Sun Dance and a four-year cycle of Vision Quests.

Shinzen Young and Basic / Unified Mindfulness

The teachings shared at the Monastic Academy and through the Center for Mindful Learning's other programs are based in Shinzen Young's Unified Mindfulness. Forall is a senior facilitator of Unified Mindfulness, and has worked closely with Shinzen to create the system through several iterations.

Zen Buddhism

Forall trained in Zen Buddhism at Sōgen-ji, under Harada Roshi. Sōgen-ji is a Rinzai Zen temple.

Appendix 3: On Posture

A central component of the Forall Method is good posture, with five specific instructions: your base should be stable; your sacrum should be rooted in that stable foundation; you should be centered and balanced; your solar plexus should be open; and the top of your spine should be elevated.

However, merely reading these words is not sufficient to understand and apply these instructions. You need to be familiar with what these look like visually, what they feel like internally, and then you need to go about making these adjustments constantly so that they become an automatic part of your meditation practice - something that you can rely on.

In other words, you can't learn good posture simply from reading a book, even this book. This book will be useful for that purpose, but the words within are ultimately insufficient. This limitation is especially true if you have not had the chance to practice with other meditators who are familiar with the many details of establishing and maintaining excellent posture.

This appendix is intended to help with the first step that is beyond words: providing a reference of visual images of good posture, as well as an indication of some of the traps of poor posture you might fall into - a caricature, if you will. I took the pictures that follow with the help of Stephanie Nam, my fellow resident at the Monastic Academy for the Preservation of Life on Earth.

It's important to know that while good posture is important, and we emphasize it for a reason, you should not expect perfection, especially to start with. I know that I have been caught in the trap of being ashamed of my posture, in a way that prevented me from making improvements to my posture (and therefore to my meditation practice). There's no need to feel bad about your posture. Simply do your best to implement these instructions, one at a time, so that they become easier and more automatic over time. We move towards excellent posture over time, with diligence, patience, and consistent

effort, rather than expecting perfection immediately.

Similarly, I would like to add the disclaimer that the pictures that intend to represent good posture are merely a claim that they are good posture - not perfect posture. They represent my own progress towards better posture, as captured at a specific time in my practice. I look forward to learning even more subtle details about how to establish and maintain excellent posture.

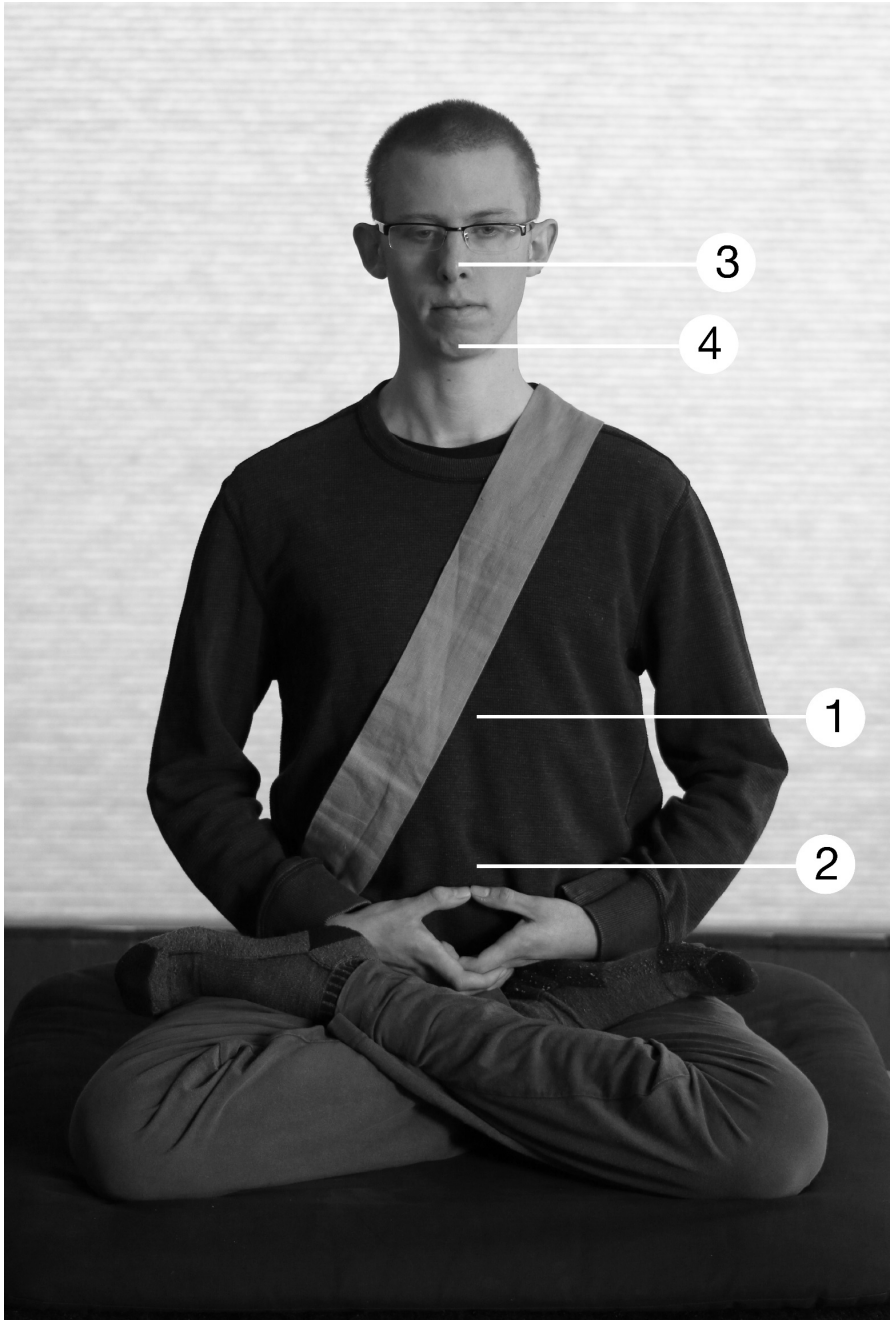


Photo A

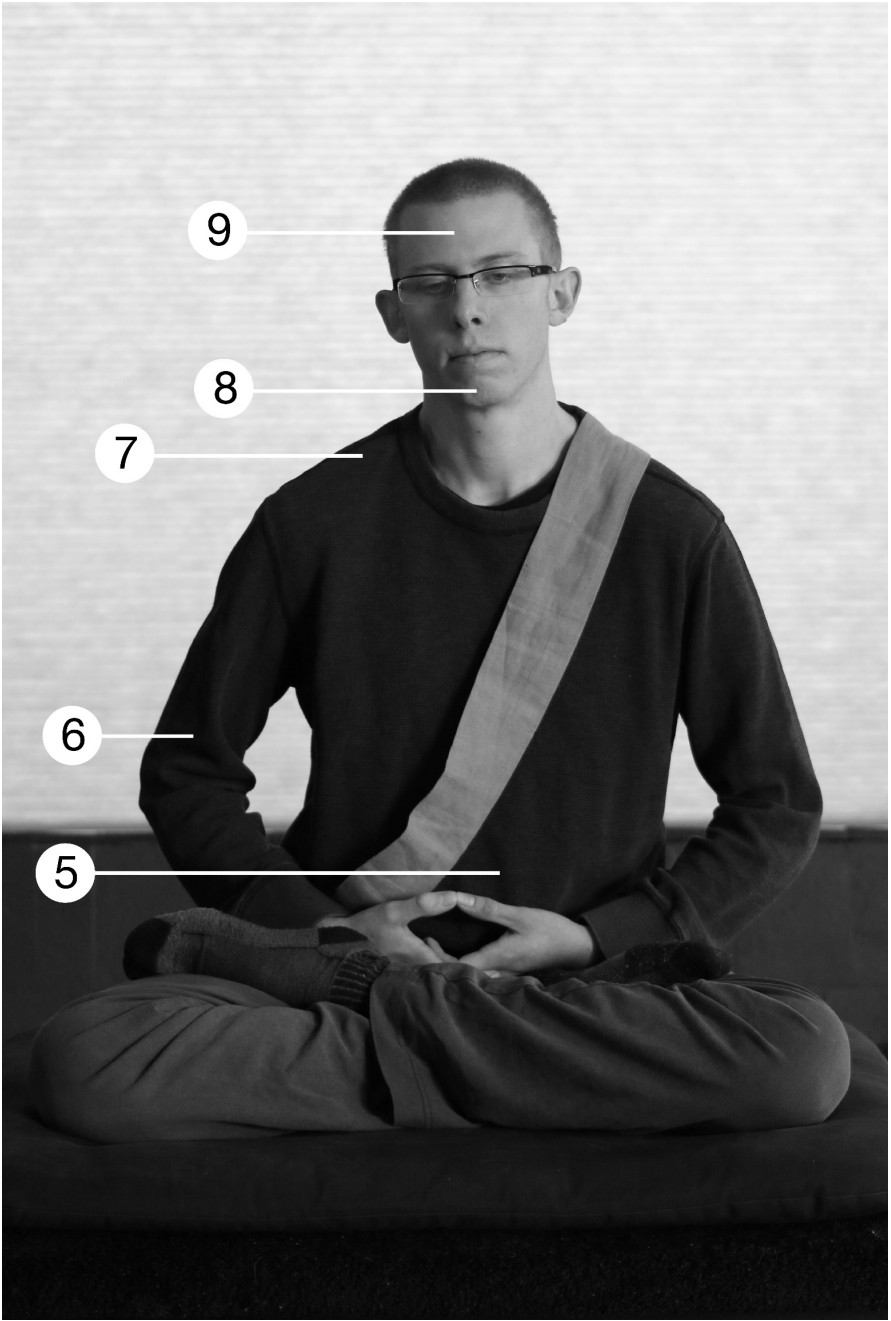


Photo B

Photo A is a frontal view of good posture; Photo B is a frontal view of poor posture. In both, I am sitting in the full lotus position. Full lotus is extremely useful and beneficial for establishing good posture, especially for establishing a stable base, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient for good posture.

Photo A (and Photo C, below) features a platform, something that Forall invented here at the Monastic Academy. The platform causes your hips to be above your knees, rather than the other way around. It also gives you a flat, even platform to put your weight on. Both of these factors assist the meditator in establishing a stable base. It is still possible to place your hips above your knees without a platform - with a cushion, a seiza bench, or, in a chair, by simply adjusting so that your knees are below your hips.

In Photo A, you can see that the lines in my shirt crease just off of where my solar plexus is, indicating that my solar plexus is open (1).

My center is centered (2), and my head is balanced (3).

Because the top of my spine is elevated, you can see that my chin tucks slightly down (4).

In Photo B, the center of my body is off-center (5), to my left and your right.

This causes the arms to be off balance (6).

My shoulders are tight and tensed (7), rather than relaxed.

My chin is not tilted with a slight downward tuck - instead, it has a slight upward slant (8).

My head is off-center, with a tilt to my right (9).

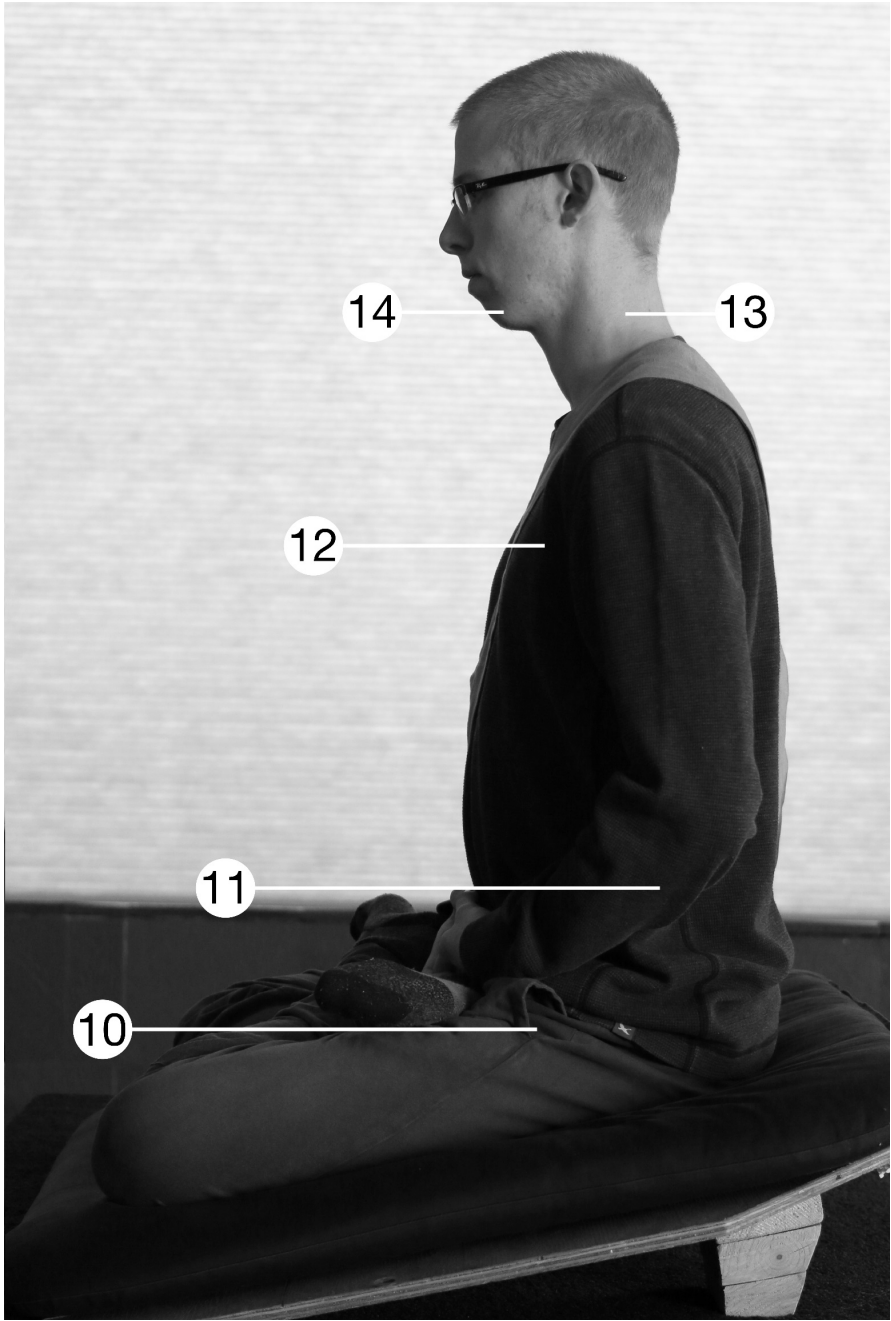


Photo C

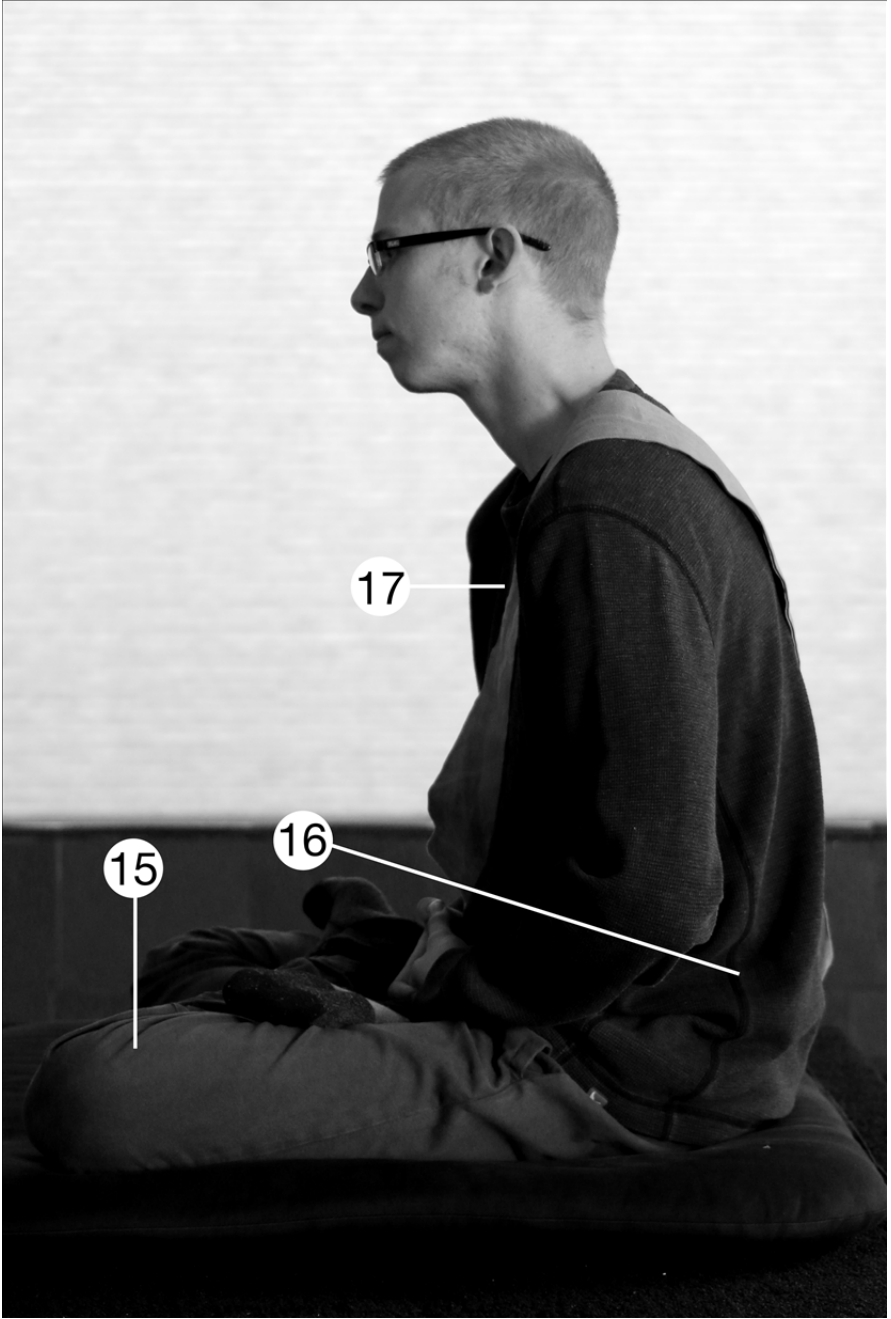


Photo D

Photo C is a side view of Photo A, demonstrating good posture; Photo D is a side view of Photo B, demonstrating poor posture.

In Photo C, you can see that my hips (10) are above my knees.

You can see that the rest of my body is rooted in this stable foundation (11). There are slight, subtle curves in my lower back (11; so that my sacrum is rooted), at my solar plexus (12; so that my chest is open), and a more obvious, but not excessive, curve at the back of my neck (13; indicating the top of my spine is elevated). This last curve also results in the slight downward tuck of the chin (14) that follows when we elevate the top of our spine.

Meditators sometimes place their knees above or even with their hips, as I have them in Photo D (15). However, having your knees below your hips (your hips above your knees) is an important way to establish a stable base and take care of the health of your body.

At both the sacrum (16) and the solar plexus (17), there is a kind of curve (outwards and inwards, respectively), but they are excessive, and the opposite curve of what is needed. My sacrum is not rooted (16); my lower back is leaning backwards (16), causing me to slouch; and my chest is not open - it is sunken and collapsed (17).

