The New Sala

July 31, 2019

It almost seems unreal. After all these many years of planning and all the delays, we’re finally here in our new cellar. It’s taken a lot of cooperation for this to work. Think of all the people who made donations, gave of their time, helped with the supervision, helped with the actual building. Something like this requires a lot of cooperation. Not the fact that it simply exists now. It’s not enough. The next step is what we’re going to do with it. And to make the most use of it, that will require cooperation as well, to make everything work. The situation has changed. You change the space in which people live, you often change their behavior. And for a while it’s going to seem very awkward. But if we come at it with goodwill and with a determination to make it work, it’s bound to work. So I hope that we all work together to realize the potential of the new space that we have. Or at least it’s for making sure that a lot of people get fed. That the building doesn’t close up and go away when people leave the kitchen or leave the dining hall. It’s still here, still available for use. A good place to meditate, a good place to do walking meditation, either in the sala or below the deck. There are lots of potentials here, so let’s do our best to make the most of them. And work together as best we can. It took determination to build this, and it will take determination to make the most of it. This is how the perfections are developed. This is how our meditation works. We have to be determined to make it work. We have to use our discernment when we run into obstacles. This is one of the reasons why in the forest tradition they don’t have a technique all laid out, where they say, “Well, just do this and don’t do anything else. Just do as you’re told and the result will come out,” as if meditation were a factory. The forest Ajahns will basically give you basic directions, but then leave a lot to your own ingenuity to figure out. As Ajahn Man once said, “If everything gets handed to you on a platter, you don’t get used to developing your own discernment, your own insight.” So that’s the first part of determination, is discernment. It applies to the meditation here as well. You’re told to stay with the breath. After two or three breaths you find that you’re thinking about something else. So what do you do? You try to figure out, “Well, how is it that the mind slips away?” And then it’s gone again. You’ve missed it. But you just keep at it. That’s the next quality of determination, is truthfulness. You decide you’re going to stick with this and see it through. So the combination of being truthful and being discerning, that’s the beginning of any good determination. Because once you’ve decided you’re really going to stick with this, then you have to figure out, “Well, what am I doing wrong? What am I missing?” I remember when I was first studying with Ajahn Phuong, he’d say, “Watch out for when the mind is about to leave.” And I told him, “Well, when the mind leaves, it leaves because I’m not aware of what’s happening. So how can I be aware of it leaving?” He said, “If you look carefully, you’ll see the signs.” So I went back and I began to realize, sure enough, there are different parts of the mind that were making decisions beneath the surface, that as soon as they had their chance, they were going to leap out and think about something else. And they were doing this thinking. It was right there. Yet there was a part of the mind that was denying it. And you begin to realize that when you’re really truthful about doing something like this, you see how the mind lies to itself. Then you have to decide, “Do I want to continue with those lies, or do I want to try something new?” This is kind of the third quality of determination, which is when you’re willing to give certain things up. You give up your old ways so you can stick with the new ones. And then finally, the fourth quality is that you learn to keep the mind at peace. The word they use there, upassama, usually applies to a nirvana. But you can train the mind in some equanimity in the meantime, some patience and endurance in the meantime. And as the Buddha says, you try to gladden the mind, so that even though you’re giving things up and you’re having to make an effort that you haven’t made before, the mind is at peace about this. This is an important part of having any goal. If you get frustrated by the fact that you haven’t reached the goal, it’s very easy to give up. But if you can be calm about it, and just stick with it, stick with it, stick with it, and don’t give in to the conversations that say, “Oh, this is going to take so long, I don’t know if I’m up for it.” Always remember that the path changes you as a person. If you stick with it, you find that you develop new strengths you didn’t have before. So maybe right now you’re not the person who could complete the work, but if you do the work, it will turn you into the kind of person who can. You have to have that kind of confidence. So try to keep the mind at an even keel, and find that spot inside. That simply watches things and observes them, and is not knocked around by them. There is that aspect of the mind. As John Sowat called it, “our quiet corner.” There’s a corner in the mind that can be at peace, even as you’re working hard, even as you’re meeting up with obstacles. You can maintain your equilibrium. And it’s that way that you see the determination through, because a lot of it has to do with persistence and endurance. And the endurance has to do with the fact that you’re not beating yourself up, you’re not adding unnecessary burdens to yourself. When there are negative things, you learn how to minimize the negative things, maximize the things that are still positive. So as you work on your meditation, keep this in mind. And as we’re working together in the new buildings, remember that every construction has its flaws, every design has its flaws. But the wise person is a person who can make little of them. And realize that there are potentials here as well that we haven’t had before. Focus on the positive. In that way, the intentions of the people who helped make this building possible will be achieved. Your intentions will be achieved. Which is the good thing about the practice, as we work on it. When in the practice, good intentions are achieved, and the goodness gets spread around. We’re not fighting against other people. We’re fighting against our own defilements. And when we do that, and we win out over them, there are no losers. In the ways of the world, some people win and other people have to lose. Some people are fighting over limited resources. But the opportunities for goodness are not limited. And the more you make the most of your opportunities, the more that goodness spreads around for other people too. So think thoughts of gratitude for the people who helped make this possible, and for those of us who have been working on this together, we can take pride in the fact that we’ve done something good. But we don’t want to stop there. We want to make the best use of this place. Just as here we are born as human beings, we want to make the best use of our minds. And if you get all the good qualities in your mind to cooperate, your determination will be achieved. And that applies both inside and out.

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