Wisdom at Work

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:01:52

Sometimes it seems very hard to improve on the silence.

This morning I was looking through the questions in the bowl, and one of those questions struck me. My talk is something of a response to a question about what wisdom is—what is the nature of wisdom?

We can have knowledge and wisdom about many things, and yet the wisdom that the Buddha offered is fairly specific. It's not the wisdom about everything we could possibly know—about how to cook or drive a car or program a computer. It's the wisdom about understanding suffering, understanding how our minds are caught, how we suffer, why we suffer. Ultimately, this wisdom that the Buddha offers becomes not just something that we learn or hear about, but actually becomes understood in our system. And that wisdom is what frees us. Wisdom in understanding what suffering is, how it functions—that understanding allows the suffering to release.

My teacher Sayadaw U Tejaniya uses this word wisdom more than just about any other teacher I had practiced with. He uses it as an activity. He speaks about wisdom doing things: wisdom acts, wisdom understands this. And it is an activity. In the terrain of the five aggregates, it's in the terrain of mental formation. It's an activity of mind. Much as other mental formations, other activities of mind, impel us in particular directions—anger impels us in particular directions, confusion impels us in particular directions—there's an activity that we can see. We can see these forces arising in the mind, creating and shaping our minds, impelling action that follows from those activities. Love is an activity of mind that shapes our mind. And so is wisdom.

When I heard Sayadaw U Tejaniya talking about this word, using this word, initially I thought of it as something that was out there—some big grand thing—and I was sure I would know it when it hit. But in my own exploration of this, I've seen that wisdom actually shows up in some small ways that we might not even consciously notice unless it's kind of pointed out to us. And so my understanding of wisdom began to be more of a process at work in the mind. Just as other mental formations are sometimes weaker or stronger, so too wisdom is sometimes functioning in very small, almost imperceptible ways, and sometimes in very obvious ways.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya also says that the purpose of our practice, the whole motivation, the whole aim or direction of our practice, is to cultivate this wisdom—this wisdom that frees the mind from greed, aversion, and delusion, that frees the mind from suffering.

In the Buddha's teaching, in the Pali Canon, there are a number of classic definitions for wisdom. The first

factor of the Eightfold Path, wise view, is a framing of the wisdom that supports us as we orient towards the path. There's a reason why it's at the beginning of the path. We need to know—it lays out the map for us. In the beginning of a journey we need some kind of a map, and wise view, wise understanding, lays out that map for us.

The classic definition of wise view is: there is suffering; suffering arises with the condition of craving; it's possible to free the mind from this craving, which will free the mind from suffering; and there is a path. One aspect of the map is these sets of steps: wise view, wise intention, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, wise concentration. This lays out the map of where we're going and how we might orient our exploration of our minds. It's a map of how to explore our minds to free them from suffering.

So that's one classic definition—the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths define the orientation of the wisdom that we aim towards. We aim towards understanding suffering. This first noble truth has an action associated with it: understanding suffering. That teaching points to how suffering manifests in our minds, and it manifests when greed, aversion, and delusion are present.

Hidden or embedded in the Four Noble Truths is an understanding of what states of mind actually move us in the direction of suffering, keep us caught, and what states of mind move us away from suffering. This understanding of what is skillful and what is unskillful—Jill talked about this over a series of talks on the wise efforts—learning what is skillful, learning what is unskillful, cultivating the skillful, abandoning or letting go of the unskillful. This is another aspect of wisdom: that we begin to see and understand what in our minds creates suffering.

This becomes very experiential. Through the practice of mindfulness we observe our minds. We observe what's happening in our bodies and our minds. And pretty quickly, when we turn with a kind of perspective—another way to frame wisdom in a very practical sense—there is this curiosity about experience in the present moment as experience in the present moment.

I mentioned this framing in the very first talk I gave. This is a perspective for mindfulness: simple curiosity about what's happening. "Oh, this is happening right now—what is this?"

And so something like anger arises, or confusion arises, or greed arises, and we see, "Oh, this is the arising of greed. This is what the human experience of greed is." We begin to directly understand this human experience of greed, this human experience of aversion. This is suffering. This hurts. This does not feel like it's leading to well-being.

This stands in stark contradiction to all the stories that aversion and greed tell us—stories that insist this is what's going to make me happy. But when we actually come into the experience of those states, when we feel what the arising of anger actually is, our system understands: this is not leading to well-being. This is wisdom. This is the experience of wisdom. When the mind understands that directly, it's getting an

education.

So this is another aspect of wisdom: understanding the skillful and unskillful. As states like compassion and love arise in our hearts, we feel directly in the moment, as we are aware of them, present with them, how they open our hearts, how they connect us to others, how they lead to well-being. And so again, the mind understands directly: this is skillful.

There's no question in the moment when we're experiencing these states from this perspective of "what is this human experience?" No question at all. "Oh, this is unskillful. This is skillful." Our systems actually seem designed to help sort this out. This is a great thing. Our human organism seems designed to show us what suffering is and what not-suffering is.

We have simply been so confused that we haven't been noticing it. We've been caught by our views, our beliefs, our ideas—conditioned by culture, conditioned by being in this human body, never having learned about this very simple but very profound tool of looking at experience from such a direct perspective. Instead, we look at experience more often as "how can I use this to get ahead?" or "where is this leading me?"

Understanding the skillful and the unskillful—this is another big piece of wisdom. And then also understanding causes and conditions: that experience is conditioned, that there is a cause-and-effect nature to experience.

This was actually another question I pulled out of the bowl: "What does this phrase 'causes and conditions' mean anyway?" Let me unpack that a little. This is my unpacking, so take it for what it's worth.

Conditions, for me, are the many, many factors—everything that's happened up to this point. Everything. That includes all the conditions of weather, all the conditions of health, all the conditions of nature, the conditions of culture, the conditions of family.

Some of those fall within what we typically call human conditioning: how our families operated, how we learned to treat others, how we were treated on the playground, all the various ways we affect each other as human beings. That's part of the conditioning.

And yet we are also born with a particular body, with genetics, as Winnie was talking about—the genetics of our particular system. That affects us and affects our experience. It affects what things are pleasant and unpleasant at times.

For instance, this body has a very strong sensitivity to bell peppers. When I eat bell peppers, I basically have to spend the next two hours very close to a bathroom. It's a pretty unpleasant experience. So that affects my time here. I've noticed that IMS uses a lot of bell peppers, which affects how I choose my meals. I do not want to have bell peppers if I'm going to be teaching a dharma talk. This is not a good plan.

So it affects me. And yet it's not quite the same kind of conditioning as how my parents treated me or what

my culture infused my mind with.

It's more of a physical thing. And then there are simply the conditions of nature itself. Our bodies are made up of stardust. Carl Sagan points this out beautifully. Let me see if I can find this quote: "The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star stuff." And so in a very real way, we are also conditioned by the Big Bang. Everything from the beginning of the universe until now is a condition.

The Buddha talks about conditions being so vast that we cannot possibly grasp them all with our minds. He said that to try to do so, you'll go mad. So don't try. And yet they affect us. Conditions affect us. This is an important piece to understand with respect to wisdom—that experience is conditioned, and it's not personal. It's not personal that I have this reaction to bell peppers. It's just this body, this configuration of nitrogen and calcium and oxygen, having this effect. That's not personal. It's a really useful reflection to recognize that so much of our experience is shaped by conditions.

The causes piece, for myself, I think of as being more in the moment—what is happening right now for this experience to be arising? In my own exploration, in my own understanding of how it's useful to explore causes, I'm looking at what's going on in the mind right now that is contributing to this experience. In particular, this question around what causes are arising in the mind to create suffering, or to create the release of suffering.

The Buddha in the Second Noble Truth pointed to craving as what arises in the mind and leads us in the direction of suffering. Another teaching, the teaching on dependent origination, points to ignorance. The whole teaching on dependent origination is an exploration of the conditions that give rise to suffering. And the same set of conditions give rise to becoming and selfing. It's the same process being described—these conditions that give rise to suffering.

Within that teaching, there are links we've talked about quite a bit. We talk in particular about the link between feeling and craving—how when pleasant arises in the mind, we tend to like it, we lean towards it, we want it, we want more of it. When something unpleasant arises, we tend to lean away from it. Aversion tends to result. These are conditions—things arising that are pleasant or unpleasant. And yet those conditions will not necessarily cause craving, clinging, becoming, suffering. Not necessarily.

But if ignorance is present in the mind, my understanding is that dependent origination teaches: when ignorance is arising, feeling leads to craving. Unpleasant leads to aversion. When ignorance is arising in the moment, that's what happens. So that's a cause—that's my understanding of a cause in the moment. Ignorance being a cause. And ignorance being basically not understanding this wisdom.

So here we are, back at the question: What is this wisdom? When ignorance is present, or when wisdom is not present, feeling tends to lead us onward to suffering—that reactivity, that kind of immediate reactivity.

In terms of cultivating wisdom, there's a lovely exploration around three levels of wisdom. The first is *suta mayā paññā—paññā* being the word for wisdom, and *suta* being the word for hearing, the suttas. So this is the wisdom that comes from listening, hearing, reading—taking in information. This is a form of wisdom, and we could say this is really where we start our path.

Somebody pointed out in one of the talks how the Buddha understood the path on his own. And that's one of the hallmarks of a Buddha, essentially—that they don't need help. They figure it out through their own experience, this path, this wisdom. And yet the rest of us need help. And so the help is these teachings. This is the first kind of wisdom: listening to the map, hearing the teachings, taking in the teachings. This is a form of wisdom.

Essentially, here in the Dharma Hall, we're just steeping in the teachings. A retreat like this, we just get steeped in hearing and reflecting on—this is the second kind of wisdom—the wisdom of reflection, *chinta maya paññā*, the wisdom of using our thought, using our minds, using our rational capacity of mind to think about the teachings, to reflect on them, how they make sense, to incorporate thought into our system, into our practice.

And the third kind of wisdom is the wisdom of direct understanding, *bhāvanāmaya paññā*, the wisdom of insight.

These first two kinds of wisdom—the wisdom of hearing, the wisdom of reflecting—are kind of where we start our practice. You all have a story of the first time you heard the teachings and felt something. It made sense to you in some way. That's wisdom landing in your system. And then there were reflections about it, thoughts about it. Maybe a kind of intuitive sense of, "Hmm, this makes sense." Or maybe a not-so-intuitive sense—not-self? I don't know about that one. But this suffering thing, that makes sense to me. And so this is using our reflection, thinking about it, reflecting on it, using our minds to support us.

And then we begin to practice. Those two kinds of wisdom—the hearing and then the reflecting—kind of lead us or impel us into action. This is the way wisdom acts. At the beginning it feels like I'm acting. At the beginning, that sense of self, still very strong, stays very strong for a long time, comes and goes, different kinds of self. And yet certain kinds of senses of self pick up this teaching and this understanding and get interested and want to act. And yet it really is wisdom impelling that sense of self. There's a kind of wisdom that's part of that action. It may not be so apparent in that time. It more feels like I'm thinking about this, I'm doing this. And yet something has entered and is creating the conditions for different choices to be made. And that's wisdom.

And so we begin to practice. We begin to explore and start to understand some of these teachings for ourselves. It's no longer just something that we're hearing and thinking about, but direct experience. And yet we can often still use these first two kinds of wisdoms even as we're engaged in active practice.

Here on this retreat, sitting in the hall, Greg gave a beautiful description of sitting and taking in

Dharma—not with the mind, not with the intellect, not with our usual conception of mind, but more just almost letting it be like Dharma rain. How does it land? How does it feel? So that's taking in the *suttamaya paññā*.

In my own experience with the practice, especially with Sayadaw U Tejaniya, I would go and practice and sit in the interview room with him, and I'd describe my experience. He would say something to me about some aspect of experience I hadn't noticed. And then I'd go off and I'd try to look for it. I'd go do something with that information. And I'd come back, maybe saying, "I got a real headache as I tried to understand awareness itself." He said, "Were you trying to do that?" I said, "Yeah, I thought that's what you told me to do." He said, "No, nothing I say is something to do. It's just information. Just do your simple practice. That information goes in and it changes the conditions. You do your simple practice, the conditions are different now. Different things get seen."

You don't have to do that. What a relief.

And so that's a way that the Suttamaya Panya can work in our practice. I have said this to many of you—this is a refrain of mine. I talk about how you might be able to see this or that, and then I say: don't do it. Don't try to do it. You might notice it. You might see it.

And then there are ways we can also bring in Chintamaya Panya, the wisdom of reflection, in the midst of our practice—bringing in wisdom reflections that might help balance the mind when we're caught in something. Sometimes, in the midst of being caught in some kind of storm, we can just remind ourselves, dropping in some wisdom phrase: "This is impermanent, it's not going to last." Or: "This is not me, not mine, not who I am." We bring in wisdom that we have either heard from teachers or read from Dharma books—or sometimes wisdom that we have experienced ourselves already.

You have noticed, I think, at times that you experience some kind of insight, an understanding about something where it's like, "Wow, I really see—it doesn't make any sense to cling. It's all changing. There's no point in clinging." And then the next hour, the mind is grabbing on. "Wait a minute, didn't I learn that?"

Well, this is the way the mind works. At times wisdom is active, strong and arising, and we have access to the direct understanding that there's no point in clinging. And then delusion comes back. Ignorance comes back. And we don't see that there's no point to clinging. In fact, our mind is telling us just the opposite: "Cling! That'll make you happy. Cling."

And so in those moments when we see that the mind is caught, and yet we have seen it not be caught, there's an opportunity essentially to borrow wisdom from ourselves. We can borrow wisdom from our teachers, we can borrow wisdom from books to help us. When we haven't had an understanding, we might just drop in: "Well, the teachers say it's all unreliable and impermanent and it will change. Okay, maybe I can hold that possibility." But when we've seen it for ourselves, it can be easier in a way to borrow that understanding—just to remind ourselves: "Yes, I do know. I do know that things are

impermanent. The mind is deluded right now. It's not seeing things as impermanent. And yet this is impermanent."

And so we can drop in wisdom reflections at times, like phrases in our mind that sometimes can help us to balance. This is a way of using wisdom in the practice.

And then there's the experience of wisdom—the actual wisdom operating in the moment, creating the conditions for some kind of release, some kind of understanding. You have all experienced this kind of wisdom. Even just the simple curiosity, as I said earlier—this curiosity about what is the human experience of this, what is this—that curiosity and that perspective of observing experience already contains wisdom. Because our habit is not that. And so it begins to shape the mind in a new way.

An object is just an object. Over and over again in the Satipatthana Sutta it points to this kind of thing: when breathing in, one knows one is breathing in; when experiencing aversion, one knows one is experiencing aversion; when experiencing love, one knows one is experiencing love. Actually, that's not in the Satipatthana Sutta.

But non-aversion is in the Satipatthana Sutta. When experiencing non-aversion, one knows one is experiencing non-aversion. Just that simple. Recognition. This is the experience that's happening. This is a pointer. This is wisdom operating in the mind.

When we are curious in this way, wisdom is active. Now, it doesn't feel like any big mind-blowing kind of wisdom. But it grows. It accumulates.

We also might begin to notice a little bit more surprise around this simple understanding of, "Oh, this is an experience arising in the present moment." For instance, around a thought. Thoughts are so potently delusive. They contain such power to fool us into believing them. When we see that a thought is just a thought, when we recognize that these thoughts I'm thinking are about the past, we wake up into this recognition: "Wow, I am not there. I'm not in that situation right now. I'm sitting in a meditation hall, breathing in and breathing out. And that is arising in the mind." That thought, that situation—it's like a bubble bursts. We see that bursting of the belief in the thought and recognize, "Oh, this is a thought of the past happening in the present moment." That kind of surprise or recognition—that's wisdom. That's wisdom at work, opening our eyes to recognize that's not what's actually happening, that scenario or content or story.

At one point I had a very powerful recognition of this, a seeing of that bursting of the bubble. I had been in a relationship for a very long time—ten years—and we'd broken up several years before. I'd done a lot of work on the anger and reactivity about that person, and by this point, when thoughts arose about them in my mind, I no longer experienced distress at all. There was no anger, no sadness, no confusion. Well, confusion—there was confusion, as I'll tell you about. But there wasn't that kind of pain anymore when thoughts would arise. It was clear, it was clean.

And yet one day I was walking down the street and I woke up from being lost in thought—a thought about this person I had been in relationship with. In the moment of coming out of that thought, I realized I had been lost in it for a fair amount of time. Basically the mind had constructed that I was back in that relationship. What are we going to do next week? When are we going to go? This whole world was born, and I was born into that world.

And then the bubble burst. Wait, what? That was two years ago. What? I'm not in relationship with that person anymore. So there was confusion. And yet in that moment of seeing, it was like seeing just how much the mind had believed that thought. The bursting of that, that feeling of clarity—"That is just a thought"—that's wisdom.

So sometimes just seeing, "Oh, this is just an arising in the present moment" is kind of like, "Wow, this is just an arising in the present moment. Oh my gosh." It can have these gradations of intensity around this wisdom arising.

And sometimes as that wisdom arises in the moment, we can feel a kind of shift that happens. We might experience this recognition around a mind state that we're caught in and notice, "Oh, this is anger arising in the present moment." Instead of being caught by it, we recognize it as a phenomenon. It feels like there's space, a feeling of space around the experience. "Oh, this is just anger. This is just impacting the body in this way—a feeling of heat and pressure. Oh, and here it's beginning to disperse."

So the first experience of the feeling of space—that too is wisdom at work. Holding that state of mind in a completely different way. No longer confused or buying into the deluded power of that mind state, but just noticing: this is a mind state. This is wisdom at work in the mind.

And then sometimes the wisdom is even stronger. Many of you have come in and described being caught by something, some state of mind, and then suddenly you got curious about it, began to just observe it, and then it's like—it's gone. Where did it go?

The first time I experienced that, I did not believe it. I thought I'd done something wrong, actually. I went into my teacher and said, "I don't know how to observe emotions." That was what I led in with. "I want some instructions on observing emotions."

And she said, "Well, what did you experience?" Wonderful teacher, Carol. "What did you experience?" Yes, you hear us asking this a lot.

And I said, "Well, I was experiencing a feeling of abandonment. And at first I was feeling some compassion for myself about it, but then I got curious about the abandonment. And it's like I turned to say, what is this anyway? And it wasn't there."

And she said, "Well, did it feel like you were still feeling abandoned, or did it just feel like it disappeared?"

I said, "It felt like it disappeared."

She said, "Trust your experience."

That was such a lesson for me. I had all of these ideas about practice and what it meant. And the curiosity of the mind turning to look at something—basically that curiosity itself created the conditions for wisdom to hold that experience, and it just vanished. It didn't wither; it was gone. I couldn't find it anywhere. I was like, "Oh wow, I feel pretty good right now. I guess I'll just go..." But what happened to that abandonment? I'll ask Carol about it. I must not know how to observe emotions.

Well, wisdom took care of it. That is wisdom at work.

So when we turn towards experience and see a shift, maybe see a releasing, see something fade and wither and maybe even vanish—that is wisdom at work.

We also start to see at times this conditioning process. I'm revisiting some of the pieces of wisdom that I named at the beginning: the seeing of suffering, the understanding of it as suffering. Part of that seeing it as suffering is part of how and why wisdom begins to release it. Because wisdom understands what leads to well-being.

So seeing causes and conditions at work, seeing how the mind is conditioned, how action follows from intention—we can start to see this. Maybe you're outside taking a walk and feel a kind of cold breeze on your cheek. You feel the unpleasantness of that but don't quite notice it as unpleasantness. But then it's like, "Oh, that's unpleasant. I want to stop walking." And that tumbles into the intention to go inside and have a cup of tea.

When the mindfulness is more continuous, you might actually see that unfolding. In a moment, you notice the plan, the intention in the direction of "stop, time to stop walking, time to get a cup of tea"—and you've barely taken another step and that has happened. If you've seen it, then you're seeing how conditioning unfolds in the mind.

Often what happens is our direction simply changes; we go inside. When we're not mindful, we'll just follow through on that conditioning. But we can start to see the conditioned nature of experience as a process. Rather than "I'm doing that." Rather than "I'm the one that's choosing." We see that choice is conditioned by a whole series of ripple events leading up to it.

And then there's another way that wisdom can work that's a little more—it feels a little more mysterious at times.

In the Satipatthana Sutta, the fourth foundation refers to noticing the non-arising of the unarisen hindrance. What does that mean—that we can notice the non-arising of the unarisen hindrance? Basically, this points to the fact that we can recognize when something is not arising. A hindrance is not arising.

The first way we might start to see this is by noticing the absence of a hindrance, which is pointed to in the third foundation: noticing the presence and absence of greed, aversion, and delusion. Yet we can also

begin to recognize this more directly. In some ways, knowing the non-arising of a hindrance can be more of an understanding than a direct experience. There is a way that we can see a non-arising, and I'll describe an experience of my own where that happened. But much of the time, this understanding of the non-arising of unwholesome states is more of an understanding than a direct experience.

We can know, for instance—and many of you have talked about this—seeing over time that these things aren't bothering us so much anymore. This thing that used to happen, something that used to spin us out completely, now it's barely a ripple. We're noticing that the reactivity is not arising, but it's more of an understanding in terms of contrast over time.

At times we may see much more directly the mind heading in the direction of a defilement, heading in the direction of reactivity. And then almost as if—you know how when you reach out and accidentally touch a hot pan on the stove, your body withdraws on its own? Well, sometimes that kind of thing happens in the mind too. The more we understand that anger is suffering, that it is not well-being, the more we understand that actually in our direct experience, then we may start to recognize the mind heading in the direction of some kind of reactivity. And the mind, in seeing that, may just go, "I don't think so," and simply redirect.

At one point, after having spent quite a bit of time observing anger, getting to know it really well, getting to know the suffering of it, I was cutting an apple in my kitchen. In that moment, I wasn't really trying to be mindful. There was just a kind of field of continuity that I had cultivated over some time of practice. This was not very long into my practice—maybe three months—so this kind of thing can happen in daily life. I had been using a lot of mindfulness in daily life, orienting around seeing anger, noticing it when it arises.

So I was cutting this apple and I saw a thought arise in my mind about a person I was angry with. I noticed there was a connection in the thought because I had been at a fruit stand with that person. There was a connection between what I was doing, cutting the apple, and the memory. I was seeing the associative nature, the conditioned nature of that arising. That was wisdom, seeing that conditioned nature.

And then I saw this urge, this impulse—it felt like a freight train of desire to jump on that thought and think more thoughts in order to get angry at that person. I was not angry in that moment, but that urge was so strong. Yet it was seen, that desire to get angry. All of this took place in about a split second. The mind recognized, "Ooh, that's not a good idea." I didn't decide that. The mind understood that way lies suffering. There was wisdom in the mind that understood: jumping on that freight train, not a good idea. The mind just said no, not going to do that. And that urge just kind of collapsed.

I stood there with this knife in my hand, waiting to get angry—because I had not had this person arise in my mind without anger also arising. And I did not get angry.

Now, that might have had a certain life to it. It was maybe a couple of seconds that I didn't get angry. But

what happened in the next moment was mind-blowing: "Oh my gosh, this practice works! Wow!" That amazement took over my mind.

At this point in my practice, I have less of that kind of mind-blowing amazement sometimes. My sense is that sometimes you get a little break from the anger, and then the thoughts keep going, and then you pick one of them up, and anger arises. I've seen that happen too. But in that moment, this was really—I think that was the moment I stepped on the path.

I was like, yes, I'm doing this for the rest of my life. This is good stuff.

That is wisdom at work. The seeing of that—and in that case, it was really seeing that anger didn't arise. That was the gift of that moment. I had been made non-functional by the arising of anger. And to see that it didn't have to arise, what a gift. This too is wisdom, wisdom at work.

So these moments of seeing wisdom at work—hopefully my description of various ways that you can see this will help you recognize, oh yes, wisdom is working. Wisdom is growing. Wisdom is being cultivated here in this mind. All of you are already cultivating so much wisdom.

And these moments of seeing, they're a pointer. The moments of sensing a little release. I can be with this. This is just whatever it is. Or the moments when we see something let go, or see the mind simply recognize, that way lies suffering. These moments are a pointer. They're a taste, a little taste of non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion. A little tiny taste of the direction of freedom. Just a taste.

And these insights too—the wisdom that arises in that moment to create the conditions for seeing in that moment—wisdom too is a conditioned arising. It is impermanent. The conditions to see through something, to understand something, you know that experience of, "Wow, this seems so obvious. How could I not see this? I must be enlightened because it's just so obvious. I'm never going to suffer again." And then a few minutes later, we're caught again. It's like, wow, I guess it wasn't so obvious. When we're in the midst of that wisdom being there, it seems very clear. It can seem so clear at times.

And yet, as I pointed to in the delusion talk, those moments of seeing through delusion—really, in a way this talk is the flip side of the delusion talk. Because those moments of wisdom arising are moments of seeing through delusion, of seeing clearly in a moment. And when delusion returns, when the wisdom passes away, it's not that there is no lingering effect. That wisdom has a conditioning power on our minds. We understand something that we didn't before. And so now we can know, oh, this is delusion. This being caught by this mind state—oh, maybe this is just a thought. A thought is creating this state of mind. Having seen maybe a thought just being the kind of trigger for the arising of a whole complex of self-hatred—in that moment seeing through it, but then not seeing through it at other times—we can bring that wisdom in, remind ourselves, oh, this is just a thought. So there's a way in which that wisdom is available to be borrowed from ourselves even as it's not actively present in the moment.

So there's a trust that begins to grow as we begin to recognize wisdom, how it works, and that it leads us in

the direction of well-being and towards letting go of the states of mind that create so much struggle and suffering and stress. We begin to trust this practice more and more.

And so it's kind of a spiraling—we get a little taste of wisdom and a little bit more trust grows. And that impels us to work, to explore, to investigate. Sometimes that means settling back and just receiving. But we gain some wisdom, some understanding, and that impels us further on the path, deepens our understanding, which gives us more trust, which gives us more understanding. And so there is this spiraling nature of the unfolding of the path, and it becomes very organic at some point. And we can begin to trust wisdom to lead the practice.

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