Qualities Of Wise Mindfulness

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:01:40

It's so quiet in here. Sometimes it feels like it would be nicer to just sit quietly. And yet my task here is to give a talk, and so I will break the silence.

The main practice that we're exploring here together is mindfulness. The Buddha offered instructions for us. One of the main teachings in the texts, called the Satipatthana Sutta, explores how we establish mindfulness and the kind of experiences that we attend to.

The Satipatthana Sutta describes four establishments of mindfulness. Sometimes the word Satipatthana is translated as "foundation of mindfulness," but Bhikkhu Analayo has made a case for the word "establishing" or "establishment." To me, that has a more resonant feeling, because what these practices do—these descriptions of these practices—help us to cultivate this quality of mindfulness so that it becomes established in our minds, stable in our minds. That kind of stability, establishing stability, is another way we could look at what a foundation is. But to me, the word "foundation" sounds like a noun, and "establishing" feels more like an activity. And that's what we're doing: we're establishing mindfulness.

These four areas, which I'm not going to go into this evening in detail, I'll just briefly name. The Buddha explores establishing mindfulness of the body, which is very much what we're looking at in these first few days. Then feeling—whether experience is pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant—the second foundation, mindfulness of feeling, or feeling tone as we sometimes say. The third foundation is mindfulness of mind states, qualities in our mind, wholesome qualities, unwholesome qualities. Particularly in this foundation we begin to understand the difference between wholesome and unwholesome qualities of mind. Such an important exploration for us in our practice.

The fourth foundation is a little harder to describe. It's called the foundation of Dhamma. Dhamma can be translated simply to mean experience, so basically mindfulness of experience or mindfulness of phenomena. But that particular part of the text explores mindfulness of phenomena—one of the definitions of the word Dhamma—through various Dharma lenses, some of the various lists that the Buddha talked about. In a way, this fourth foundation is exploring experience in terms of the Dharma.

So this is a little bit about what we explore in our mindfulness practice. But at the beginning of this teaching, at the beginning of the sutta, there are a few words, just a few sentences, where the Buddha encapsulates the teaching in summary before he goes on to elaborate it. There's one phrase that gets repeated a few times that basically defines what our mindfulness practice is. I'll read that to you.

This is repeated four times, one for each of the four foundations. The first time I say it, I'll use the body:

"One abides, observing the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, putting away desires and discontent for the world." And he repeats that: "One abides, observing feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, putting away desires and discontent for the world." And likewise for mind states and for phenomena.

I want to explore this sentence. What is it pointing us to? It really begins to help us understand what we're doing here—not only what we pay attention to, but how. How do we pay attention? What does wise mindfulness mean?

This definition includes the word "mindful." The establishment of mindfulness, the definition of how mindfulness is established, includes the word mindful, which is kind of interesting. I'll start with that word since it's the one we're most familiar with, just to make sure we're all on the same page around what mindfulness is.

Actually, the more that I practice, the more mysterious mindfulness seems to me. It seems more like a state than something we do. And yet there is a way in which we begin to get familiar with what it's like when we know that we're aware. Maybe that's a good working definition for mindfulness: knowing that we're aware, being aware that we're aware. Other words that evoke what this quality often means to us include "presence." Awareness is a good word, actually. I love the word awareness for mindfulness. To me, it's much more evocative of the quality of the feeling that's present when mindfulness is strong. The word "mindfulness" is such a technical kind of term, and it sounds mental. Mindfulness, when it's established, has much more of a...

It doesn't just feel like it's up here in the head at all. It feels much more pervading. And awareness has that quality for me—a sense of... it's got a softer feeling to it. The word awareness has a softer feeling. It feels more evocative to me of the experience that I've come to understand is mindfulness.

Sometimes we explore mindfulness through words like witnessing or observing. Other ways to touch into it more at the sensory level: the feeling of being connected with, feeling into, being with experience. These kinds of words evoke what we mean by mindfulness. And perhaps we could say in a more simple definition: we know what's happening while it's happening. In real time—he keeps using that phrase—in real time we know what's happening while it's happening.

Mindfulness, the quality that the Buddha talks about in the Sutta of establishing, points to a kind of mindfulness that supports us to understand what is skillful and what is unskillful, what leads us to suffering and what leads us away from suffering. This quality of wise mindfulness is based, I think, on an ordinary capacity of our minds—this capacity to be able to know that we know, this kind of self-reflective capacity that we have. It's a human capacity; not all animals have it, though apparently some do. But this is one of those things that really makes us human: this capacity to be aware of ourselves, to be aware that we are aware.

And yet this simple reflective capacity, the ability to know that we know—while I'd say that wise mindfulness is based on it, it's not the same thing. Wise mindfulness is more of a perspective, a way of turning that capacity to know that we know, to observe, to be with experience in a particular way.

To reflect on this a little: this morning when he brought up the example of somebody being angry, and they know that they're angry, that kind of knowing isn't exactly what we're talking about. Much of the time, if somebody's angry and you go up to them and say, "Do you know you're angry?" they'll say, "Duh, yeah, I know I'm angry." But what they are focused on, what they are attending to, what they are aware of is the content of why they're angry. It's focused on the situation about which they're angry. It is not generally curious about what does it feel like to be angry. That's the shift of wise mindfulness. We get curious about experience as experience.

Another simple way to reflect on what we're doing here: looking at experience as experience, as experience happening right now. It sounds like nothing. But this is not our usual perspective. This is not usually the way we go about relating to experience. Mostly we relate to experience from the perspective of: What does it say about me? What should I do about this? How can I do something with this?

Much more rarely—at least for me, until I actually met this teaching—and it was kind of not intuitive to me. I got this book; I was experiencing a lot of anger, and a friend of mine asked me if she could send me a dharma book. I said, "Well, nothing else has worked, sure, go ahead." I read this book and basically what I gleaned from it, in terms of my anger, was: try being aware that you're angry when you're angry. And I thought, what good is that going to do? Isn't that just going to make me more angry? But I had nothing else better to try.

So I tried it. And the first moment of waking up into it, it was like: oh, I told myself I'd be aware of this. And wow—this hurts. This doesn't feel very good. In just that simple instruction of knowing that you're angry when you're angry, it pointed out to me something very fundamental about that anger: it's painful. And in that experience, in that particular moment, what happened was: wow, I have no idea what to do with this. I guess I go back to work.

That actually, in retrospect, was a pretty powerful shift for me. In previous times when the anger had been running, it had just been running. The mind had been caught in the anger, thinking about the person I was angry with, spinning it up, and it was just amping up. It wasn't even possible to go back to work. I was just sitting frozen in front of my computer.

And so this simple, simple tool, the very first time I tried it, allowed me to recognize: wow, that hurts. Okay, don't know what else to do—I guess I go back to work. What a difference in experience.

To be curious about your experience as experience. We could say being curious about what it is like to be a human being experiencing whatever's happening right now. What's it like to be a human being feeling knee pain? What's it like to be a human being feeling vibratory energy in the body? What's it like to be a

human being hearing? What's it like to be a human being experiencing frustration or confusion? This turns us towards the experience in and of itself.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta has these categories of what we pay attention to. It points to establishing mindfulness of the body, establishing mindfulness of feeling, establishing mindfulness of mind states, and establishing mindfulness of phenomena through a Dharma perspective or lens. We might think that this limits us in terms of what we pay attention to, but this set of descriptions of things to notice encompasses everything in our human experience. There's nothing you experience that is left out of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Whatever is coming up for you, there's a way in which we can attend to it from this perspective—being curious about it as experience.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta points to both what we attend to and how we attend to it. Being attentive to experience as experience is a key piece of this. In the definition itself, this comes out in the phrase that says "aware of" or "abides observing the body as a body, feelings as feelings, mind states as mind states." This, to me, is what the Buddha is pointing to, and I'll get into that in more detail shortly.

I want to think about the words associated with this phrase: "One abides observing the body as a body, ardent, mindful, fully aware, putting away desires and discontent for the world." The first word there—abides—I love that word. It has an evocative feeling for me. If you're told to abide with something, how does that feel? Abide with your breath.

I was teaching this at one course, a kind of interchange—not a long silent retreat but a study course. I invited the room to offer phrases or words that the word "abides" evokes. Some folks said things like relaxation or home. These are some of the meanings of abide. Ease is a quality this word evokes for me. And somebody said, "What it brings up for me is 'the dude abides,'" from that movie The Big Lebowski. Well, yes, that's kind of what it's talking about! The dude abides at ease. No problem.

Now, it may not be that laissez-faire feeling of just "yeah, whatever." It's not that. But it is this quality of ease and relaxation. I love that this is the first word in this sentence. It has been a long time coming for me that relaxation was really understood to be a foundational part of the practice.

Our system, our organism, is kind of designed to be aware. This natural quality of mindfulness I spoke about earlier, this being aware in the present moment—a baby is born and that's what they are. They are just aware. You can see it in their eyes, how curious they are, alert and interested in what's going on. That's a natural quality in our system. What gets in its way is our mind being caught up in thoughts or worries or concerns. Tension in the mind gets in the way of this very natural capacity. And tension in the body affects tension in the mind. So if we can relax the body, we may find that it supports an easing of the mind, a relaxing of the mind.

I was talking to somebody in the last couple of days about how the face is so closely connected with the mind. The expression on the face and the feeling in the mind are very closely connected. There have even

been studies about this. Just try it now: take in how you are in this moment. And now let the corners of your mouth turn up in a little smile and see what happens.

The studies show that the expression on the face can influence the state of the mind. Relaxing the face can help relax the mind. Relaxing the body can support relaxing the mind. And then there's more access to this natural capacity for being aware in the present moment.

We can begin to aim this awareness in the direction the Buddha is suggesting. So we don't just abide—this is where the Dude is not quite right. The Dude abides, full stop. The Dude abides. But the Buddha goes on: the practitioner abides *observing* the body as a body.

This word "observing" is significant. The root of the word is the same as what's in the word *vipassanā*. The *passanā* part means "to see." And the full word is *anupassanā*—that's the word translated as "observing." The commentaries say it has this feeling of being closely connected to, really engaged with. So: observing, seeing, connected with, closely connecting with. To me it's kind of like a meeting—meeting experience. There's abiding and meeting, connecting.

And what do we connect with? The body as a body. Feelings as feelings. Mental activity, mind states as mind states.

So what does this phrase mean—"body as a body"? I've explored it a little bit. To me this really points to what we almost think of as mindfulness. It evokes one of the more famous suttas, the Bāhiya Sutta, which perhaps one of us will speak on in more detail as the retreat goes on.

That sutta contains a famous instruction, a short instruction from the Buddha to someone who wasn't a follower but just kind of showed up and said, "I hear you've got good things to say. What do you have to say?" And the Buddha responded with a very pithy teaching: "In the seen is only the seen. This is how you should train yourself. In the seen is only the seen. In the heard is only the heard. In the sensed is only the sensed. In the cognized is only the cognized. This is how you should train yourself."

The teaching goes on to explore the ramifications of that exploration, which are understanding and freedom. But this seeing or observing the body as a body—to me this is pointing to something similar. In the sensed is only the sensed. In the seen is only the seen. It's not things added, extra ideas or concepts. It's coming to what we might call the bare experience, closer to it. What's actually happening?

We are often relating to experience through concept. At a very deep level in our human system, this is how we navigate the world in so many ways—through perception. We look out at the world, we look out in this room, and we see people and walls and fans and light and zafus. That understanding of what is seen happens because we have a lot of experience from the time we're born. We begin to be taught what things are. This shape is mom. This shape is food. We begin to make these associations.

And so perception at work helps us identify what's going on. But perception is a mental object, a mental

formation. Perception doesn't happen at the eye.

Perception happens in the mind. And so in a very real way, as we're navigating the world, we are relating very much through concept—and we need this. There have been times when I've been meditating that the concepts around seeing fall away. And I do not want to get up and try to walk across the room when that's happening, because what remains is pretty much just form and color. The mind is not landing on the concepts.

So what is it in our experience? We get closer and closer to this. And in my experience, this is something that unfolds gradually. We don't start there, and we cannot try. Don't try to see things as just form and color—you will get a headache. But over time, we begin to recognize that perception is working, that ideas come in with perception.

And so we're not just seeing a person. We're seeing a person and we've already got, even before we meet somebody, a whole bunch of ideas about them. We have ideas about them based on how tall they are, how much they weigh, what their gender is, what their sexual orientation appears to be, what their skin color is. We have ideas about them that we're bringing along because, again, this is the conditioning of being human. And it's natural for this to happen, these conditionings. What we don't often recognize is that they're happening.

And so "in the seeing, in the seen is only the seen" is recognizing, well, there's seeing. And "in the cognized is only the cognized"—wow, there's all these thoughts and ideas and attitudes and views happening about that seeing. We're not even trying to stop necessarily all the things that are going on, but it is helpful to recognize that these things are going on as experiences in the present moment, instead of simply being swept along by the beliefs and views that we carry.

There's a difference between believing something and acting out of that belief. That often happens—the beliefs are kind of undercover for us, oftentimes. They're hiding under the surface. When we don't know that they're there, we are just acting on them as though they are truth. We just assume that this belief is true, that that's the way everybody sees things—or everybody should see things that way, at the very least.

And so there's a big difference between believing something and acting on that belief, following that belief, and being aware, "Oh, there's a belief arising in this moment." Huge difference between those two. And so that's "in the cognized is only the cognized." Awareness in this phrase "mind aware of abides observing mind states as mind states"—a view is a form of a mind state. So that's knowing that mind state as a mind state: "This is a view that's arising." This is not our usual perspective.

And so we explore our experience. Right now we're focusing to some extent on the body. As Winnie said this morning, this is an easier place to begin to get a sense of what this kind of attention is like—being curious about body experience as body experience. The human experience of tingling and vibration and pulsing. Not so much in reference to I or me or mine. That's another piece, I think, of this instruction. Body

as a body. Not my body, but a body. What is the actual sensation level of experience right now in your experience?

Abide observing the body as a body. And maybe just like the whole body—one place in the sutta says it's kind of sufficient to just know there's a body. Abide observing. There is a body. There is a body.

These two words together, "abides observing"—I like that they're combined because it to me brings together the kind of relaxed and alert quality we've been speaking of. It's connected and relaxed. Observe the body as a body. Abide observing the body as a body. And it also points to two aspects of attention, two ways of exploring attention. There's choosing what we pay attention to.

This is directing the attention. We've talked about this a little, and I've used the analogy of the radio—tuning the channel, tuning the station. So that's the aiming or directing. We're choosing which channel to listen to. Maybe for the anchor, for instance, we're choosing the breath, and so we tune to those sensations. That's the observing part, that attunement. We're directing the attention, aiming it in a particular way.

But then how do we meet that experience? With abiding—receiving the experience. To me, that word *abidi ng* also points to this receptive quality. Mindfulness can have a very receptive quality.

I'm going to get a little technical here, but I think this is a useful distinction to understand in our experience. There's a quality of mindfulness which is just this simple capacity to know that we know. And we're working on establishing a wise form of that knowing—one that is aimed towards or curious about experience as experience in the present moment. But mindfulness itself is just this simple knowing that we know.

Attention is a factor of mind that selects what we know. And this factor of attention can be directed. We can choose. We have a capacity—there's an agency in our system that can choose to aim the attention somewhere. So right now, I can suggest: attend to the sensations of your hands. Maybe you can attend for a moment to the breath. This is a function of our minds. We can choose to direct attention.

And yet this factor of attention is also something that, if we're not choosing where to put our attention consciously, our habits and patterns—how we've been shaped, how our conditioning has unfolded to this moment—will choose something for us to pay attention to.

In some ways it's similar to how the breath works. We can choose to breathe in and breathe out. We can control that to some extent. We can decide, "Okay, I'm going to breathe in now. I'm going to breathe out now." And yet we don't have to do that. If we don't, the breath will just breathe—fortunately. It's similar with this factor of attention. We can choose where to put our attention, but if we're not consciously choosing, attention will be connecting to something regardless.

So that's a little bit about attention. Now, how does that connect to mindfulness? Mindfulness and

attention are not the same thing. We can know this through a simple remembering of experience we've all had—walking down the street, lost in thought, not consciously aware of our surroundings.

Recently I was driving to teach a class at the center where I teach in California. I was driving down the main road near where the center was, and I was tracking where I was and noticed, "Oh, the street that I need—I saw it. The street I need is coming up. I'm going to be turning left soon." Then mindfulness went away. Completely. And the next time I woke up, probably thirty seconds later, I was sitting at a stoplight. My eyes gazed up at the sign and it was like, "Oh, that sign says Whipple. I've gone too far."

There was no awareness of where I was during that time. In that moment, as mindfulness came back, I remembered what I'd been thinking about. So there was a kind of awareness of where the mind had been, what it had been wrapped into. But even in reflecting back, there was no remembering at all of seeing. I did not remember having driven past the intersection where I was supposed to have turned. I could remember what I'd been thinking about.

And yet, that absence of awareness, that absence of mindfulness—because it was absence of mindfulness—did not mean that attention was absent. Because I didn't crash the car. I managed to get through the stoplight and through the intersections and stop at the stoplight. I had no memory of seeing that stoplight and stopping there. I woke up sitting at the stoplight. And so attention was continuing. Perception was continuing, even though mindfulness was not there.

We can tell from this kind of example—and I'm sure you all have stories like this, where you're walking down a street lost in thought and suddenly it's like, "Wait, where am I?"—that mindfulness is this capacity to wake up into what's happening. And yet our system takes care of us. Perception goes on, mental formations go on, attention continues. Attention and mindfulness are not the same thing.

And yet early in my practice I confused them, because I thought that if I was not consciously choosing where my attention was, then it meant I wasn't being mindful. Paying attention to the breath, choosing that, being with the breath—I was being mindful. But as soon as my attention shifted to hearing, I thought I'd lost mindfulness. But that's just a shift of attention, and we can be mindful of that.

Mindfulness is kind of like a mirror. It's just reflecting all of these processes tumbling on—including attention, including perception, including all these body sensations.

One experience that often happens in the style of practice that we're teaching right now: we're encouraging you to rest, or have a preference for the anchor. And while you're doing that, a very common experience is we're with the anchor and then suddenly the attention is on the sound of a car going by. We didn't choose to have that happen, but it happened. We may feel like we lost mindfulness—"I didn't choose to do that, so that was not mindful." But what often is going on there, if you see that, is you're seeing a shift of attention. You're seeing the attention shift. And then because you're mindful, you can choose what to do next.

When the attention just shifts like that, it usually means that something strong is pulling the attention. And so we can be aware of that, as Winnie was describing this morning. When the attention is pulled to something else, we just practice being aware of that.

Sometimes this has been described as, if the attention is drawn to something else, you let go of the breath and turn to that. Well, but you've already let go of the breath. The attention has already shifted. It's more about having that "abides observing" quality come in with whatever it is—that hearing. "Oh, hearing. Abide observing hearing right now. Hearing as hearings."

For me, this was an important thing to begin to understand: that it didn't necessarily mean that mindfulness was lost when the attention shifted to something else. Sometimes it did mean that. It's a very common avenue for mindfulness to get lost. We're paying attention to the breath, or whatever our anchor is, and the attention shifts to something else. But our mind is kind of attuned to the breath, and then the mind goes off to that car, and thinks about cars, and thinks about driving down Pleasant Street, and what's at the end of Pleasant Street, and what maybe I can get in the store at the end of Pleasant Street—and we're gone. Because we didn't notice that attention shift. When we notice that, we just say, "Oh, it's hearing. Hearing is happening." And maybe recognizing the perception that comes with that hearing, seeing an image of a car in our mind.

I wanted to bring this in because for me, this phrase "abides observing" conveys both the receptive and directed qualities of awareness. We can attune the attention to an object and then receive. Just receive that.

The next word is *ardent*. The word itself doesn't have a juicy quality for me. Maybe it has a little bit of harshness or something, I don't know. For some people, it really evokes something. We're just using translations here. But what it points to is engagement, connection. Ardency—even the word "ardent" may have a connection to heart—so maybe it's heartfelt. A heartfelt connection to experience. This is, again, about how we attend. How do we attend to experience?

It also brings in something of energy. Attending with a persistent quality—engaged, diligent, wholehearted, heartfelt, interested. That word really resonates for me: interested. Interested in what's happening. Curious about what's happening. This is a quality that supports witnessing, observing the body as a body. Can we get curious about how this being actually works?

So ardency has this quality of energy and engagement and curiosity—an engaged quality. But remember, the instruction includes "abiding." Abide ardently. This brings a different quality to it for me. Abide with interest. There's a kind of relaxation and alertness again. One abides observing the body as a body, ardent, curious.

One abides observing the body as a body, curious, interested, fully aware. This next word, *sampajañña*, is sometimes translated as "clearly comprehending." One of the main ways this is spoken to—the way most

people are familiar with—is in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, in the Foundation of the Body. There's a section on clear comprehension, full awareness, where the instructions are to be aware of all your activities. When walking, know that you're walking. When standing, know that you're standing. When walking back and forth, know that you're walking back and forth. When carrying something, know you're carrying it. When eating, know you're eating. When being silent, know you're being silent. Simply an awareness of what's happening, of all activities.

Elsewhere in the suttas, however, clear comprehension is defined in a more subtle way. It's defined as experience being understood as it arises, remains present, and passes away. Essentially, being curious about the impermanent nature of experience. Fully aware that experience is not stable—it's arising, persisting, and passing away.

To me, this phrase brings in some of the wisdom component. Several of these elements have brought in the wisdom component. "The body as a body" brings in some wisdom because we're encouraged to drop below the level of concept. We begin to recognize how much we often overlay onto our experience through the concept of self, through ideas and views and beliefs. That brings wisdom into this definition. But this phrase also speaks to some of the understanding that begins to happen as we attend to our experience in this way. We begin to understand its impermanent nature.

As we begin to understand this impermanent nature, the whole project of the way we usually go about our lives—holding onto things, hoping that we can arrange our lives, get things we like, get rid of things we don't like, construct a world in which we'll only have pleasant experience—we realize that whole project is hopeless. It's not useful. And so this begins to help the mind let go of craving and clinging.

Yesterday Rebecca talked so much about *dukkha dukkha*, the craving around unpleasant experience, the craving to get rid of it. As we begin to see the impermanent nature of experience, the holding on to something or trying to control it or manipulate it—the mind begins to understand that this project actually creates stress. The craving itself is already stress in our system. Not useful.

Now, that doesn't mean we don't take action. There are times in our experience when we see things that are unjust, harm being caused in the world. Becoming aware of that, yes, there might be craving or aversion. And yet there is also the possibility of being motivated by compassion to alleviate that suffering. This is a kind of understanding that begins to happen as we explore our experience in this way.

The Buddha at one point heard that in his home country there were warring factions fighting over water. He went and stood in the middle of the battlefield and tried to stop the water war. He took action—but not out of anger, not out of hatred. Out of compassion.

When we're hooked into the view or belief that craving has—the delusion embedded in craving—we think we've got to do this thing, and we've got to do it on our terms, otherwise everything's going to fall apart. What can happen as craving begins to fall away is that we discover a whole host of different reasons to act

that are based not in greed, aversion, and delusion, but instead in wisdom, generosity, kindness, compassion. These qualities are active. Craving is a mind state that motivates action—it tends to motivate us to do things dictated by that craving.

Compassion is also a mind state, and it motivates action too. Wisdom acts. Compassion acts. As the craving begins to fall away, we find there are other reasons we would engage in the world.

When we're caught by craving, craving has no clue that there are other possible motivations for acting in the world. It has us caught in that belief that if I weren't angry about this, why would I do anything? If I weren't angry about it, I'd be like, "Yeah, the dude abides." But that's not what happens.

Through this kind of training, as the heart releases greed, aversion, and delusion, beautiful qualities—the Brahma Vihara qualities of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity—begin to arise as the emotional map of a heart that is free from greed, aversion, and delusion. And these are what motivate us to act in the world.

This full awareness, this attuning to the changing nature of experience, begins to support the understanding that craving is not the only motivator out there. It supports the mind releasing craving and beginning to see that there are other motivations that take us through the world.

There's one more phrase which I'll say something briefly about—the last phrase. I'll read the whole thing again: "One abides observing the body as a body, ardent, curious, interested, mindful, fully aware, putting aside desires and discontent for the world."

Sometimes this is translated as "free from desires and discontent for the world." That's a pretty high bar. I'm not there yet. Bhikkhu Anālayo points out that the Pali term can actually be understood as an active verb—so "putting aside" or "setting aside." That's how I chose to speak it: setting aside desires and distress for the world, freeing oneself from. It can be understood as a process that happens as we engage in this practice, not something we have to accomplish first, but something that unfolds while we practice in this way.

To me, this points to what we've been exploring about allowing what's happening. "Free from desires and discontent for the world"—the phrase "the world" often points to the world of experience. The Buddha says, "What I mean by world is this fathom-long body, the experience of this fathom-long body." So free of desires and discontents in relationship to experience, the experience that's happening.

Freeing oneself from desires and discontent often unfolds as we begin to recognize and explore the possibility of allowing what's happening. Whatever's happening, we've said this many times, it's okay. The breath can be as it is. Body sensations as they are. Can we explore this possibility of allowing it to be as it is?

And yet it's not always possible. There's body sensation arising and the mind doesn't like that body sensation. There's aversion. Can there be an allowing of both of those? What's happening right now is

unpleasant body sensation—that's the body in the body. Feelings in feelings. And there is aversion arising—mind states in mind states. Can that be allowed?

For me, at a certain point, it was kind of like, "Oh, that's what's happening. There's an unpleasant sensation and I don't like it. Of course, of course I don't like it. Okay, I can allow that to be what's happening." And there we are, stepping into freeing ourselves from desires and discontent. Because when we're caught by aversion—this is pointing to the difference between being caught by aversion and knowing that aversion is happening. Maybe the aversion doesn't go away in that moment, but the relationship to it becomes very different.

Caught by the beliefs around aversion—"I've got to fix this, I've got to get rid of this"—versus simply recognizing, "Oh, aversion is arising." There is a huge difference between these two.

And so, can it be allowed? That's how this process of freeing the mind from desires and discontent unfolds. When there's discontent about something that's happening—oh, discontent is arising. Can I allow discontent? Freeing ourselves from being caught by discontent, we come to know it simply as an experience. We abide observing discontent as discontent—curious, fully aware, mindful.

Let's sit for a moment.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.