Recognizing Delusion

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:00:14

This morning, Terry read and responded to a question around delusion, and I'd been thinking about giving a talk on delusion anyway, but that kind of prodded the pump a little bit. So that's the topic this evening—and in particular, that very question: How do we recognize delusion?

Delusion is part of this three-part set. We often talk about greed, aversion, and delusion. These are understood to be the roots of our unwholesome mind states and actions. They're at the core, at the base of all the unwholesome, unskillful things that happen, and they are suffering. The definition in the suttas of freedom, of nibbana, of awakening, is the absence of greed, aversion, and delusion. So it's really worth getting to know these three very well.

If we think about what the Buddha taught as the first noble truth—there is suffering, the truth of suffering—that truth of suffering is meant to be understood. We can say that this comes down to the instruction to understand greed, aversion, and delusion, not by thinking about it, but by understanding how they function in our minds, in our hearts. We do that by witnessing them. The very witnessing of them creates the conditions for wisdom to support a release from these patterns and habits.

You've all seen this—how the shift of seeing a pattern, for instance around fear or anxiety or confusion or clinging, and then just seeing it, being able to hold it with mindfulness and wisdom, being able to observe it—there can be a shift. When we can see these patterns and habits with mindfulness and wisdom, they're no longer functioning as greed, aversion, and delusion. They're functioning as objects of our meditation. They're functioning as experiences that can help to wake us up.

Greed and aversion are relatively easy to recognize. There are some subtler flavors of those, but you've all been talking about this in your meetings, and I think we do find it relatively easy to recognize. Greed, that pulling towards something, that wanting, that leaning towards something. Or aversion, the pulling away from something. We can see the thoughts in our mind around it: "I want that," "I want to get rid of that." And the visceral sense of it as well. The question this morning also spoke to that—it's not that difficult to recognize greed and aversion.

But by its very nature, delusion is harder to see. So how do we see delusion? What is its nature? How do we get familiar with it?

In this talk, I really hope to offer some information that will help you recognize delusion—first of all, to learn what delusion is and how it functions, and then also to actually start seeing it happening, to start seeing when it is working in our minds.

Delusion can arise conditioned by greed and aversion. The perspective that greed and aversion put into our minds is a perspective that we're seeing through a filter, through a particular flavor. I think I talked about that with respect to aversion—how it shaped my mind, how I tended to see things from an aversive perspective. The perspective that greed and aversion can put in the mind creates the conditions where we're seeing things from a skewed perspective. We're not taking in all aspects; we're missing aspects of experience because we have a narrower or particular perspective that we're looking through. This missing of aspects of experience because we're looking from a particular perspective—this is one way delusion functions.

So delusion can be conditioned by greed and aversion. But fundamentally, delusion is more basic than greed and aversion. Ultimately, greed and aversion arise because of delusion. I'll talk about how that works as we go. But if delusion didn't exist, greed and aversion would not arise. So it is really the core issue, we could say.

We can think about delusion as having different levels to it. I've explored three different layers of delusion, moving from the more obvious kind to subtler and subtler forms. I'll name these now and then briefly go through the first two. I'm going to spend most time on the third one.

The first kind of delusion is basically a disconnection from experience, a not-knowing. The second kind is where there isn't a disconnection from experience, where there is awareness, but we are seeing experience through a particular perspective. As I just mentioned, greed and aversion can do that. We see things through a particular perspective and miss aspects of experience because of it.

This second layer of delusion is flavored by our own personal conditioning—the way we've been raised, the views and ideas and opinions we hold that have come into our experience and shaped how we meet the world. Our social conditioning, personal conditioning, familial conditioning—all of that creates a layer of views, a layer of ideas and beliefs that filter how we look at the world. That's what I'd call the second level or layer of delusion.

The deepest level of delusion is a level of misunderstanding, misperceiving that we all share. We could call it human delusions. The Buddha spoke to some specific ways that we as humans tend to misperceive, misunderstand, not recognize experience as it actually is. Tuari mentioned these this morning—the four distortions of experience. Sometimes the translation for the word there, *vipalasa*, is rendered as "inversion," that we see things upside down. We're seeing things exactly backwards. So that's the deepest level, the deepest layer of delusion.

Just a little bit about the first two, and then I want to spend more time on the distortions.

The first one—being disconnected, not aware of what's happening—this is basically lack of mindfulness. We're lost in thought, lost in a mind state, not conscious, not present in the present moment. This is a form of delusion. We've been talking about getting familiar with this a lot in terms of recognizing the moment

when mindfulness returns. That moment when mindfulness returns, we can have a flavor of the difference between what it's like to be aware now and just the moment before. There's a lingering memory often in that space when mindfulness returns of what the mind was like when it was not mindful. It's that thing Tuari was pointing to in the poem. Light, not light. Light, not light. The difference between when the mind is aware and awake and when it is caught or lost in thought. This is pointing to seeing—we can get a flavor in the mind of what it's like when it's just in that cloud of not knowing. So we can begin to get familiar with that side of the experience through that simple exploration of recognizing when mindfulness returns.

Another flavor of this disconnecting comes up with doubt. When doubt is in the mind, there's often a wavering, a sense of: What do I do? What should my choices be? We may feel paralyzed, we may feel like we're stuck there. And it is often a place where we are not aware. We're caught in the belief or the view of doubt. "I have to figure this out. I need to figure out which way to go, what practice to do, how to do it." The doubt itself, when we're believing it or when we're caught in it, that's a form of delusion. But when we can see it, when we can know, "Oh, this is doubt happening in the mind," there's no longer delusion there because we know—there's clarity, we know there's doubt. Doubt is not functioning like doubt when it is seen with mindfulness and wisdom, when it is clearly recognized. This is the experience a human being has when doubt is happening, this wavering feeling.

That's a little bit about that first kind of delusion. I think you've all seen this, but maybe not really quite recognized that you can see the delusion there. You can recognize, "Oh, that being caught is delusion." The waking up is coming out of that delusion.

The second level—this kind of delusion based on our personal conditioning, our social conditioning or familial conditioning—we could say this is the views or beliefs or agendas that are associated with our own personal lives, our own history of conditioning. This doesn't have to be delusion, but very often we are so immersed in that perspective of our conditionings that we don't recognize that we're seeing things from that perspective and perhaps missing experience. Not seeing. We're so immersed in that perspective or view that we take it to just be how things are supposed to be.

We may start to feel or see into this kind of delusion when those views are challenged. Just a simple example: I think we all have some flavor of what do you do when you meet somebody for the first time. How close do you stand to them? How much eye contact do you make? Do you touch them or not? All of that is deeply conditioned, and it's not as if somebody sat you down and said, "Here's what you do when you meet somebody for the first time." You absorb it through the conditioning. You absorb it.

But then, you know, if you go to another culture or another place and people behave differently, you might feel the discomfort of that. That view is being challenged, that perspective. It's not really a view that we think about in terms of beliefs—it's just more like "this is how people behave in this situation." And it may be challenged if you go to another culture or see people behaving in a different way.

When we're immersed in a perspective like that, it's hard to see information to the contrary. This is what's called confirmation bias in psychological terms: when we have a particular perspective, our minds tend to take in information that agrees with that perspective and actively ignore information that does not agree with it. This is a lot of why we're in so much suffering these days.

The Buddha's version of this kind of understanding, which I mentioned the other day: whatever we frequently ponder becomes the inclination of the mind. And that frequent pondering may not be something we're actively trying to do. We're not actively thinking, "I want to think about this, I want to think about this"—we're just immersed in a perspective. And so that's how we see the world. That's how we take in the world.

So views happen. What's important is to recognize that we have views, and to begin to be curious about what views we are holding. We need to recognize that they're views as opposed to truth.

A way to explore this that I've found really useful: when I'm particularly caught in a pattern or habit of mind that feels deeply connected to my personal conditioning, when I can really be with that pattern—feel into it, hold it, open to it—self-hatred, for instance, or anger—really open to it, then I drop in the question: "What's being believed?" And I don't try to find the answer. It's like dropping a pebble into a pond and just seeing what the ripples are for that question. What's being believed?

Often there's an interesting thing we might notice. If a belief is apparent there, we might be curious about how strong the belief is. Are we really on board for that one—like 100%, "I believe that"? Or is it actually, "Gosh, I don't even consciously believe that"? Maybe we know that doesn't make any sense, but somewhere at a deeper level—maybe our two-year-old self inside—believes it. Understanding or recognizing that level of belief can be a useful exploration in this area of delusion: just beginning to recognize views are views as opposed to truth, just curiosity about what is. When we can see "this is a view, this is a view that's being held," there's a little crack there to be able to not believe it necessarily as truth.

And then there's this deeper level of delusion that I'll spend more time on: the human delusion, the patterns of delusion that we all share. In some ways our social delusions have commonalities—the underlying ways in which that conditioning unfolds are similar in us—but we all have our own flavors of those, and that's a lot of what we get to see, those flavors in our own minds. I had this aversive flavor, this self-hatred flavor, this analytical flavor, this arrogant flavor—all these flavors of my personal conditioning. Seeing with mindfulness really helps to weaken those patterns.

As those patterns weaken, we start to see much more the fundamental levels of delusion. I would say this is the most insidious kind of delusion. It's so hard to see. With viewed delusion, it's hard to see because we're often in a little pocket of people who share our views. With this human delusion, we all share it—it's really hard to step out of it and see how we're misperceiving, how we're misunderstanding things.

These distortions, these vipallāsa, are inversions, sometimes called an "upside-down making" of experience. They cloud our accurate perception of what is happening. They lead us to recognize, perceive, experience incorrectly. The four basic distortions, which Ṭhānissaro mentioned this morning: we tend to take what is impermanent to be permanent; we tend to take what is unreliable as a lasting source of happiness to be reliable; we tend to take what is not-self to be self; and we tend to take what is unattractive to be attractive.

This last one—taking what is unattractive to be attractive—is primarily around our perspective on our bodies, and I think it's included here because that is such a sticky area for us. To me it feels very much like a corollary or natural offshoot of the first two: we take things to be desirable, attractive, because we're taking them to be permanent and reliable.

These first three—taking what is impermanent to be permanent, what is unreliable as reliable, what is not-self as self—these are the ones I'm really going to explore. You might have recognized that they are essentially the flip side of what we often talk about as the understandings that happen with direct seeing. The vipassanā insights are around understanding the impermanent, unreliable, not-self nature of experience. These are the understandings that free the mind—the seeing that frees, as Ṭhānissaro was mentioning, the title of Robert Beatty's book.

The seeing of experience as impermanent, unreliable, not-self—this will free the mind from clinging, because it is the misunderstanding that things are permanent, reliable, and self that leads to that clinging. As Ṭhānissaro also said this morning, whenever there is suffering—

these distortions are at play. Anytime there's a sense of struggle or stress or suffering, at some level we are taking things to be either permanent, reliable, or self.

So a little exploration around recognizing these aspects—recognizing how we misperceive things in this way.

One of my teachers spoke about these kinds of distortions. That first kind of delusion I talked about, not being present, is not necessarily what's happening here. We can be present and knowing experience and still have the perspective that things are permanent, reliable, and self. My teacher Sayadaw U Tejaniya has said, "Delusion doesn't mask the experience or the object. Delusion masks the true nature of the object." So we see experience, we may be aware that we're meeting experience in the present moment, but we're seeing it through this distorted lens.

This first one—taking what is impermanent to be permanent. We've talked about this in various ways. Actually, we've talked about all three of these in various ways, so I'm going to just remind you with each one of some of the ways to begin to see this.

We tend to take what is impermanent to be permanent for a couple of main reasons. Impermanence is masked by some different things that happen. One of the things that happens is that sometimes change is

occurring so quickly that we don't see it as change. The example around this that my teacher in Burma, Sayadaw U Pandita, used is the example of a fire stick. He said if you have a fire stick—a sparkler, like we used as kids—you could wave it around in a circle, and it would appear that there was a circle of fire in the air. Moving fast enough, the way our perceptual mechanisms work, the image lingers. It makes the appearance of that fire—it's like the tip of the red lingers in our perception. There's a perceptual kind of holding, in a way. So this is partly the nature of our perceptual apparatus that creates this kind of misunderstanding around impermanence, that we tend to see what is impermanent as permanent.

At one point I was at an exhibit at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. I walked in and saw these bars hanging from the ceiling—maybe four feet long and about two feet apart—and there were flashing lights on the bars. I looked up and thought, "I wonder what that exhibit's about. Maybe I'll get to see that later." I was with my nephew, so we wandered through the exhibit, and after a while we sat down to have a drink and take a break. We were not too far from this exhibit with the bars, hanging pretty high up in the air from the ceiling.

He was kind of looking up at them and said, "Oh, it's a school bus." I looked up at the bars with their flashing lights and said, "What?" He said, "Oh, it's butterflies now." I looked up—more flashing lights. "What are you talking about?"

After some time, I had to look at it in a specific way. His eyes had apparently relaxed or something and been able to see it. But when my eyes kind of relaxed in a certain way, I could—actually, one of the first ones I saw was the school bus. Across that set of bars, probably about forty feet long, enough bars to fill forty feet, it turned into a screen. Like I was seeing a screen projected up there. And across that screen was driving a school bus.

The first time, when he said it was a school bus, I looked up and saw flashing yellow and red and black lights. But when I looked up this time, I saw the school bus. The detail on it—it's just bars with flashing lights. That's what was up there. That was the reality of it. But it was detailed enough that I could read the name of the school district on the side of the school bus. I could read the name of the school district.

That's the persistence of our minds that will create that continuity. I knew it was just flashing lights. It was impermanent flashing lights. And yet I could see the school bus. It was quite a powerful experience—this seeing of how our visual field creates that sense of permanence from little bits of information.

So this kind of delusion is hard to see through, but we start to recognize through meeting our experience that things we take to be solid are actually little bits and pieces of information, or sparks of sensation. We can sometimes see this as we settle in with a continuity of mindfulness. We can start to see the way our mind is creating that stability.

Another way we may not recognize impermanence is because the change is so slow. I was talking about change being fast before, but sometimes change is slow. The stability of our bodies, for instance—it is

actually changing pretty fast when we look at the actual experience. But looking in the mirror day after day, it doesn't seem to change that much. We impute a sense of stability when change is slower.

And yet we can begin to be curious about this. We can recognize, "Yes, I don't look the same as I looked five years ago." It's like that axe handle that Tueri mentioned the other day—the slow wearing away of the handle of an axe. Day by day we don't see that change. But at some point we notice that the axe handle fits our hand like a glove. It's very smooth, and we know that some has worn away even as we didn't see it wearing away.

So sometimes, through reflection, we recognize there has been change that happened. We didn't see it as it was happening, but it was changing. This reflection can help us to have a more accurate perception of experience.

Another thing that masks change is concept. We've talked about this to some extent. The ideas that we overlay onto experience—when we're seeing experience from the perspective of the concept, we tend to miss the changing nature of experience. Our minds stabilize concepts. The mind can hold on to a concept and keep that concept going without recognizing that the actual experience is changing.

I think one of us did an example around the hand. Look at your hand and know it's a hand. You might not notice the sensation level too much if you're orienting to the concept of hand. But now, let go of the idea of hand and just feel the hand. Close your eyes and just feel it. That may create a different perspective on meeting that experience—the sensation level, the vibration, the pulsing, the tingling, very dynamic sensations. Concepts tend to obscure impermanence also.

We need concepts. Concepts are useful. But we need to recognize them as concepts. Again, this is the seeing. If we can know we're relating to something through a concept, then we have a better chance at not taking the concept to be the actual experience. Concepts are created in our minds. They're not the actual experience.

When we know we're relating to experience through a concept—and concepts often come with views, with ideas and beliefs and opinions—that pairing of concepts and views can be a really potent place for suffering and misunderstanding. When we can see a concept as a concept, there's a better chance that we might recognize that views coming along with that concept need to be held lightly.

In terms of exploring this aspect of delusion, investigating or bringing curiosity to it—we tend to take what is impermanent to be permanent. So what is it that we're taking to be solid? For one period of time I had this kind of investigation. Certain things felt really solid, and I got curious about that. When something feels solid or really stable, what is that experience? Is it actually solid? Is it actually stable? This can be a curious exploration around that particular aspect of delusion.

Knowing that all experience is impermanent, when we're taking something to be solid or stable, what is that? Not trying to see it as breaking into bits, but what is the experience of that solidity? When I've

explored that, I couldn't really find it. It did begin to break into parts—not because I was trying to make it break into parts, but because I was curious about what I was taking to be solid. How did the mind think this was solid? What is that experience of solidity?

Then there's the exploration around taking what is unreliable as a reliable place for happiness. I think this takes shape a lot around sense pleasure, or pleasure in general. When there is pleasure, we want it. We want to hold on to it.

And I think some of this sense that sense pleasure is reliable—it's kind of amazing sometimes. I was exploring this at one point because I was seeing that while I was having a piece of chocolate, my mind just thought, "Yes, this is really good." And somehow I thought that this was—I mean, even though I knew it was going to end, in that moment, the mind believed this was it. This is how happiness is found.

And so this is what our minds have done over and over again—sense pleasure is as good as it gets. And so while we may not think that it's going to last forever, we think we should be able to string them together, create a string of sense pleasures and just have a never-ending sense pleasure.

The Buddha had a teaching around sense pleasure and being curious about this, because it is that misunderstanding—I mean, it's kind of a corollary to impermanence. We think things are reliable as a place for happiness because we're taking them to be permanent. And so the Buddha encouraged us. He said, "Yes, you're going to experience pleasure. You're going to experience gratification when there's sense pleasure. So just notice. Be curious about how long does that gratification last?" And then I think the next encouragement is: and what happens when the gratification ends?

So that teaching or that exploration around sense pleasure is not to push away sense pleasure. We don't have to say sense pleasure is bad, but just look at our misunderstanding around it. What we see when we watch this process is that when we feel the happiness, the gratification of getting something that we want, and then when it ends—as it does—the next moment is looking for something else to want. Often. Not always. If we're seeing this very clearly, then it might just fall away and we might actually feel a sense of release and ease. But the habitual pattern around gratification, the one that tends to drive this misunderstanding or misperception of what is unreliable as reliable, is that when the gratification goes away, our minds immediately start: "Well, when was the last time I felt good? Well, when I had something that I wanted. So what do I want to want?" We start looking for something to want. We start looking for the next hit of sense pleasure.

So this teaching on exploring the gratification—I love this teaching because the Buddha is saying, "Start where you are. Yes, notice the gratification, but notice how long it lasts. Notice how far it extends." And then see what happens with that exploration. That will begin to help the mind see that it's not that reliable. We jump from one sense pleasure to the next, and we're missing that the whole process of jumping from one sense pleasure to the next is kind of missing the point that there is this unreliability. We miss the unreliability of it because we think we can get the next moment of sense pleasure.

So greed and aversion, I think, do arise out of this misunderstanding. We can understand that greed itself is that kind of pull towards something pleasant. That pull. That feeling of, "Yeah, I want that." Just that pull. The delusion embedded in greed is that having that is going to make me happy. Having that is going to make me okay. That delusion is embedded in the greed. Without that delusion, the greed is not going to arise. We think we need something—like, I need something pleasant to be happy.

Or on the flip side, aversion—the pushing away, that's the aversion, the wanting to separate, the nature of aversion to want to separate us from some experiences. So that's the aversion itself. The belief or the delusion embedded in aversion is that separation will make me be okay. It'll make me feel safe. I'll be fine if I'm separated from that thing. That's the delusion connected to aversion.

So again, in terms of curiosity and exploring this one, some of what I've talked about—the gratification, exploring the gratification—can be a doorway into understanding this side of delusion. Another kind of reflection or question: What are we relying on? What is it that we are relying on? And is it actually reliable?

We rely on a lot of things in the world for finding happiness—money, partners, having a particular car, whatever it might be. So what is it that we're relying on? That kind of question can be illuminating.

And then this last distortion: seeing what is not self as self, or taking what is not self to be self. We've talked about this quite a bit over the last weeks, but just as some reminders, taking what is not self to be self is a kind of misattribution of a sense of self to a process.

What's actually happening is just these five aggregates tumbling on—our sense bases and consciousness of each object. Joseph has a famous saying: there's only six things that ever happen. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and things going on in the mind. That's it. That's all that's happening. And yet we attribute a lot of things to those basic happenings. We attribute a sense of self in there, to this process.

There are natural laws that govern the processes unfolding in our bodies and minds—not a sense of self controlling or directing the experience. So we can investigate this. I talked about this last week, I think—the curiosity about when the sense of self feels strong. Again, to understand, we don't have to try to see not-self in self. The understanding happens as the sense of self is seen thoroughly. So curiosity about what it is that we are calling "me"—when it's strong, it can be much easier to see when we have that sense of self.

I pointed to this question or reflection on looking at the sense of self from this three-part perspective: feeling like mine, who I am, or me. Just recognizing the different flavors of the sense of self. That sense of "mine" is pretty obvious. The sense of "I am" the doer—the one who plans, who chooses, who acts, who's the agent—that's the next level. And then a feeling like it's happening to me: seeing that I'm not doing it, but it's happening to me.

We can see that what we are taking to be self is simply a tumbling on of process, these aggregates

tumbling on. At times we can see that very clearly, and it's very freeing to see it. But at first we kind of just have to recognize that we are misattributing. We don't have to try to stop doing that selfing, but see it. Understand: this is a sense of self that's happening. We can see that as a process also—the sense of self is a process that's happening. Believing that sense of self is the delusion. When it's seen—"oh, this is the sense of self that's arising right now"—just as I said about doubt, "oh, this is doubt that's arising right now"—that's not delusion. We can see these processes at work.

These three distortions operate at different levels. There's the basic level—the most superficial—and Tuareg mentioned this this morning as well, but just to review: there are distortions of perception, which is the least sticky level. The example often given in the texts is around misperceiving or misrecognizing a rope coiled in a corner in a dim room as a snake. There's a distortion of perception—we see something and we misperceive it, we recognize it incorrectly. That kind of misperception can happen, but that kind of misperception is corrected by just looking a little more closely. We turn a light on and we see it's a rope in the corner.

The next level is the distortion of thought. We start thinking about that experience, and it gets a little more solid in our minds. That is thought. So in that instance: "that is a snake." It's attributing, in a way, a reality to our perception. It's a little more firm there. We think it is a snake.

Then there's the distortion of view—that's the third level of distortion. That's where our patterns of thought become rigid, and we take something to be... it's more than just we think it's a snake. It's like we think it's a snake and we can't be convinced otherwise. An example in this realm would be: we see the coiled form in the corner and think it's a snake.

And we go out of the place, come back, get somebody and say, "There's a snake in there. Somebody's got to get rid of the snake. Somebody take the snake out of there." The distortion of view would look something like this: you go in there and the person says, "That's not a snake, that's a rope." And you say, "Well, I know there was a snake in here. That's a different thing. There was a snake in here." That's the distortion of view.

So these three work in a kind of cycle. The distortion of perception builds to the distortion of thought, which builds to the distortion of view. And with the distortion of view, our further perceptions are then conditioned by that distortion. They reinforce each other. I had a great story to tell you about this, but I don't have time. Sorry about that.

This information about delusion can help you begin to recognize—even just remembering that when we're taking things to be permanent, reliable, or self, there's delusion going on. Get curious about that. How is it working? What's going on?

We can also use suffering as a pointer. Whenever there's suffering, there's some kind of delusion at work. One of the great explorations when we're experiencing suffering may not be to ask, "Is this suffering

around impermanence?" That can get way too busy. But a simple question when we're suffering—"What's being believed?"—can begin to reveal the sense of "I need this to stay here," or something like that. The belief can point to what the deeper level of clinging is around. So when there's suffering, that exploration around what's being believed can help to find or point to the kind of delusion that's happening.

Non-delusion is not something we do. It's an understanding. It's insight. When we see through delusion, this is insight. We can't make it happen. But we can create the conditions for the understanding to arise by meeting our experience and being curious about the actual nature of our experience.

And insights themselves are also conditioned and impermanent. I've seen this so many times now—I've stopped getting frustrated by it—that we see through something, and for a little while, seeing through some kind of clinging, some kind of pattern... At one point I remember just being so happy. It was like somebody was in my ear whispering, "Clinging causes suffering. You don't need to cling." And the mind was just letting go of everything. I was so happy. I thought I'd figured it out. And it seemed so obvious—it seemed so obvious that clinging would create suffering. Why would I ever do that ever again? It was just so clear. And I think it was about an hour later, it was no longer so clear.

The understanding there, the seeing—it can't be unseen. We know at that point, we know that clinging causes suffering at a deeper level maybe than we had experienced before. When we have these insights, there's a deeper kind of understanding. And yet the delusion comes back. The delusion like, "Yeah, there's got to be something out there I can hold on to that'll make me happy. If not a piece of chocolate, then at least a concentration state—that'll make me happy."

So the mind goes back to that pattern of clinging. And knowing, having seen the clinging not be there, we can know in that watching, seeing the mind reaching out for something, we can know that's delusion at work, very clearly. Having seen through it with wisdom, it becomes much more obvious that it is delusion at work. And then at some point, several years later, seeing the mind just do this reaching out—

I was like, it was so tender almost. It was like, oh, yeah. Go right ahead. Try to find something. It was just this is what the mind was doing. And I could see that it was the habit. I could see it was just the pattern the mind was caught in. And there was so much capacity to just know it and see that it was delusion. It's like, okay, you try. I'll be here with you. Go right ahead. Try to find something that you can cling to and be happy about. Just try.

And it would find something and it would create something for a split second. And there would be a little bit of happiness. And then the whole pattern would fall apart. It just lets go. And it's so much more restful when it's not clinging. Oh, but there must be something. And I would just go right ahead. Seeing delusion at work. Because there was so much of that understanding there, it was okay to watch the pattern and know it was delusion. And just see the momentum, just the momentum of this pattern over and over again.

So having seen delusion, seen through it, when it comes back, it's not a mistake either. That's not like you did something wrong. It's because delusion is so deeply conditioned. It's human. It's human. One or two times of seeing through something is not going to undo years and eons of human evolution along these lines—to take what's impermanent to be permanent, to take what's unreliable to be reliable, to take what's not self to be self. These are so deeply conditioned.

So some tenderness there, some sense of, yeah, okay, this mind, it's going to do this stuff. And it can be seen. And so much freedom can happen. And the Buddha promises the ending of suffering with the ending of greed, aversion, and delusion—the seeing of impermanence, unreliable, not self.

Let's sit for a moment.

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