The Present Moment

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 59:21

So tonight I want to talk about the present moment and why we spend so much time talking about it and trying to pay attention to it.

Sometimes it seems like we endlessly talk about the present moment, and after a day of coming back to the body, coming back to the breath over and over again—even when we've done it for a while—we can start to wonder, why am I doing this? What does this have to do with anything anyway?

To start this exploration of the present moment, I'd like to begin by reading a poem from the Buddha. I find this an interesting poem to look at and reflect on because it's repeated four times in the suttas. In a couple of those instances, the discourse where this poem appears begins with a monk and a deity having a conversation that goes something like, "Do you remember that poem the Buddha told us to reflect on?" And the other one says, "No, do you remember that poem?" "No." "Well, maybe we should go ask about it." So you kind of get the sense that this is a poem they were encouraged to memorize, to reflect on:

Let not one revive the past
or on the future build one's hopes.
For the past has been left behind
and the future has not been reached.
Instead, with insight let one see
each presently arisen state.
Let one know that and be sure of it,
invincibly, unshakably.
Today the effort must be made.
Tomorrow, death may come, who knows.
No bargain with mortality
can keep him and his hordes away.
But one who dwells thus ardently,
relentlessly by day, by night,
is one, the peaceful sage has said,
who has had a single excellent night.

So he's stressing here coming into the present, letting go of the past, letting go of the future, and coming into the present. I'll talk about that in some more detail, but first I want to share something I found—a Peanuts cartoon that to me is kind of like a commentary on this poem.

Lucy and Charlie Brown are sitting at the wall, hanging out in the afternoon, looking over the wall. And Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "Do you realize how many great moments in life are wasted? Take, for instance, the great moment that's coming up right now. Bang, it's gone, you've just wasted it." And Charlie Brown responds, "Well, you're a lot of fun to be around."

Like any good humor, there's truth on both sides of that. We do waste our moments by not being present for them. We waste so many of our moments by being lost in the past and being caught up fantasizing, thinking about the future. And yet on the other hand, Lucy's idea of what wasting a moment is seems to imply that there's something special that needs to be happening—whereas Charlie Brown is content hanging out and looking over the wall. Not a problem to hang out and look over the wall.

We tend to revive the past and project into the future. We do this endlessly. What is the past when we actually look at it? The past is thoughts that are arising now in the present moment. And we are in a kind of thought world, a thought bubble around that past. So we're lost, we're not connected to what's actually happening here and now. We are reflecting back and living in that world of the past.

Or the future. Even more of an exercise in futility in a way is spending our time projecting forward into what the future might be. Not to say that we can't plan and think about what we're going to do, but we spend an inordinate amount of time actually going over scenarios. What's going to happen if they say that? Well, then I'll respond this way. What's going to happen if they say that other thing? Well, then I'll respond that way.

I've spent so much of my life thinking about the future that never appeared. Even when I had planned out every possible scenario and thought, okay, that's what's going to happen, that's what I'm going to do—if that situation actually did happen, I rarely could do the thing that I thought I was going to do. We just cannot really predict how we're going to respond in a moment when we actually get there.

So these activities of mind, these thoughts, they're all just thoughts arising in the present moment. But we don't see them as that. We see them somehow as actually being the past and actually being the future—if not the actual future, possible futures.

If we're not actually here, present, we miss our lives. I spent so much time both looking back with regret, thinking back on the past, wishing I'd done this or said that, trying to revive the past and live it over again differently so that I wouldn't be experiencing something painful here and now. Or projecting, often with fear, into the future.

I remember one time I was having some struggle with my boyfriend. I came up with this whole scenario: well, he's going to do that, and then I'm going to get really mad at him. He never did that. It was all just fantasy, all just projection. And so much of our suffering actually happens over reviving the past and projecting into the future. I suffered a lot over that fantasy. I didn't need to suffer over that. It never happened.

So if we're not mindful of what's happening here and now, we're actually missing our lives. There's that sense of—bang, it's gone, you've wasted it. Never again is this moment going to be here. Every moment is new, every moment is fresh. And if we're lost in the past or lost in the future, we miss our lives.

That's one reason to be in the present moment: it's the only place anything ever happens. Including the past and the future. The past and the future happen here and now in our thoughts, in our minds. What we think of as past happens here and now. What we think of as future happens here and now.

Another helpful understanding about the present moment is that it's actually in the present moment that our struggles are created. We react to our experience. A thought arises now, and we may react to that thought. We think of something we wish we'd done or hadn't done. There's regret arising. What's actually happening is that there's a thought arising in the present moment, and then there's a reaction to that thought. Often that thought has a kind of unpleasantness associated with it—I wish I hadn't been the kind of person who said that thing. And so we regret that. There's the arising of that memory, the construction of that identity: I'm the person who said that, and I didn't like that person. And then we suffer over that. That regret arises now. It's arising here and now.

We sometimes think about our suffering over the past as something we carry around with us, like baggage that's always weighing us down. There is a kind of baggage there. The memory is there, and there's a tendency to have reactions around that memory—a memory of something that happened and a feeling of embarrassment. Often it feels as if these things are inextricably intertwined, that there's no way that memory can arise without embarrassment arising. It feels as if the embarrassment is lurking underneath the surface, just waiting to pop up.

But actually, when we start to explore in the present moment what happens, we see that the memory arises, the reaction to that memory arises, and then the embarrassment arises. It actually happens in sequence. And it's not necessarily the case that those two are inextricably intertwined. There's a habit of going from that memory to embarrassment—a very strong pattern, a strong habit.

And yet, it does not have to be that way. That memory can arise and we can simply see it as an arising memory. "Oh, there's that memory." When we see it arising, when we see the memory coming up as just a thought and don't create the identity around the person who did that in the past or was in that situation in the past—when we just notice, "Oh, there's a thought"—then there's the possibility of seeing that it is just a thought, and there doesn't need to be the follow-on reaction to it.

So much of our suffering is created like this. Thoughts arising about the past, thoughts arising about the future, and we react to those thoughts. And then there are things happening in the present moment that we react to as well. Physical pain, for instance, is one way that we often get reactive. Unpleasant experience in the body—we often react to this. And again, this is a very habitual kind of experience. When there's pain in the body, we don't like it, we don't want it, we want to get rid of it. We may feel like we don't have control over it, and there's a struggle, a feeling of being combative with that physical

unpleasantness.

From the Buddha's perspective in the teachings around this, he talks about how it's as if we, having been struck by a dart—an arrow—then pick up another arrow and strike ourselves again. Because we have this initial sense of physical pain, that first arrow. But then we get reactive to it. We don't like it, we don't want it, we want to get rid of it, we want to fix it, change it, control it. That's the second dart, and it becomes a feedback loop whereby that pain just escalates—the mental pain compounding the physical pain.

These things happen in the present moment. This process happens in the present moment. And by being mindful, being present in the present moment, we have an opportunity not only to witness this process, but through witnessing it with mindfulness, we can sometimes choose differently.

The reactive mind basically wants things to be other than they are right now. Our reactive mind is essentially out of alignment with the way things are here and now in this moment. And if you reflect on this a little bit, you know, this is the situation we're in right now. Things have happened in the past; causes and conditions have come together to put us into whatever situation we're in right now. It is here. Whatever situation it is—pleasant, unpleasant, whatever experience we're having—is already happening. And so often we fight against that experience that's already happening. We hate it, we have aversion to it. Or we really like it and we want to hold on to it, and we experience fear around the thought of it going away.

So that situation here and now is just what's happening. And I'm not saying that all we do is sit here and not try to take action. But the aversion, the wanting to hold on—those are extra. And they create a mental stress, a mental suffering, a sense of dissatisfaction that's extra in our experience. It's not necessary. We can experience something unpleasant and take action. We cut our finger with a knife and we can bind it up without feeling angry at ourselves for having cut ourselves. That's just a simple example, but that's the kind of thing we do over and over again. We rail against things as they are. And that very railing against is the suffering, is the stress, is the dissatisfaction.

There's another way of relating to our experience. The Buddha suggests mindfulness as another way to relate to our experience in the present moment. When we notice that we are battling with things as they are, battling with the present moment, the Buddha said, "This is suffering, this battling with the present moment." And what we need to do with that suffering is understand it. Not understand it intellectually—he's not talking about thinking about it—but a direct experiencing of that suffering. How does it come to be? What does it feel like? It may sound counterintuitive, but I'll talk a little bit about how this works, how being mindful of our suffering actually helps to free us from it.

I'll share first a poem by one of my favorite poets, Rainer Maria Rilke. This is a kind of celebration, an acknowledgment of this truth that suffering is our teacher—it's what helps to wake us up. Rilke says, in the Tenth Duino Elegy: "Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight, let me sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels."

Let not even one of the clearly struck hammers of my heart fail to sound because of a slack, a doubtful, or a broken string. Let my joyfully streaming face make me more radiant. Let my hidden weeping arise and blossom. How dear will you be to me then, you nights of anguish? Why didn't I kneel more deeply to accept you, inconsolable sisters, and surrendering lose myself in your loosened hair? How we squander our hours of pain. How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration to see if they have an end. Though they are really our winter enduring foliage, our dark evergreen, one season in our inner year. Not only season and time, but our place and settlement, foundation and soil and home.

Mindfulness of this phenomenon of suffering, of unsatisfactoriness, of stress—there are so many different translations for this term *dukkha*. The Buddha used this term, often translated as "suffering," but *dukkha* is much broader and deeper than that word usually conveys. Others have translated it as stress, or unreliability, or unsatisfactoriness. These translations give you more of a sense of what we're talking about here. There's just this rub, this feeling that things maybe aren't quite the way we'd like them to be.

Being in the present moment offers us ways to learn about this reactive mind and learn to free ourselves from it, to let go of it a little bit. One of these ways is simply through the process of being present—the mind begins to settle down, it gets concentrated, it gets still. And in that process of the mind settling and getting concentrated, the reactivity toward and away from things begins to fall away. Concentration through mindfulness brings us to a place where we can meet the present moment without reactivity. Through this process, we begin to see that the reactivity is extra.

We can be with our breath through pain in our body, and then it's actually okay. We can sit through an emotional storm. Sometimes, as the mind settles even further, the emotional storms even fall away. We see a thought arise and it's not a problem—that memory that might have led to embarrassment. The embarrassment just doesn't come up because the mind is right there to see that thought arise. It sees, "Oh, it's just a thought," and the thought passes away. So the mind settling in concentration begins to help us understand how all this reactivity is extra.

Also, as we settle into the present moment, often through concentration, there is a kind of peacefulness, a settling that happens. The mind gets more comfortable and more at ease in this process. Through that, it's as if the mind starts to get an education in peacefulness and ease, and it begins to gravitate more toward that. It sees, "Yes, okay, so this reactivity is happening, and I remember what that peace felt like." The mind can almost begin to let go of the state of reactivity and gravitate toward something that has become more familiar and feels more grounded and settled. So the process of being in the present moment begins to educate our minds in another way of being. This helps us let go of some of this reactivity.

Then there's a letting go that happens as we start, through being mindful of something—being mindful of the arising of a very habitual pattern of self-hatred, for instance. That was one of my favorite habitual patterns that I worked with over the years. Through the practice of mindfulness, through being with things as they are and not resisting things as they are, there seems to be a little shift that can happen as we

bring mindfulness to our experience. It's as if things don't have to be other than they are. "Oh, there's an arising thought of self-hatred. That's the way it is. It doesn't have to be any different." So mindfulness begins to create a little space around our experience.

There's a fun poem by Billy Collins—some of you might have heard me offer this before—that conveys this sense of a shift in perspective that can happen as we pay attention. When we come into the present moment and we are paying attention, something's happening and we just hate this thing that's happening. But we keep bringing our mindfulness back over and over again, and suddenly there's a shift. Things change. This Billy Collins poem is called—

Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in My House:

The neighbor's dog will not stop barking. He's barking the same high, rhythmic bark that he barks every time they leave the house. They must switch him on on their way out.

The neighbor's dog will not stop barking. I close all the windows in the house and put on a Beethoven symphony full blast, but I can still hear him muffled under the music, barking, barking, barking.

And now I can see him sitting in the orchestra, his head raised confidently as if Beethoven had included a part for a barking dog.

When the record finally ends, he is still barking, sitting there in the elbow section, barking, his eyes fixed on the conductor who is entreating him with his baton, while the other musicians listen in respectful silence to the famous barking dog solo, that endless coda that first established Beethoven as an innovative genius.

So something that we just assume is a problem can shift, and our minds can take it in in a different way.

Then there's the letting go that happens as we are willing to hang out with things that are difficult—the mindfulness of simply watching our emotions rise and pass, watching our bodily sensations arise and pass. With emotions, this is a particularly good place to notice this. If we are able to simply allow a challenging emotion without either resisting it and trying to push it away, or without trying to manipulate it or fix it or change it, or without holding on to it—sometimes we can hold on to a feeling of self-righteous anger, whipping ourselves up into even more anger through that feeling of self-righteousness, holding on to it because it somehow makes us feel justified.

Instead of relating to our experience in one of those ways—either pushing away or holding on—we can simply be with it. That's a shift of perspective, to just be with something. Allow a feeling of anger, not trying to change it, but just riding it out. The law of impermanence will take over, and that thing will eventually end.

We can watch this process. We can see how being mindful of something, particularly with difficult emotions, creates space. Emotions tend to be fed by our thoughts. When we're in a depressive state, we tend to keep talking ourselves into that depression: "Oh, I'm no good, I'm a failure, I've really blown it this

time, nobody's ever going to like me again." We can go on and on like that, and those thoughts simply perpetuate the feeling of depression. Likewise with anger—we can perpetuate it through our thoughts.

Through mindfulness, instead of putting our attention out in the world on the thing we are focused on, or inside ourselves in terms of how we think we've failed or what we've done wrong, we turn instead to the feeling of the emotion itself. What we do is cut the mental juice that's keeping that emotion going.

It's kind of like a car. Those emotions are like a car going down the freeway at a hundred miles an hour. Pumping those thoughts is like putting your foot on the gas pedal. If you can turn your attention to the feeling of the emotion itself and let go of the thoughts, it's like you've taken your foot off the gas pedal and put the car into neutral. It's not going to stop immediately, but it will come to a stop because you're no longer giving it the gas.

Mindfulness works in this way. We turn our attention to the feeling, and that's like putting our minds into neutral around that feeling. It gives the opportunity for the feeling to live its life and come to an end. We can realize the letting go of our reactivity by being willing to be mindful of it until it dissipates through impermanence.

Mindfulness in the present moment is truly the key—mindfulness along with some sense of understanding about what's helpful for us to pay attention to, what leads us away from suffering. The Buddha really focused on this. He said, "This is all I teach: I teach about suffering and I teach about the ending of suffering. Everything I teach is leading in that direction." Keep your eye on the suffering. Keep your eye on that and understand it. This will help lead to the ending of suffering.

He said there are three main underlying tendencies of mind that lead us into suffering, into unsatisfactoriness and distress, over and over again: greed, aversion, and delusion. These qualities—acting out of greed, trying to hold onto something that inevitably, because everything is impermanent, will eventually go away—cause us to suffer. Or we suffer from the holding on itself, because we're afraid it's going to go away, knowing something about how things go. So we experience fear. In that very greed, there's a contraction, a stress, a suffering.

Aversion is really obviously suffering. Even the feeling of aversion is unpleasant in the body.

A sense that this is not acceptable, that this has got to change—that is suffering. Now again, it's not to say that when something is happening we don't take action to change it. But that sense of aversion around it is optional. The aversion itself is suffering. And we can take action instead out of compassion, out of kindness, rather than out of aversion—some more wholesome motivation for action.

The Buddha pointed to action taken out of greed, aversion, and delusion. He said if you act out of greed, aversion, and delusion, you're essentially deepening the ruts of greed, aversion, and delusion in your mind, and that will lead you into more suffering. If your actions are motivated by non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion, that will lead you away from suffering and towards happiness. And so in this

teaching he said: keep your eye on your mind. If you're going to be acting out of greed, aversion, or delusion, if you can choose to not take those actions, that's going to lead you towards more happiness.

There's this interesting quality of mindfulness: as we turn our attention to those unskillful states of mind, those unskillful motivations—greed, aversion, and delusion are the three roots, but so many difficult, unwholesome, unskillful states of mind result from these. Anger, rage, cruelty, hostility, frustration, depression, wanting, avarice—all arise out of these three roots. And the amazing thing about mindfulness is that if you turn with mindful attention to those states of mind, letting go of the thoughts associated with them in favor of just being with the feeling, then mindfulness creates the conditions for those difficult states, those unhelpful states, to appear less frequently in our minds.

Partly this is because when we're caught by those difficult states, when we're caught by anger, we don't actually recognize how it's impacting us here and now. I know in my life, when I've been caught by anger, I've been so focused on that other person—I really hope that they suffer—so focused on the anger at that other person that I'm not feeling how I'm suffering through the anger in this moment. Turning the mindfulness away from the thing we're angry at and towards the experience of anger itself begins to give the mind an education in the fact that this state actually doesn't feel very good, is not very helpful in our system here and now. It begins to educate us in the suffering of those states.

When the mind begins to get that education, it also starts to see how that anger is arising out of a holding, a clenching in our own minds. The mind sees it's something it's doing to itself. And so it starts to let go of that. It's really quite an amazing property of mindfulness that turning mindful attention to these difficult things actually helps us to let go of them. I didn't believe it when I first heard it, but over and over again I have seen the truth of that in my own experience.

The other interesting thing about mindfulness is that if you turn your attention to beautiful states of mind, wholesome, skillful states of mind motivated out of non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion—the quality of mettā, the quality of kindness that we were working with this afternoon, the quality of compassion, the quality of mindfulness itself, the quality of tranquility, the quality of generosity—turning mindful attention to those states, noticing how they are present here and now in the moment, creates the conditions for them to become more frequent in our experience.

So mindfulness has this simultaneous property: it helps us to let go of what's unskillful and cultivate what's skillful. By just turning our attention to the present moment and noticing what's here, we begin to naturally let go of the states motivated by greed, aversion, and delusion. We begin to naturally cultivate more of the wholesome qualities—love, kindness, generosity, compassion, equanimity.

So another reason why it's so helpful to be in the present moment, noticing the present moment: it's the only place anything ever happens. It's where our reactivity is born, so it's where we can start to see that reactivity. And the mind, being mindful in the present moment, begins to naturally let go of the unwholesome and naturally cultivate the skillful.

Another reason is that the present moment is the only place where there's any possibility of choice. This relates back to skillful action and unskillful action. Through seeing our experience in the present moment over and over again, we begin to notice that kind of motivation happening in our minds before we actually act. We can know that we're going to speak before we speak, we can know that we're going to move before we move, and we can even know we're going to think before we think. We can also know we're headed in the direction of an emotion before that emotion actually arises.

This is the factor in the mind of intention—intention is what motivates our action. And we can see this; we can see intention apart from the action. Through the physical actions of our body, we can begin to explore this, noticing that we can know we're going to move before we move. In the knowing of this intention—the knowing that I'm getting ready to move, or I'm getting ready to act, I'm getting ready to speak—in the knowing of that, we can also often, not always but often, see why we're going to do that thing. There's a motivation that underlies our actions. Accompanying all of those intentions to act is a reason why we're going to act.

And that reason is the key. The Buddha really pointed to this as a very important point to notice. If we can find that motivation and recognize whether it is skillful or unskillful, then we have an opportunity—having seen that intention and the motivation, because we've seen it come up—mindfulness has an opportunity to kind of step in and choose to not follow through on that intention.

If we're not mindful in the present moment, these choices happen for us. Our habits make our choices for us. The ways that we have engaged through our lives have created a kind of momentum of particular habits. We all have our own favorite habits. My two favorite habits were anger and self-hatred. And over and over again, I kept falling into those ruts. When mindfulness wasn't present, it was kind of like those were the ruts that I gravitated towards. I'm sure you all know your own ruts—you know your own things you tend to fall into over and over again. When we're not mindful, it's like those ruts are making our decisions for us, like our habits and patterns are choosing for us. So the choices are being made, whether or not we're conscious of it.

When we can bring mindfulness into the present moment, to this process of making choice, we can start to have a little bit of a wedge in the door to begin to say, maybe I don't want to choose that way. Not always. Often what happens as we just start this exploration, as we see this intention and this motivation, is that all we get to do is watch ourselves follow through on it. And then we just get to see the consequences of following through on that action. We get to see what happens as a result. Often it's some kind of struggle, some kind of suffering. And then the instruction is just to understand that suffering, just to meet it. Let go of thoughts of self-recrimination—"I should have been able to stop myself." If you could have stopped yourself, you would have.

Sometimes our habits are stronger than our ability to be mindful. And we have to respect that. We have to acknowledge that the conditioned patterns of our mind have a lot of power. Mindfulness is pretty

powerful, but sometimes those habits are stronger than our mindfulness. And so when that happens, we just have to be compassionate for ourselves. This is happening because of the way causes and conditions have come together. The habits of my mind have led to this. And can I now be compassionate towards the situation I find myself in? Can I just meet this moment with mindfulness?

We can start exploring this moment of choice in our actions. It's actually an interesting exploration to make, something you might want to play with. You don't have to do this, but you might just want to try this: when you're sitting, you might take a period of, say, ten minutes at the beginning or at the end of the sitting, where you kind of just say, "Okay, I'm not going to move. I'm just going to see if I can hold still." And then, having made that kind of resolve around stillness, see if you can notice the intention to move before you move. If you notice that intention, you may want to see, "Okay, can I just see what's the motivation behind that? Is it an aversion because I've got an itch on my nose and I really want to scratch that itch? Or is it a pain that I want to move to relieve?"

I'm not saying not to move at all, but notice. If you can have that resolve for stillness, you might begin to notice that intention and begin to notice the motivation that accompanies it. And see if you can choose whether or not to follow through on it. Sometimes, you know, if there's a certain kind of pain—you've been sitting for a while and there's a certain pain, like my sciatic nerve, if I'm sitting on my sciatic nerve, there's a pain that really lets me know: it's time to move now. The body is going to be damaged if I don't move. And I can move then out of compassion rather than aversion. But if I'm not present to notice that, I'd probably just move kind of automatically out of aversion—"Oh, I don't like that. I want to get rid of that." But we can choose to move more skillfully. So explore that. You can play with that a little bit in your experience.

Another place to play with it is around the changing of postures. If you're sitting, then see if you can know you're going to stand before you stand.

The watermelon is out there and there's only a few pieces left. You've kind of had your eye on that watermelon, and you see somebody walking over there, and suddenly you're up, wanting to get to the watermelon before the other person gets there. That was some greed motivating that action.

So just see if you can notice—the larger changes of bodily posture are sometimes an inroad into being able to see our intention and the motivation that goes behind it. Again, not to say that we're not supposed to act at all. That's often a misunderstanding of the Buddha's teaching. But we see if we can, in the seeing of our motivation—often in seeing our motivations, there's a mixture of wholesome and skillful motivations and unwholesome, unskillful motivations.

Like the moving, for example, when there's pain in your body. Knowing that this pain is damaging the body—there may well be some aversion to that pain. And there is the sense of knowing this is a skillful thing to do. The damage to the body is not a good thing. So there is a compassionate motivation there as well. Sometimes I like to suggest for people, in seeing these mixed motivations, just see if you can connect

a little bit more to the more wholesome motivation in taking the action. See if you can incline more towards the compassion than the aversion in the movement.

I've already talked a little bit about concentration, that this is another benefit of being in the present moment. The mindfulness, the sustaining of our mindful attention in the present moment, leads to concentration. It's as simple as that—if we can simply moment after moment be present, the mind will become concentrated, it will become settled, it will become calm. And this feels good. The state of concentration feels pretty good. So that's a benefit of this practice. As we learn how to engage with more continuity, it brings some peacefulness, it brings some happiness into our being. It brings a sense of well-being.

And through that well-being, through that sense of happiness, the mind opens into some of these more beautiful qualities that we were talking about this afternoon. In the present moment we can begin to have a heartfelt connection to the present moment—that kind relationship to our experience we were discussing. Being in the present moment, we can have that connection.

I'll read another poem by Rilke that speaks to this happiness of being here:

Truly being here is glorious. Each of you had an hour, or perhaps not even an hour, a barely measurable time between two moments when you were granted a sense of being. Everything. Your veins flowed with being. Yet we can so easily forget what our laughing neighbor neither confirms nor envies.

This state of well-being, this heart-opening connection to the present moment, is very beautiful. And we all know that feeling. But we do tend to overlook it at times. Our culture doesn't really respect or honor it. So we come into retreat and cultivate this sense of being present. And yet when we go back out into our lives, we often forget this because our culture doesn't value it. Being here, we really can begin to get a sense of the value of this being present. It's very beautiful.

And the being present, stable in the present moment, begins to open us up to insight, begins to open us up to actually seeing things more clearly. We begin to understand impermanence more deeply through being in the present moment—seeing impermanence directly through experience. Watching these emotions, for instance. Watching the feeling of wanting. I recommend this one highly. If you want something, you want that piece of watermelon—play with watching the wanting instead of following through on the wanting. Feel the wanting. Feel the kind of magnetic pull, that magnetic connection between you and that watermelon. It's like it's drawing you over there. Just feel it. Can you just feel it?

If you just feel it without thinking so much about, "I have to have that watermelon, that's going to make me happy for three seconds"—if you just feel the feeling, you will see it vanish. And when you see it vanish, you know in that moment directly the impermanent nature of that experience. And you will also know directly the way that that

wanting had you in its grip. When that wanting releases, it's like being released from a vice grip. And you

directly see how you were suffering, how you were caught by your own mind.

So insight—insight is possible through being in the present moment.

I'll close by reading a Tibetan poem. In a way, it's a kind of bookend to the poem I started with. The poem I started with pointed out: let go of the past, let go of the future, notice with insight each presently arisen state. That's what we've been talking about. See each presently arisen state. You have to do this here and now. This is the only place you can do this. We need to do it today because we never know when we're going to die.

So this poem says some similar things:

This human body, at peace with itself, is more precious than the rarest gem. Cherish your body, it is yours this one time only. The human form is won with difficulty. It is easy to lose.

All worldly things are brief, like lightning in the sky. This life, you must know, is the tiny splash of a raindrop, a thing of beauty that passes away even as it comes into being.

Therefore, set your goal and make every day and night a time to attain it.

Treasure the time you have been given, for this is all that matters.

Thank you for listening.

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