Supports for Continuity

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 57:52

I appreciate in the moments before the talk, sitting here and listening to the rustlings, the sounds of people coming in and finding their place. It gets to be almost quiet, and then somebody adjusts their posture, shifts in the chair, and then it goes a little quieter, and then there's a little shift. Just hearing it gradually get quiet. Something about that I really appreciate—just hearing the natural movements of humans as we do our thing.

In the instructions and in the talks in the last days, several times we've mentioned this encouragement towards continuity of mindfulness, encouragement towards the sustaining of mindfulness over time. I wanted to speak about that this evening: the importance of it, and how to encourage it, really. What are some supports for that aspect of mindfulness?

When the Buddha talked about this in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, that phrase that Greg mentioned the other night—satipaṭṭhāna can mean the establishing of mindfulness. And to me, what the establishment of mindfulness is, is this coming into the continuity of mindfulness. Mindfulness is established when it is moment to moment present in our experience. And this is a form of concentration, this establishment of mindfulness, this continuity of mindfulness.

It can express itself in different ways. Continuity of mindfulness might be happening as we stay with one experience, like the breath, and that produces one form of concentration, a kind of one-pointed concentration—maybe the kind of concentration we're more familiar with, this focused concentration. But a different form of concentration happens as the mindfulness becomes stable, as we are not pulled out of the present moment by reactivity, by thoughts, by slipping out because of inattentiveness or boredom. This is another form of concentration, in the Pāli called khaṇika samādhi, momentary or moment-to-moment concentration.

This continuity of mindfulness is essentially how concentration gets established. As we encourage that continuity, as we encourage the stability—either through the one-pointed concentration or through this moment-to-moment concentration—in the moment-to-moment concentration there's a stability of mindfulness, not necessarily a stability of objects, a stability of experience. We may be aware, continuously aware, moment to moment, of changing experience. Now a body sensation. Now a sound. Now a vibration. Now a thought. Now an emotion. Just moment after moment, knowing what's happening. In a way, it's the stability of mindfulness itself rather than the stability of an object.

This continuity supports concentration. It is also where mindfulness gets its power from. As mindfulness becomes more continuous, this is how we begin to really see very deeply into our experience, to

understand our experience as impermanent, unreliable, uncontrollable—not me, not mine, not who I am. We begin to understand the conditioned nature of our experience through this continuity of mindfulness. And so continuity of mindfulness is really important.

Many of my teachers have said this: we practice mindfulness from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to bed. This is our practice. And yet, as Greg said the other day, we're probably not going to be mindful from the moment we get up to the moment we go to bed. There will be gaps. What I'd like to really explore this evening are ways to support continuity.

So, a couple of shorter tools or reflections to start. One way to support continuity, or really engagement with our mindfulness practice, is understanding the value of practice. Sayadaw U Tejaniya says that if we understood, really, really understood the value of practice, we wouldn't stop practicing. Clearly you all understand the value of practice or you would not have signed up for this retreat. And yet sometimes we can forget. Sometimes, especially in a long retreat like this, it can start feeling almost like rote. It's like, okay, this is what we do. Our job is: I get up and I'm mindful while I get dressed and I'm mindful while I go to breakfast. We lose a sense of the connection or the juice with the value.

If we find ourselves taking the practice for granted, or feeling like we're getting up to go to work today, it can help to reflect a little bit on what benefits you've gained from the practice, to recognize how the practice has supported you. Also reflect and recognize that you can practice right now. We do not know how long we'll be able to practice. We actually don't know whether today's our last day here, today's our last day alive. So while we are alive and have energy—

while we have our minds. We don't know whether, in our aging process, our minds will shift into dementia, losing the capacity to choose to practice. So right now, in this time, you have chosen to be here. You have this capacity. Using it, remembering that we won't always have this possibility—this is one way of remembering the value of practice.

Another exploration around continuity: when we talk about practicing in a continuous way, bringing mindfulness moment to moment, often that calls up the idea that what this is about is trying to do it. Bringing effort into the practice. Trying to be mindful. I remember many times sitting down thinking, "I am going to be mindful for this whole sitting," almost trying to muster the energy to be present for the entire forty-five minute sitting in that first second. This is perhaps a familiar way of applying effort in our daily lives and in other things.

But in our practice, we can really only be mindful for a moment or a few moments at a time. So exploring how we use our energy in this encouragement towards continuity, rather than that mode of sitting down and trying to pick up mindfulness for forty-five minutes—all that's necessary, actually, is to notice in this moment: right now, how hard is it for you to be mindful of the contact of your hands? How about the sound of my voice? The contact of your hips against the chair or cushion or bench. Usually it's not so difficult. When I name each of those things, it often just pops into awareness. You don't have to struggle

and rouse the mind, saying, "Okay, go to the hips." It's just—oh, it's there.

And so that kind of noticing—for a moment, in this moment, what's most obvious? Maybe a breath, half a breath. For a moment, it's not difficult to be mindful. The investigation or exploration might be: enough effort or energy to be mindful in this moment.

Maybe let's explore this with the breath right now. Can you be mindful of an in-breath? That's it. That's all the energy you need—just an in-breath. And as the in-breath ends, how about enough energy to be with an out-breath? And enough energy to be with an in-breath. That's all. Just a light touch of mindfulness. In being with the breath, just enough energy for half a breath at a time. Can I be mindful for half a breath? Usually. And then do it again, and again, and again.

As we do that—just that light touch, just a gentle connection, light touch of mindfulness, moment after moment after moment—it creates a kind of momentum. It's like the ball of mindfulness begins to get rolling.

There's a game that some children play. You have a hoop and a stick. You rest the hoop on its side and tap it gently with the stick. The gentle taps get it rolling. If you tap it gently a couple of times, from one side or the other, you can get the momentum of that hoop going so that for a while—and you have to run next to the hoop, that's part of the game—as the hoop gets rolling, you run with it. Then after a little while, when the hoop gains momentum, you don't have to tap it anymore. You run with it, and when you see it start to get a little wobbly, you tap again. Tap that hoop again to keep the momentum going.

That's kind of how the light touch of mindfulness works. Just enough energy to connect with half a breath or connect with this moment of experience—this body sensation, this sound, this thought, this emotion. Just enough to connect with that, and then do it again. Gentle, that gentle tap, tap, tap, that gentle connecting.

At a certain point, when the momentum gets rolling—as with the hoop—if you keep tapping it when the momentum is going, it's going to get in the way of that momentum. So we begin to learn in our mindfulness how frequently we need to remind ourselves: oh, next breath. Maybe we can, just in a gentle way, connect with half a breath and discover that with ease we're with a breath or two.

So it's this beginning to recognize the experience of the momentum of mindfulness, like the momentum of that hoop. And then we might begin to even recognize that, like with the hoop getting a little wobbly, needing to tap again to keep it going, we might begin to recognize when the mindfulness gets a little wobbly. Oh, I need to remind myself—just a touch, this light touch of mindfulness moment after moment.

In the walking practice this can also be helpful. At one point, one of my teachers said he had done the walking practice. He said he couldn't do the walking practice by saying, "I'll start at the beginning and I'm going to be present for the whole 45 minutes of walking." Just like I said about my sitting—that was too much. He said, "So I set the intention to be mindful for one path." He was doing the back and forth

walking, so about ten or twenty paces. "I set the intention to be mindful for that length and then to do it again when I went back."

And I played with that, and it was like, that was too long for me. That was too much picking up of "I'm going to be mindful till I get to the end." And so instead I started looking about two feet out and saying, "Can I be mindful till I get to that spot on the carpet?" A step and a half. Yep, made it. Okay, how about that spot? Oh, made it to that one too.

So just, if the mind is really restless or really sleepy, sometimes just picking off little bits—just enough, just enough effort to get to the next step or the next half a breath. Light touch of effort, moment after moment. This is a gentle persistence, a very gentle persistence. It is a persistence, but it's not a gripped kind of energy.

Given that continuity is really encouraging this becoming continuous with mindfulness, I think one of the main ways that I have explored this aspect of the practice is rather than using—well, I have used this kind of very light touch, I use that a lot actually—but quite often what I explore is just noticing the comings and goings of mindfulness.

Mindfulness, as we've been talking about, is a quality in the mind. It's like metta, it's like concentration. It's a quality in the mind that can be cultivated, that has conditions that support its cultivation. And one of those conditions that supports its cultivation is noticing when it's present, noticing when it's here. So being cognizant of the comings and goings of mindfulness.

We usually call this the mind that wanders, or the mind that gets lost. When the mind is getting lost, we don't usually think about it as mindfulness disappearing, but that's what's happening. And so we can turn this aspect of the wandering mind or the thinking mind on its head and instead reflect on exploring the coming and going of mindfulness itself.

The first place, probably the easiest place to begin to explore this, is when it comes. I've had people at times say, "Well, I can't see when mindfulness gets lost. It's either here or it's not. So the only thing I can see is when it comes back." And that's often true—that's one of the easiest places to begin to see the difference or the shift between non-mindfulness and mindfulness, when mindfulness returns.

But it is also possible to begin to get familiar, as I was speaking about with that hoop—the momentum of the hoop, seeing it get wobbly—we can also start to get a sense of this quality of mindfulness itself and begin to see it get wobbly. Begin to see the connection with experience get weak. And so we can start to see the mindfulness getting lost.

Now we'll start with looking at, exploring something about seeing it return. And we've all mentioned this—I think almost all, I've heard many of us mention this moment of mindfulness returning. It is a great moment, noticing it when it returns.

This noticing of mindfulness returning is another way that we can cultivate continuity of mindfulness. We usually think of cultivating continuity of mindfulness in the way I spoke about, with that gentle reminding, the gentle prompting every half breath, every few steps. And that works as long as we are mindful. The kind of mindfulness we explore in that case is called prompted mindfulness—when we are mindful, we remind ourselves in that gentle way.

This re-arising of mindfulness, when our mindfulness has been lost, that is called unprompted mindfulness.

Because it just happens. It's a great recognition, actually, if we are interested in the moment of mindfulness returning in and of itself, and not so hooked into an idea or a self-judgment. Often in that moment when mindfulness returns, we can have a kind of judgment: "I wasn't mindful." But that thought, in the moment, isn't actually true—because we are mindful right now.

If we can be really curious about that moment itself, about the mindfulness returning, we notice something remarkable: we didn't have anything to do with that moment. It was completely effortless. This is one of the great things we can begin to taste in that moment of mindfulness returning—what it means to be mindful without trying to be mindful. Because that's so often a place where we get caught up, in the churning and doing of mindfulness.

That moment when mindfulness returns is an effortless moment. We didn't have any say over it; it just happened. Conditions came together for that mindfulness to return. And this kind of mindfulness actually happens a lot. Especially on retreat, you have an opportunity to see it probably thousands of times a day. Thousands of times a day you get the opportunity to taste that effortless mindfulness and to be curious about it.

That moment is also really useful in terms of beginning to recognize what it is like to be mindful—what the quality of mindfulness itself is like. Because in the moment of mindfulness returning, if we're curious about it in and of itself, and not thinking about the fact that we weren't mindful a moment ago, but curious just about this—wow, mindfulness is back, what's that like?—there's an interesting contrast. Between what it feels like now, in this moment, for mindfulness to be back, and what it was like seconds before, or half a second before, when mindfulness was lost. We get a taste of the difference between mindfulness and non-mindfulness in that moment. We get a felt sense of what it's like to be mindful. This is really useful.

Because this moment actually happens a lot—way more than we think. As we develop a taste for it, as we attune to that quality of mindfulness returning, we recognize it. And as we begin to recognize what that moment is like, it essentially begins to point itself out to us when it happens. Often that moment of mindfulness resurfacing gets hooked into something like, "Oh, I wasn't mindful a minute ago," and we just get lost because we haven't actually taken in, "Oh, I'm mindful again." If we can take in that we're mindful, it begins to sensitize us, to tune us to the quality of that moment. We begin to notice that it happens more.

The feeling or the flavor of it begins to point itself out to us, and we see more of those moments—more and more of those effortless moments of mindfulness all day long. What a celebration that is.

So in that moment when you remember, when mindfulness returns, simply recognize that you're aware now. That awareness has returned. I actually use awareness and mindfulness synonymously—I just like to let people know that because sometimes they seem like different words. But for me, I like the word awareness for mindfulness. It's actually more evocative for me of the quality of what it is like. There's more of an evocative sense to the word aware.

Notice that you've become aware. Then you might notice whatever's obvious in that moment—maybe not rushing back if you have a particular anchor that you're using, or a primary experience that you're gathering your attention around. Just take in what's here now.

The mind hasn't been present in the moments before, and often the mind has been off getting up to something—thinking about something, or just spacing out, whatever it's been doing. It's been doing something while you haven't been mindful. And often that has an effect on us in the present moment when we return. So noticing that quality: how is the mind now, in this moment, with the mind not having been present in the moments before? What is the effect, essentially, of what the mind had been doing while it wasn't mindful, on my present moment experience?

To my surprise, especially as my practice has continued over the years, quite often when mindfulness returns there's maybe even a little bit more settledness, more calm than was there before. So it's not always that the mind gets up to hindrances when it's not mindful. Sometimes the mind wanders into metta and we're not aware of it. Or it wanders into peace or calm and we're not aware of it.

In the waking up, yes, sometimes the mind will have gotten into an argument with a friend, and that will have an effect on our present moment too. Useful to notice that. And yet sometimes our mind will kind of find its way into more ease and peace. So it's really useful not to have an a priori idea about what might be there—just, "Ah, I'm back. What's here? What's here?"

I find that curiosity is, I think one of the other teachers also mentioned this, such a good tool in our toolbox. It's not always available, but it is a very powerful motivator of energy. When we're curious, there's a natural engagement with the present moment, a natural inclination to keep being present. Curiosity is a really great support for continuity.

Curiosity is also a really helpful tool when we're exploring the comings and goings of mindfulness—particularly the goings of mindfulness. Curiosity about how do we lose awareness? Where do we lose awareness? This curiosity is not intended to be an encouragement for judgment, but more a genuine wondering about what the mind is doing, what it's getting up to. Be curious about where the attention wants to go, and see if possibly mindfulness might be able to follow it.

So, exploring how do we lose awareness? Where do we lose awareness? I'm going to go through several

ways that in my own experience I've seen the mind lose awareness. You may have your own ways. I tried to put them into general categories, but I don't think this list is all-encompassing.

One of the ways to explore where we lose awareness is just to be curious as we go through our day. Where are the rabbit holes of mindfulness in terms of activities? In what kind of activities or locations do we tend to lose awareness? We might tend to lose awareness when we go to our yogi jobs, or when we go into our room and close the door—it's like, "Finally, nobody's looking. I do not have to be mindful right now." We might be more inclined to lose awareness if we go on the loop. Just noticing if there are places. Or maybe going into the dining hall—that's often a rabbit hole of mindfulness, the dining hall. Curiosity about what happens.

The encouragement here, again, is to explore through curiosity. Going through the day, at the end of the day you could reflect, or begin to recognize over these days that you see some patterns. "Yes, in my yogi job I lose awareness. When I go into the dining hall for lunch, it's gone until I'm doing my dishes." You might begin to notice some of these patterns.

The encouragement here isn't about doubling down and trying to force the mind to stay mindful all the way through that dining room line, but rather to be curious about what happens there. Something's going on in the mind that causes you to lose mindfulness. It's not random. Something happens. So what is it that happens?

The encouragement is this: once you've seen some patterns, once you've seen, for instance, that the dining hall or taking a walk on the loop or going into your room are places where mindfulness gets lost—often as we're heading to those places we have some mindfulness. Here at noon there's mindfulness, and the bell rings. Curiosity about when is it that mindfulness gets lost. Maybe it actually carries all the way until you cross that door and then start looking at the board with the dedications. Where does it happen? When does mindfulness get lost?

When you have the understanding of, "Okay, it's likely mindfulness is going to get lost when I head to the dining room"—let's see what happens.

Our minds get into these kinds of stories, and the mindfulness gets lost.

So be curious about where the sticky parts are. What happens in there? Add some interest, some curiosity about this—not trying to say, "Can I be mindful all the way through lunch?" but rather, "Let's see if I can notice where I get lost."

If you're curious about that, you might begin to see, if you're tracking it—kind of like, "Okay, yep, mindful here. Mindful as I'm walking. Mindful as I'm standing in line. Mindful as I pick up my dish"—knowing, you can track where you are. And then you're eating. So somewhere between picking up your dish and eating, that's where it happens. The next day you can add a little more interest after you pick up your dish. Again, curiosity around this is really helpful.

I'm going to skip a couple of the ones I had on my list to get to some of the others, but I'll mention two of them briefly.

It's really common for us to lose mindfulness when there's uncomfortableness in the body—pain or discomfort. And so again, rather than trying to force yourself to be with the pain, be curious about what happens. What does the mind do?

I found at one point that my mind had a strategy of spacing out and daydreaming when pain was happening. When I noticed that, when I woke up in the daydreaming, I recognized that the pain wasn't bothering me. It wasn't that it was gone, but it wasn't bothering me while I had been daydreaming. I just hadn't been mindful. And so I got curious about the fact that the mind knew how to not be disturbed by the pain. It didn't have to be disturbed by the pain—it just didn't know how to do that mindfully.

What that began to instruct me in was how I might be able to just kind of set the pain aside. I didn't have to zero in on it and focus on it, which is what my mind had been doing. Sometimes we can learn from what our mind does around particular difficult experiences. I learned that my mind knew how to let go of a kind of magnetizing to pain, and it didn't have to be disturbed by it. So I could kind of ignore it in my mindfulness.

Pain is a big one. Looking at what happens there as the mind gets lost—most of us do have strategies for navigating pain, and a lot of them include non-mindfulness. But they don't have to include non-mindfulness. So curiosity about that: What happens there?

We also tend to lose awareness in very habitual states of mind. Jeannie gave the talk on the hindrances the other night. Those are five very habitual states of mind that we tend to lose mindfulness in. The exploration is really about whether we can bring the mindfulness into these states.

Often we recognize that we have been lost. We sometimes recognize that we've lost awareness when we're waking up. In that moment of remembering, we see essentially that we got lost—"Wow, I got lost in boredom," or "I got lost in this habit of anger," or "I got lost in this spacing out, this habit of spacing out." In the waking up, sometimes we can see that we are habitually waking up in some kind of familiar, old patterns.

Again, we may have some capacity to know when those patterns come up—"Oh, boredom's coming up." When we see that we tend to habitually get lost in boredom, we can add some interest there too. Add some interest, as Jeannie was talking about—being curious, being interested in the hindrances themselves, or any habitual pattern.

One of the main ways that mindfulness gets lost, and I think this is a pretty common way, is that we are paying attention to something in our experience—noticing the breath, for example, or doing walking meditation outside at night and noticing the cool air and the movement of the body. And then there's a sound. These past nights, as we've left in the evening, there's been a very cool owl sound. So maybe you're

doing walking meditation and you hear that sound. Then you start thinking about the sound, then you start thinking about owls and what kind of owl it is, and the mindfulness is gone.

Much of the time that happens because we haven't actually noticed that the attention shifted from what our kind of plan was.

I'm going to be paying attention to the walking and the movement, and that's where my attention is, and oh, hearing, and oh, owls... and it's out.

We haven't noticed that the attention has shifted from what we had the intention to pay attention to. So this is a really helpful thing to begin to see—when the attention shifts from one experience to another, we can begin to get familiar with this attentional shift.

One place that this can be really fun to play with is in walking. Perhaps not in the formal walking such as Bhante described, but if you're taking a walk, you might explore noticing: seeing is happening, knowing seeing is happening, or hearing is happening. And then be curious about when the attention shifts. You could do a walking practice for a few moments, shifting between seeing and hearing, body moving through space, and feet touching the ground. This is one alternative walking practice, actually—seeing for a few paces, hearing for a few paces, body moving through space for a few paces, feet contacting the ground for a few paces. You can do that while taking a walk. It's a great kind of more everyday life or ordinary movement practice.

In the seeing and hearing, you could be curious, while the seeing is happening, about when the attention might shift between seeing—just kind of taking in the flow, like a movie camera moving through space—and when it shifts from seeing to looking. That will happen very naturally. Maybe a bird or a squirrel runs across the path. The movement catches the attention and we are looking at that. This is a shift of attention.

Likewise in hearing, we might be taking in ambient sound and suddenly a particular sound catches our attention. Noticing this shift between a more general awareness and a very pointed awareness—noticing that shift, we don't have to stop the looking, but we can begin to get familiar with that shift of attention.

As we get familiar with that, it can carry into our meditation practice, our sitting practice, our more formal practice. Sitting in the hall, paying attention to the breath, and then hearing the sound of a car drive down Pleasant Street. The attention shifts, and we may begin to be familiar with what it's like for that attention to shift. We're with the breath, with the breath, and then we feel the attention kind of let go of the breath and move to something else. If we can notice that, then we're just hearing. Hearing is happening. Hearing is happening. If we don't notice that, then we may be in that car driving down Pleasant Street, leaving IMS, going to Boston.

So noticing that attentional shift—this is a really useful exploration. Noticing this shift between seeing and looking, hearing and listening, can be a great place to get familiar with that quality, the quality of

attention shifting.

And then there are certain states of mind where each of us may have a kind of habit of non-mindfulness. We have some in common, often. Spaciness is often a place where we're not mindful. Low energy sometimes is a place where we're not so mindful. Sleepiness or drowsiness, a daydreaming kind of state of mind—often not so mindful. So there are certain states that the mind can go into where awareness will habitually not be there.

But it is not an inherent part of that state of mind to be non-mindful. Thinking about something like spacing out—it almost seems by definition that spacing out would be non-mindful, as part of the very definition. We might think, "Well, I guess that meant I can't be mindful of that, so better try to be present with the breath again."

Well, at this point in my practice, if there's any state of mind where I think I can't be mindful of it, I don't believe that thought. It is possible to be mindful of any state of mind—except potentially non-mindfulness. But even that we can begin to recognize the quality of it as mindfulness returns. States of mind like spacing out or sleepiness or dullness or even falling asleep—it is possible to be mindful through the process of falling asleep into sleep. It's possible.

And so again, this exploration—for me, there began to be a curiosity about exploring these states that I thought I couldn't be mindful of. One of the best ways to begin seeing that or exploring that is in the moment when mindfulness returns. If you wake up into daydreaming, for a few moments you are aware of daydreaming. That gives you the flavor of what it's like to be mindful of daydreaming. If you're spacing out, when you come back into mindfulness, for a few moments there's this recognition—that's the mind spacing out. That is the mind being aware of that state of mind.

I've told this story quite a lot, but it's a useful example, so I'll tell it again. I was exploring this at one point. I was eating a meal and kept noticing the mind spacing out.

And at first I was exploring being mindful during eating. When I noticed that spacing out and came back into mindfulness, the intention was to pay attention to eating. Okay, I'm back. Be mindful. Lifting up the fork, putting it in my mouth, chewing, tasting. The mind would space out again. I'd come back and bring that mindfulness in, paying attention to all of that, and it would space out again.

At some point, I got curious about the spacing out. And this, again—it was curiosity that really fed this investigation. Having seen that it happened a number of times, I began to notice the mind letting go of eating breakfast, letting go of paying attention to taste and lifting and sensations. There was this feeling of mindfulness releasing its hold on the physicality of the sensations. But there was an awareness of that. So rather than bringing attention back to the physical sensations, there was more of a sense of, "Oh, okay, I'm aware—let's see what the mind is doing."

There was an ability to be aware of the mind as it kind of went and hovered up to the right-hand side of

my head a little bit. It felt very restful. It felt very pleasant. It was disconnected from the field of physical sensation, but I was very aware. There was full awareness of the state of mind. And in that experience, there was this real sense of rest. The mind was tired. It wanted to rest, and I wasn't letting it rest. I kept dragging it back—be mindful of the breakfast. And my mind basically said, "Forget it. You are not doing this right. We are going to take a rest." And it took its rest.

When I let that happen with mindfulness, the mind rested. It was so restful for that time. It lasted about thirty seconds, and then that state was released and I was eating breakfast and present with the body sensations very easefully.

This connects to what I was saying earlier—that sometimes when the mind loses mindfulness, it's not necessarily getting up to hindrance; it may actually be helping you. This has been my experience. Sometimes when the mind wanders, it's trying to help us let go. If we can be curious in that moment, seeing that the mind's letting go of something rather than having the agenda of "Oh, come back," if I'm aware in that letting go and able to be present for it, sometimes the mind is wandering into a new space.

I mostly want to encourage curiosity about exploring this. Curiosity is a support for continuity, rather than doubling down when we notice places where mindfulness gets lost. I certainly was trying to double down when I kept dragging my attention back to eating breakfast. That wasn't so helpful. But it was helpful to start to see the mind and think, "Let's be curious about this. Where's the mind going? Oh, it's resting. Resting feels very good."

In this curiosity around seeing the coming and going of mindfulness, there's so much to learn. We learn a lot about our conditioned habits and patterns of mind, because often where our minds wander is around those conditioned habits and patterns. We also learn about our beliefs about meditation and mindfulness—what we think we can be mindful of, and what we think we can't be mindful of. Sometimes we might have this idea that we can't be mindful of something. If I ever have the thought "I can't be mindful of this," I just say, "Really? If you're even thinking that thought, you already are mindful of it. You're aware enough of it to name it in that moment."

So, curiosity. We also start to see something about the uncontrollability of our mind through looking at this coming and going of mindfulness.

Being mindful—that's kind of the main yogi job. That's our intention. We sit down thinking, "I'm going to be mindful." And how long does it last? A couple breaths, maybe a few minutes, then the mind wanders.

Who did that? Who decided to make the mind wander? You probably didn't decide to make the mind wander. Sometimes we do—sometimes we kind of check out intentionally. But mostly it happens just because conditions come along. It's not self that the mind wanders.

And then that moment of mindfulness returning—who did that one? You weren't in charge of that one either.

So this exploring the comings and goings of mindfulness—every day this truth of not-self is staring us in the face, very obviously. And we usually kind of miss it, because we think we're supposed to be in control of the mindfulness.

If we're curious about the comings and goings of mindfulness, as opposed to judging ourselves about non-continuity, we can get this awe of the mind—this mysterious mind.

So let's just sit for a couple of minutes.

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