The Experience of Wisdom

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:03:10

The topic I'd like to explore with you tonight is wisdom—what it is, how we cultivate it, and how we experience it. That last piece is really what I want to explore most deeply.

Following from Bhante's talk last night, he said a number of times that little by little we cultivate the conditions that allow us to open to the truth, to open to this freedom. And the conditions, this little by little cultivation, is the cultivation of wisdom. We've said so many times on this retreat, and it came up again in the hall this morning: wisdom is what does the work of freeing the mind. We can't consciously do that. Sayadaw U Tejaniya says, when asked why we practice, "We practice to cultivate wisdom."

This fits in very much with the Buddha's teaching. The Eightfold Path begins with wisdom—wise understanding, wise intention. And yet there are two framings of the Eightfold Path. The standard framing includes the eight path factors: wise understanding, wise intention, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, and wise concentration. In this framing, the path begins with wisdom, begins with what we can call the wisdom of learning. We have to start somewhere, right? We have to start somewhere from learning, from hearing teachings.

This is where our path begins. It begins by hearing the teachings of the Buddha, then beginning to reflect on them, which we can think of as the second kind of wisdom. So first we hear, we listen, we read, we take in wisdom and begin thinking about it. Does this make sense? How can I apply this to my own life? Do I want to apply this to my life? Does it make sense to me? This is the part where we begin to practice. When we reflect on the teachings, wise understanding—that first factor of the path—leads to wise intention, which carries us into action. And so the wisdom of the Buddha carries us into practicing wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, practicing wise effort, wise mindfulness, wise concentration.

The second way the path is described, and some of you are probably familiar with this framing too, is the gradual development beginning with generosity, then leading to sīla (ethical conduct), samādhi (the cultivation of the settledness of mind), and paññā (wisdom). The understanding is that the gradual training unfolds in this direction. We begin with cultivating our hearts and minds in connectivity with the world through generosity and ethical conduct, and then begin cultivating the inner mind to let go of the ways that we cling. This creates the conditions to open to wisdom.

In many ways we can see the path both begins and ends with wisdom. At the beginning of the path, it takes the form of wisdom that is hearing, reflecting, understanding—this is sutamayā paññā in Pali. The wisdom we take and act upon is the wisdom of reflection, cintāmayā paññā. And the third kind of wisdom is the wisdom of insight, where we actually have the direct experience of wisdom: bhāvanāmayā paññā.

When I first started hearing the word wisdom a lot in dharma talks, I had this rather grand idea about it. I thought, "I don't have any wisdom," or "What is this wisdom?" I also had this idea that there was going to be some big mind-blowing insight and then after that everything would be different. But as Bhante said so many times yesterday, it's a gradual development of wisdom. Little by little, over and over, we cultivate our hearts and minds and wisdom grows.

Wisdom is actually a factor of mind. Carol mentioned this morning in answer to one of the questions that wisdom is a factor of mind, subject to causes and conditions. It's actually found in one of the key lists of the Buddha called the Five Spiritual Faculties. These five spiritual faculties are five of the really beautiful wholesome qualities that are cultivated as we practice. The other night Winnie talked about this—that as we practice, wholesome qualities are cultivated. This is one of the lists of wholesome qualities that are very active in the practice of meditation. Sayadaw U Tejaniya actually calls this list essentially the way the meditating mind works.

Those five factors are confidence (or faith), energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. You'll recognize them; we've talked about all of them. They are all factors of mind that are cultivated by conditions. They arise with certain conditions; they pass away when conditions are not present. Wisdom is a conditioned arising. We can cultivate conditions that will support its arising.

The wisdom of the Buddha was vast. At one point—I think somebody mentioned this in the hall—he picked up a handful of leaves from the ground and said, "Tell me, are the leaves I have in my hand greater than the leaves that are in the trees in the forest?" And they said, "Well, obviously the leaves in the forest are greater than the leaves you have in your hand." And he said, "In the same way, what I know, what I understand, is vast."

But what I teach is this handful of leaves. I teach just what you need to know to understand suffering and to end suffering.

And so the wisdom that the Buddha taught, the teachings of the Buddha, are really oriented around this question: How do we understand suffering, and how can suffering come to an end? It's no surprise, actually, that wisdom is developed through contact with dukkha. Joseph sometimes says that we want insight into dukkha without experiencing dukkha. And it doesn't work that way.

I'd like to talk about these three kinds of wisdom—briefly about the first two, and then more in depth about how we actually experience wisdom. Because you have all experienced wisdom, and it can be helpful to have it pointed out to us that wisdom is arising in our experience. It took me a while before I really understood this. It was very helpful to be able to acknowledge and recognize: yes, this is wisdom.

The first two kinds of wisdom—the wisdom of hearing, of learning—we're engaging with this one a lot. The meetings, the interviews, the questions in the hall, the dharma talks—we're offering support, teachings, information for you to take in and reflect on. And then we begin to reflect on that, apply it, look

at it in our practice.

The practice of satipatthana, the practice of right mindfulness, is an exploration of wisdom. Right mindfulness, the way the Buddha offered that teaching, as we've been talking about and explored very early in the retreat—right mindfulness includes wisdom. The orientation of wise mindfulness is to understand that what's arising in the present moment is a present moment arising. It's really very simple: a turning of the mind to recognize that what's happening in the present moment is an arising in the present moment. That orientation begins to allow the whole of the Dharma to unfold.

Munindraji is said to have told Joseph a number of times: sit and know that you're sitting, and the entire Dharma will be revealed to you. It can be that simple. Know what's happening in the present moment as a present moment arising. That's our orientation. That's what we've been practicing.

This bringing of right mindfulness, hearing the teachings, bringing right mindfulness to our experience—this is a way of cultivating chintamaya pañña. We are reflecting on the teachings and beginning to act on them, exploring for ourselves.

We can also use reflection, actual conscious reflection, to bring wisdom in if things feel challenging or difficult. I've certainly had many experiences where I'm sitting, attempting to bring wise mindfulness to my experience, and still really struggling. Sometimes it can be helpful to use this second kind of wisdom consciously, actively, by bringing in wisdom thoughts. This is a practice Sayadaw U Tejaniya teaches quite a bit—just dropping wisdom into the mind if there's a sense of struggle.

I'll offer you some of the reflections I've found helpful: "This is just anger. This is just fear. This is just confusion. This is just sadness. This is just loneliness." It's a kind of reminder, pointing back to that recognition: yes, this is something happening in the present moment. If we're caught, we can bring some of these thoughts to bear on experience and see what happens. This is a conscious use of thought, a use of skillful thought in the practice.

Reflecting on the impermanent nature of experience: "This will pass. This will pass."

As I mentioned that, the memory that came to mind—I don't think I've shared this in the hall before. At one point I had a really strong orientation toward aversion. I still have that as a tendency, although it's shifted quite a bit. But early in my practice it was very strong, and it was hard to experience pleasant emotions. As I began in the practice to experience metta and joy, it was very uncomfortable.

At one point I was sitting at my table having breakfast, and a wave of joy just rose over me. I felt like, "Whoa, this is way too intense. I can't handle this." And a wisdom thought passed through. This one I didn't consciously bring in—it just passed through: "It's okay, it will pass."

That really helped. The joy actually got very strong for a few moments, like a big wave. And then I went to the other side of it, and it became this delightful happiness. I had been trying to hold it down because it

was so strong, so intense, and I was not used to it. Reflecting on its impermanence was very helpful.

Another reflection I find really, really helpful—this one Sayadaw U Tejaniya taught me, and it requires a little explanation—is simply to remind yourself: this is nature.

Whatever's happening, this is nature.

On reflection, I really liked this reflection, because what it points to is that whatever is happening in the present moment, of course it's happening. Whatever's happening in this moment is a product of all of the choices from the past leading to this moment, all of the conditions having come together leading to this moment. What's arising right now is arising very naturally. It's like a tree growing—a seed has been planted and the tree has grown. Of course this is arising.

To me, saying "this is nature" encapsulates a whole understanding about the process nature of experience, the cause and effect nature of experience, and the vast number of conditions that come together to create this moment. It's just nature unfolding right now. This one has been really helpful to me when I've gotten caught in certain kinds of mind states. Just dropping that in has created some room in which mindfulness could meet the experience more easily. Instead of fighting against it, it helped to create the conditions for wise mindfulness, rather than the attitude of mind that was resisting or fighting the experience.

The Buddha himself recommended something similar. He actually uses this kind of reflection in some of the discourses. He says that what is arising you should understand: "This is not I, this is not mine, this is not myself." It's a kind of reflecting to yourself—this is not self. This is not I, this is not me, this is not mine. That's another version of "this is nature."

It can sometimes be helpful to find reflections like this that resonate with your understanding and make them your own. For me, having reflected on "this is nature," it has a very deep resonance when I drop that into my practice. You can find language for your own expression of wisdom.

At one point in my practice, Sayadaw U Tejaniya asked me to recognize the wisdom that was arising in my experience. At that time, wisdom still seemed pretty abstract to me, and I wasn't really sure what he meant. But I began exploring: what wisdom is arising in my experience? This was at a point when my practice was pretty settled, when there was quite a bit of continuity of mindfulness. I began exploring: what is wisdom?

It took a while for me to be able to recognize it, and then when I began to recognize it, I saw it all over the place. I saw it actually retrospectively all over the place. I saw that wisdom had been with me my whole journey, and I hadn't really recognized it.

This talk really grew out of that exploration—well, that exploration plus a question somebody asked me on retreat after I began using the word wisdom in my talks. Somebody raised their hand and said, "What are the symptoms of wisdom?" I thought that was a great way to put it. I reflected on it and gave an

answer, but this talk really grew out of both the exploration that Tejaniya set me on and answering that question.

So I'd like to spend some time now pointing to ways in which wisdom is experienced, from very simple ways to some perhaps less familiar ways. These are just some examples. I cannot possibly be exhaustive here. As I have seen in my exploration of this topic, there are, I think, infinite ways wisdom can manifest. Your own experience will point things out to you in different ways, and you will begin to understand it yourself. These are just some examples of wisdom at work in experience.

Probably one of the first ways that we see wisdom at work as we begin to practice meditation is that simple shift around something challenging. We are meditating, perhaps struggling a little bit with a reaction to anger or confusion, and then suddenly there's a shift and the mind recognizes, "Oh, this is just anger." This is different from what I was describing earlier about using that as a reflection. What I'm saying here is direct understanding in the moment—a shift of perspective, a kind of space that's created.

I know you've all experienced this. There's been something happening and suddenly it's like, "Oh right, this is just happening right now." This is a situation where the experience doesn't suddenly vanish, and it doesn't feel like you've seen through it or understood it completely, but there's some ease with being able to meet it.

An analogy might be: if you're in a car going sixty miles an hour down the freeway, this kind of insight is like taking your foot off the accelerator and putting the car into neutral. The seeing doesn't stop the momentum of that pattern from continuing.

But it will stop because you're no longer fueling it. Just like the car will come to a stop because the car's in neutral.

So that's one way that we experience wisdom—that sense of "oh, this is just..." That shift is the shift of wise attitude that Sayadaw U Tejaniya talks about, the attitude of mind that can be okay with whatever is arising. Okay that anger is arising. Okay that confusion is arising. It's just an arising.

This is another aspect of wisdom in the present moment: that mind that recognizes what's happening now is happening now. I started with that at the beginning of the talk—that recognition of "oh, what's happening is actually something that's happening right now."

There's a huge difference, and I think you've all seen this: there's a huge difference between thinking and being aware that thought is arising in the present moment. When we're aware that thought is arising in the present moment, what tends to happen is that the mind is not fooled by the thought. It's not fooled into thinking that the thought is something it's not. I talked about the kind of bubble of world that we get born into when we're not mindful of thought—we believe the reality that thoughts paint for us when we're not aware that thought is arising in the present moment.

And so this is a manifestation of wisdom. When we see thought and know "this is a thought happening in the present moment," wisdom is operating. It's helping us to not believe the creation of that thought as a reality, as a firm fixed reality. We understand it is something that is being created now in the present moment.

Another way that wisdom operates in the present moment, a kind of different perspective of how wisdom sees things, is when it sees things as causes and conditions, as you're seeing a pattern unfold. So you have something difficult, for example, and as I said early on, it's not an accident, it's not a mistake when we are meeting dukkha. It's how wisdom grows—through the meeting of dukkha.

And so we observe over and over again a difficult pattern. Around my example of anger—over and over again watching that pattern come and go. We see it over and over and over again.

This is where we get a little caught. Wisdom doesn't work like knowledge. Wisdom isn't something that you can necessarily just say, "Oh, I have that wisdom. I can use that now." We can do that a little bit with the use of the reflections that I mentioned. But I know you've all seen this too—that we have an insight into something, we see "oh, this is just anger," and we watch it dissipate. And then there's another time when we see "oh, this is anger," and it's not "this is just anger." We're caught in it. And we wonder, why is it I learned this lesson? I've seen "this is just anger." How come I can't do that now?

Wisdom isn't something we just pick up, like book knowledge. It has conditions that come together. Sometimes the conditions come together to help us see in this moment, "oh, this is just anger." And sometimes we get to watch the pattern unfold. We get to see the creation of the pattern. Instead of just watching it fade, we actually get to see how it gets perpetuated. Over and over again we get to see that. And so over time the mind begins to understand: this pattern is suffering.

This was a mind-blowing insight for me at one point when I was early in my practice. The practice of observing anger was my very first mindfulness practice. I wasn't particularly interested in meditating, but I was interested in understanding my mind and why I got angry. And so I practiced with exploring my anger in daily life. That was my first meditation practice, my first mindfulness practice—explore when I'm angry, be aware of that.

And over the course of months, reflecting back now, as I said, I didn't really understand this so much as wisdom until later. But at one point I recognized or realized that there was something going on in my mind. I was angry at a particular person and there was something happening in my mind—I was somehow believing that this anger was going to make them miserable. Does that sound familiar?

And in some ways, fortunately, this was very obvious to me because I happened to be in the Peace Corps on a South Pacific island, and the person I was angry with was 7,000 miles away in California. So after some weeks of observing the anger, I finally got it. Oh, this isn't making that person feel miserable at all. They have no clue that there's anger in the field. They have no idea. And what I began to see is, oh, and

this anger makes me miserable. Duh! But the idea that it was hurting someone else or that it was going to make someone else miserable was obscuring the dukkha here.

That is an insight. It's wisdom to recognize this present moment arising—in this case, of anger—as dukkha. This is the first noble truth. The Buddha asked us to recognize "this is dukkha" and then to understand dukkha.

This morning in the hall, the question came up about looking at craving for becoming. And this is a similar example in a way, in that in our non-mindful mode, what we're typically focused on with craving for becoming is the idea of what we will become—the good yogi, the good meditator, the one who's seen, the one who's respected or admired. We have that craving to be that person. And that idea, the mind projecting, "Oh yes, that's what I'm going to be someday"—it's a pleasant fantasy, a pleasant thought. The mind is in that pleasant thought, and that pleasant thought is obscuring the suffering of the craving.

So this morning, the recognition in the question was, "I'm seeing the craving for becoming and it is suffering." Yes, that's an insight. It's wisdom that shows you craving is suffering. Again, it's not a mistake when clear awareness sees dukkha. Wisdom sees dukkha. Wisdom understands dukkha as being something arising here, and the deeper understanding is that it can be understood, it can be freed.

This is one of the ways that purification works. We've used that word a lot in the hall too. With clear seeing, the mind begins to understand the consequences of what it is engaged with, what it's engaged in doing. For me, with the anger, after several weeks of observing the anger come up over and over again, the mind began to understand the consequences of that, which was suffering here. Until the mind understood the consequences of that, it wasn't going to change its pattern.

Somebody asked me in one of the meetings today, "How does purification work? What's the mechanism of purification?" And I think this is connected. It's like our organism is oriented towards well-being. It wants to be happy. It wants to feel good. And in our typical way of meeting the world, the organism will go the quickest way to the quickest place of well-being, which would be having what I want and getting rid of what I don't want. Greed and aversion, basically. So without mindfulness and wisdom, the organism really fundamentally misunderstands how well-being is found, how well-being comes about.

With mindfulness and wisdom, the organism gets good information—the wisdom of "oh, craving is suffering." Yes, wisdom sees craving is suffering. That information points the mind toward understanding that this way of going about finding well-being doesn't work very well. It reveals the underlying unreliability of that approach to finding well-being. And so we experience the dukkha in mindfulness and wisdom. It's not a mistake.

This wisdom then begins to help the mind let go of that craving. When the mind really begins to understand that its own processes are contributing to non-well-being, the mind itself begins to understand how to let go. And this is what we mean when we say wisdom does the work of freeing the mind.

A few more ways of experiencing wisdom. Some of you might have seen at times, as the mindfulness gets stronger and as wisdom gets stronger, sometimes you turn to look at something challenging—there's that confusion or frustration, a sense of abandonment, a feeling of loneliness—and the mind turns towards it and it vanishes. This very quick disappearance of a defilement on being seen is another symptom of wisdom.

One of the first times this happened to me, I didn't trust it actually. I was on a three-month retreat, right in the middle of it, and there was the crossover where I knew I'd be getting new teachers. I felt abandoned by my teachers who were leaving. I bow to this. I know that some of this will be happening for you too. It's hard. I want to acknowledge that. It is hard.

So I was exploring that feeling of abandonment, and at some point I recognized, "Oh, I feel like a four-year-old little girl who's been left." There was part of me that felt that four-year-old little girl, and there was this sense of compassion holding the whole thing. I was exploring it in this way, and then at some point interest got strong. "Well, what is this feeling of abandonment anyway?" I turned to look at it, and it vanished.

The story I told myself in that moment—this is how far I was from really recognizing wisdom—was, "Oh, I must not know how to observe emotions. I don't know how to do this right, so I'm going to ask my teacher how to observe emotions." I went in and reported this to Carol, and she asked, "Was it your experience that there was any lingering sense?" I said, "No, it was gone!" She said, "Trust your experience." I said, "I thought I'd made a mistake." She said, "Trust your experience."

So sometimes wisdom can be strong like that. Interest gets high, the mind orients and observes something, and it vanishes. You can just notice that it vanishes. You don't have to go back and figure out what happened, like I tried to do. Just notice: that happened, that vanished.

Going back to the car analogy, in this case what happens isn't that the car goes into neutral or even that the car stops—the car disappears. It's kind of a funny feeling.

Another way wisdom can manifest is in seeing or recognizing that defilements are not arising. Bhante mentioned this reference in the Satipatthana last night—looking at the fetters. We see the fetters, we understand the fetters, we see as they arise, we see the conditions for them passing away, and we see the conditions for the future non-arising of that fetter.

This idea of the non-arising of something—somebody asked me, "How on earth do you see the non-arising of something?" In exploring this, much of the time seeing the non-arising of something is more of an understanding.

I've thought of four different ways you might recognize that defilements are not arising. The first is through the tool of wise effort. We begin to get familiar with what conditions create defilements, and we learn to avoid those situations. We recognize how not to engage in the conditions that create the arising of

that suffering. We learn to avoid unhelpful conditions.

The second way is through reflection, looking back. "Wow, you know, if this situation had arisen five years ago, there would have been a lot more reactivity." So it's not that you're actually seeing the non-arising of the defilement, but you're knowing how in the past more defilement would have arisen. Is this familiar? Do you recognize that one? You know that after some time of practice we begin to see that we're not as reactive anymore.

So this is a way of recognizing the non-arising of a defilement.

The most direct way, or most experiential way, of seeing the non-arising of a defilement is as the mindfulness starts to get more continuous. We see in the mind stream, we begin to recognize—like for instance this exploration of anger that I did early in my practice. I watched anger for months. The mind got really, really familiar with anger. And at some point it got so attuned to the experience of anger that it actually began to recognize the just beginning of congealing of the state of anger. What in retrospect I can see was the intention to anger.

So this happened. I had been observing this pattern of anger for several months and I was just in my kitchen, doing something, cutting an apple. In that moment I wasn't really trying to be mindful, but there was a fair amount of mindfulness present. This was maybe two or three months into my practice, just practicing. I wasn't even doing sitting meditation at this point. This is the power of mindfulness and the power of practice even in daily life.

I was just cutting this apple in my kitchen, and because I had been exploring this quality of anger, I apparently had been fairly attuned to the conditions that led to anger. And I saw in my mind, as I cut that apple, a thought about the person I was angry with. And I felt in my experience what seemed like a freight train of, "Oh yeah, let's jump on this thought and think more thoughts to get angry at that person." This is all seen within a split second. I saw that momentum towards anger.

And in the next split second, the mind recognized—here I had been paying attention to anger for months. I had fully recognized, "Oh, anger is dukkha." And the mind, this is again the power of how purification works, the mind in seeing that freight train of intention to get angry, in that moment recognized: anger, that's dukkha. And the wisdom in that moment deconstructed, let go of that intention. And the anger did not arise.

That was the most direct seeing of the non-arising of something. Seeing how the mind was kind of poised to leap to anger, and the wisdom was right there, and the anger did not arise. So that's another way that we see the non-arising of defilement—through seeing the intention or the momentum of something. And basically the wisdom understanding, "Ooh, that way lies suffering."

The feeling was very much like, you know how if you put your hand on something hot, the hand will draw back even almost before you felt the heat? The body recognizes, "Oh, that's dangerous." It was that kind of

seeing. The mind drew back from it. That way lies suffering. So this is another part of the mechanism of purification.

Another way that we know that wisdom is present is when we experience the balance of mind that is non-reactive. This is the experience of wise attitude. We see, we feel the stability. We feel that sense—and several of you in the interviews have talked about feeling rooted, like not buffeted around by things. That sense of equanimity is an indication the defilements are not present. So this is also the non-arising of the defilements.

Other conditions, other states of mind may be arising at this time too. Compassion, joy, metta, interest, curiosity. These also can be manifestations of wisdom.

As the mindfulness gets stronger and we really start to see the dynamic flow of experience, we land in the impermanent, changing, dynamic nature of experience. Wisdom. Wisdom creates the conditions for us to see that in the first place. And at times wisdom will be quite strong and clearly recognize—in that moment it's like there isn't anything to hold on to. Nothing to cling to. It's not even possible to cling in that moment. The mind is so attuned to the changing nature of experience.

Sometimes wisdom can operate kind of in the background, not obvious to us. It can be at work while we're not looking. And this is actually good news too. Wisdom can be a factor that develops its own momentum.

Wisdom develops its own momentum and begins to just do its thing.

One instance I had of this—still around the story of anger—this was some years after this exploration began. The investigation of anger was a several-years-long process. At one point I began recognizing that certain times when I tried to turn my attention to be mindful of the anger, to really get familiar with it, to investigate it, to look at it... When I was first starting to explore this stuff, I was really naive. I didn't know any of the tools of investigation. I was just like, "Oh yeah, anger, that's anger, okay. Oh, anger again, okay." I had no tools. Nobody had ever told me or taught me, because I was off in the Peace Corps. I had read books but hadn't had a meditation teacher to teach me. So I didn't have anybody telling me about how to investigate it in my body and feel where it was. I didn't know any of that.

After I learned all of that stuff, I started digging when the anger came up. "Oh, anger—ooh, let's put that under the microscope. Let's figure that out. Let's look at that." And what started to happen is that every time I'd do that, I'd go down the rabbit hole of anger. So at some point, I kind of got the idea: okay, trying to be mindful—at least in that way—trying to be mindful of the anger wasn't so helpful. So I set it aside. I would notice, I would see the anger. When it came up, I'd bow to it. "I see you, anger. And I'm going to put my attention on my feet right now. You can be here. I'm not going to tell you you're not going to be here, but you wait over there, and I'll be with my feet."

So I did that for a long time, actually. I don't even know how long—maybe several months, or maybe as long as a year—I explored the anger in that way. And over time, I began recognizing that the bouts of

anger were getting further apart. In some sense I was seeing the non-arising of the anger, but mostly what I recognized was: wow, it's not bothering me as much anymore.

And then one day—I remember so clearly where I was—this was the wisdom being presented to me. I was walking up my sidewalk and it occurred to me: wow, I haven't experienced that anger in a very long time. And in that thought, of course, the person I was angry with came into my mind, and I couldn't conjure it up. It was gone. I didn't believe it was gone at first. It's kind of like, "Where did it go?" And yet, that moment, the recognition was: it was gone. And it has not come back since then. It vanished while I wasn't looking.

The wisdom showed me—that was a really great learning there—that moment of recognizing: okay, actually, my orientation of this isn't always the way. Sometimes things will let go kind of on their own in the background. That's another form of wisdom.

So learning to recognize these little bits of wisdom, these moments of wisdom, helps us to cultivate the wisdom. As we have been saying, when we are aware of wholesomeness, it creates the conditions for the wholesomeness. And so actually, when I first began exploring this with Sayadaw U Tejaniya, what I did—I mean, I didn't have the way to articulate the different ways I was seeing things like I do now—but what I started to do is when the mind was particularly clear, and there was a sense that there was a clarity of mind seeing things, I just said to myself, "Wisdom is here." And that's where I left it. I didn't go digging or try to figure out what the wisdom was. I just said, "Wisdom is here," and went on with my practice. Just a simple acknowledgment of the sense that wisdom was operating in that moment.

Since wisdom is a conditioned phenomenon, and insight—the manifestation of wisdom—paññā, insights are impermanent. Wisdom is impermanent. The conditions arise for clear seeing, and sometimes it happens that it is so obvious when we're in that state.

Is this familiar to you? It's like, how can I not see this? It is so clear. And in that place, when wisdom is very strong like that, the mind cannot comprehend the possibility in that moment of not seeing it that clearly.

And yet, maybe seconds, maybe hours later, something shifts. And it's like, wow, I guess it wasn't that obvious. You know, just seeing the changing nature of experience and how there isn't anything to cling to. A thought wafts through and it's like, oh yeah, that's a thought, oh there it goes. It seems so clear and so obvious. And yet, that's a very refined state of mind where wisdom is very strong. And it is, again, conditioned. It will fall apart. It's not a mistake that it falls apart. It's not a personal failing that it has fallen apart. Conditions have shifted.

And yet, having seen something clearly like that, there's a way in which the memory of that lingers. Maybe at some point you've had the clear recognition: yes, things are just arising in the present moment. And then another time when it's like, well, I can't see it that way anymore. Rather than second-guessing the

insight, which sometimes we do—and I've done my share of that: Was that real? Did I really see that?—rather than second-guessing the insight, what we can recognize in that moment is that clearly delusion is operating right now.

When we're not seeing something clearly like that, having seen it clearly before, we can recognize that delusion has descended and simply be aware: ah, this is delusion. Delusion is operating right now. Having seen it without delusion, you begin to recognize delusion actively in the present moment. And this is very powerful, because we're no longer fooled by our delusion. We may not be able to see through it, but we're also not fooled by it.

So our insights, our wisdom, supports our confidence, our interest in exploring, supports our mindfulness, supports our continuity of mindfulness, which leads to further insights. Those five faculties that I mentioned at the beginning really spiral and support each other. A little bit of wisdom generates confidence, generates a sense of, yes, this is possible, I'm willing to try this. Generates the energy, generates the mindfulness and the concentration, creates the conditions for more clear seeing.

So it's a process, of course. And just a reminder: simplicity, simplicity, simplicity. We can see what we can see. It's often helpful not to dig, but rather to just notice, ah, this is what's obvious. Meet that. And meet the next moment that's obvious. Wisdom will grow. We don't have to make it grow. It grows because the conditions are there to support it.

So let's just sit for a moment.

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