Attitude and Delusion

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:02:57

Tonight I'd like to continue exploring the third foundation of mindfulness—mindfulness of mind states, mindfulness of mind. We've been exploring this for several days, but it just seems to me like there's so much there. I wanted to bring in a slightly different perspective, which I understand Nikki introduced yesterday morning in the instruction period.

This involves exploring the third foundation of mindfulness not only as kind of exploring the obvious mind states that come up as we meditate, as we meet our experience. Of course we're going to notice mind states of frustration or anger or confusion just as we're going through the day. Thoughts come by and we'll react to those thoughts, and of course mind states come up in that way. We've been exploring how to meet those states, explore them, open to them, and be with them—not with the agenda to get rid of them, fix them, or change them, but more with the curiosity of what is this? What does it mean to be a human being experiencing this state of mind?

Another way that this foundation can serve us is as an exploration not only of the obvious states of mind that come and go during our day, but also in terms of exploring how we relate to experience and how we are relating to practice itself. These kinds of mind states may be more hidden, below our conscious awareness. They may be in the background, hidden from us a little bit. I'd like to explore how we can use this teaching on mindfulness of mind states to begin to explore our relationship to experience.

Every single experience we have—whether it's seeing a sight, hearing a sound, or feeling a body sensation—there is some relationship that our mind has to that experience. Our mind has a relationship to all of the experience that comes through our physical senses and all of the experience that we have in our mind as well. We have a relationship to the experience of thinking. We have a relationship to emotions that arise.

A simple example, and this is an obvious one that you've all explored and worked with: if you're sitting here and feeling some kind of physical discomfort in the body—pain in the back or pain in the knee—the pain is one thing, the physical discomfort is one thing. It's an unpleasant experience with its elemental qualities of sensations—perhaps pressure, pulsing, burning, stabbing. So there's the experience of the physicality of it and then the feeling tone of it. But based on those experiences, there's usually some relationship that we have to that pain. Often there's an aversive relationship. Occasionally there's a balanced relationship. But in any case—and I've sometimes seen this as I get really into the mindfulness that can see things in detail—there can even be a greedy relationship to that pain. It's like, "Wow, that is so cool! Let me really dive in there and look at that and see all the sparking sensations." So there can be a

kind of greedy relationship to it as well.

Whatever the experience is, there is always some mental relationship, some attitude that the mind has in relationship to that experience. It may be so subtle that it's not noticed at times. Sometimes we don't particularly recognize the experience of a balanced relationship, for instance. If we're exploring the way sounds come and go, we may be very interested in the coming and going of the sound but less aware that interest is arising in the mind, that there's a relationship of interest, a relationship of non-reactivity, a relationship of calm perhaps.

So the exploration I'd like to make tonight is beginning to look at what our relationship is to whatever is happening moment to moment. We are often not consciously aware of this relationship. If we are not consciously aware of a relationship of aversion, for example, or of greed—if we are relating to experience through a relationship of aversion and we're not clearly aware of the aversion—then there is a kind of reinforcement of the aversion happening. When we have a relationship to experience that is unseen, and it's an unhelpful relationship, we're actually tending to reinforce the habit of that unhelpful relationship when it's not seen. If it's a helpful relationship like curiosity or balance of mind and we're not consciously aware of that, we're actually missing the opportunity to strengthen it.

Mindfulness has this wonderful property: when we turn our mindful attention to states of mind that are not helpful—those states of mind based in greed, aversion, and delusion, three of the states clearly highlighted in the third foundation of mindfulness—when we turn our mindful attention to greed, aversion, and delusion, when we are mindful of them, it creates the conditions for them to be diminishing in our experience. We learn something about greed when we pay attention to it. When we bring our mindfulness to greed, when we bring our mindfulness to aversion, we see that it actually doesn't feel so good. That very mindful attention begins to help give our minds an education that greed, aversion, and delusion are not really the way to go in terms of heading towards well-being.

Very fortunately, when our system, our organism, gets good education, it wants to move towards well-being. It really just needs good information.

in our experience, our system begins to understand very viscerally that this is not helpful. And so it begins to create the conditions for a weakening of those states.

Likewise with wholesome states—helpful states of mind, states of curiosity, of kindness, of equanimity, of calm—when we turn our mindful attention to those states, it creates the conditions for them to strengthen. The very mindfulness of these qualities gives our system, gives our organism, the information that these states do lead towards well-being.

So mindfulness itself is a very supportive aspect of our minds that begins to help us let go of states based in greed, aversion, and delusion, and to cultivate those wholesome states. When we are unaware of what our relationship is, we're missing the opportunity to weaken the unskillful states. We're unwittingly

strengthening those unskillful states and losing the opportunity to strengthen the wholesome ones.

Another way to explore this relationship to experience is through the question: How am I with this experience? My teacher, Sayadaw U Tejaniya, uses the question: What's the attitude of mind with respect to experience? For me, the phrase "What's the relationship to experience?" or "How am I with this experience?" feels a little more natural. We can actually use this question from time to time to begin to uncover attitudes and relationships of mind that may not be so clear or obvious to us.

This is a little technique, a tool we can use just from time to time. I would definitely say from time to time rather than making this something you're doing every few seconds—we can kind of make ourselves crazy with this question. But from time to time it can be very useful, and some good times to check in or ask this question are when it feels like there's some struggle, when it feels like you're butting up against something or fighting with something. That's a good time to check in: What's my relationship to experience right now?

Now, with the dropping in of the question, I have to be careful about this sometimes. It's not that you're trying to find an answer or figure out an answer or think about an answer. You're dropping in the question and then just continuing your practice. Often—or I'd say some percentage of the time—there can be a kind of response. It's almost like we're ringing a doorbell with that question, and then some mind state answers the door. We don't have to go looking for it. We don't have to find it. We just drop in the question and see: Is there some relationship that hasn't been obvious? Just by checking in, just by asking the question, sometimes those relationships can come forward, offering themselves to be seen more consciously.

When there's a feeling of struggle, that's often a good time to check the attitude, check the relationship to experience. Another really helpful time to check your relationship to your experience is if it feels like things are going really, really well. Because sometimes there's a little bit of leaning in, a little bit of greed, a little bit of "Oh, I figured it out, I've got it right." Again, that's a relationship that may not be noticed if we don't kind of open up and check in, ask that question.

So this practice question, used just from time to time, becomes a way to explore something that may be behind the curtain, behind the scenes. Sometimes we have mind states running the show that are having us engage in our exploration of experience without our being consciously aware of them. If you have a kind of attitude of resistance while you're looking at pain and you're not aware of that resistance, then that very resistance is informing how you are exploring the pain. It's influencing how you choose to explore that experience.

When we become aware—okay, there's pain and there's resistance to it—at least at that point there can be a sense of recognition: "Oh, there's pain and I don't like it, I'm resisting it." We can begin to see perhaps that we're bearing into that experience of pain, or maybe pulling back from it and bracing ourselves around it. We can just see that more clearly as we begin to open ourselves to this question: What's the

relationship to experience?

There are roughly four flavors of attitude you might come across as you ask this question, and these connect very directly to the third foundation of mindfulness. There's the attitude of greed—of wanting something either to continue or wanting to have something, wanting to be someone. That movement towards, that wanting, that greed. There's the attitude of aversion—of not liking, of wanting to get rid of something, wanting to pull myself away from it or to actively push that thing away from me. There's the attitude of delusion, often experienced as a disconnection or a not-knowing. And then there's the attitude I'll call balance of mind—the relationship of "it's okay," the relationship of "no problem." This is in the terrain of equanimity, that beautiful quality.

When we look at the first half of the third foundation of the Satipaṭṭhāna, it talks about looking at the presence or absence of greed, the presence or absence of aversion, the presence or absence of delusion, and then contraction and distraction. Contraction and distraction I actually think of as flavors of delusion in a way. Noticing the presence of greed, aversion, and delusion—including contraction and distraction as flavors of delusion—and then the absence of those, which is essentially balance of mind.

When greed, aversion, and delusion are not present, the mind is not reactive. It's not doing a push-pull dance with what we're experiencing. It's okay with what's happening.

So I'd like to explore these flavors a little bit and talk more about attitude in general.

Let's start with greed. You're all familiar with greed—it's a common one that we begin to see as we look at our experience. It has obvious flavors: the really wanting, a feeling of neediness, a feeling of "have to have," that sticky pull towards some sense pleasure or some state of mind. We can crave states of mind. We can want and have greed about states of mind. We can have wanting about being seen, being mirrored, being heard, wanting to be seen in a particular way. These are the more obvious forms of wanting that we're familiar with.

Some more subtle forms of this flavor of attitude might be things like expectation, excitement, or even possibly amusement—subtler kinds of leaning towards something that's delightful or pleasant.

Now, one of the really important explorations with states of mind is to recognize and remember—remember, remember, remember—that when we see a state of greed, something subtle like expectation or amusement, we're not somehow trying to stop it or get rid of it. We're bringing mindfulness to it so that it can be known.

Subtler states of greed, like expectation, excitement, and amusement, often have a blend with joy or curiosity. There's a way in which those are beginning to move towards the wholesome states of curiosity, joy, interest, delight. And yet, as you begin to explore, just bring mindfulness.

Some of you have talked in our meetings about feeling excitement as you begin to recognize what's going

on inside. It's pretty cool sometimes to start seeing things that are happening in there and be okay about it, to be non-reactive about seeing some of the stuff that's going on. This can bring some Dharma joy, and that Dharma joy can shoot into excitement, sometimes into restlessness or mental proliferation. "Oh wow, that's so cool! I'm never going to have to worry about that one again—I figured that one out!" The mind has moved from the pure rising of joy into a little bit of restlessness around it, a little bit of leaning towards it.

This isn't something to judge as "excitement bad"—like we should just cut it out, try to excise it. Rather, we want to be aware of it. As we open to "what's the attitude here?" and recognize that excitement is the attitude, we might begin to feel the rising of joy and its purity, but also feel something a little shaky or agitated around that joy. Excitement has a slightly agitated quality to it. And that part is extra—it has a little bit of the leaning to it.

But we're not going to understand which aspect of the experience around Dharma joy and the excitement that follows—which part is the beautiful, the wholesome, the Dharma joy side, and which part is the agitation—without just opening to it. "Oh, there's this recognition of understanding, and excitement is happening." The mindfulness and the interest together, the curiosity about what it's like to be a human being feeling excitement—this mindfulness begins to help us tease apart which aspects have a little bit of that gripping and which parts are the wholesomes.

A subtler form of wanting is a leaning in, a trying perhaps to make something continue, a wanting it to continue—just a subtle "ah, mmm," reaching toward experience. The subtlest kind of leaning in.

In my own practice, I have seen all of these flavors. And again, I want to emphasize that the learning comes with curiosity and opening to these flavors, not labeling them as "Oh, leaning in—it feels like I'm leaning in. Andrea said that was greed, so how do I get rid of that?" What I'm hoping to encourage is opening to it. "Oh, leaning in—that's what's happening. What does that feel like? What is that like?"

Likewise with aversion, there are more obvious and more subtle flavors. The more obvious ones include dislike, anger, fear, hatred—those more apparent forms of that quality of mind. Subtler forms might be just a state of discontent, dissatisfaction—just "meh." It's okay, but could be better. That subtle quality almost isn't something we recognize consciously because it doesn't feel like it's getting in the way of being present with whatever it is. And yet it's really helpful to acknowledge

Yeah, "it could be better." So I'm looking at this thing that's going on here, but it's really kind of boring. Or it's just not as interesting as it was yesterday. So it's okay, but... there's just a subtle dissatisfaction, a subtle sense of something being off, not quite what you want it to be. It's got a subtle feeling of not wanting this to be what's happening—a subtler flavor of aversion.

Or another level of subtlety: the thought that by paying attention to this thing, it'll go away. We can have a sense of interest in paying attention to something in order for this unpleasant experience to disappear. So

again, these more obvious and less obvious states.

Checking the attitude like this, checking our relationship to experience, can reveal an emotional relationship to experience—something's happening and there's an emotional storm around it. But it can also reveal subtle agendas in the mind. Agendas around the meditation, like "If I pay attention to this in the right way, I'll get this great state." Or "If I pay attention in just the right way, this unpleasant thing will go away." These have less of an emotional quality and more of an agenda quality. These agendas can also be relationships to experience.

I'd like to talk about delusion in a moment—I'd like to cover delusion in a little bit more depth. So I'm going to skip delusion for now and come back to the fourth kind of attitude: this balance of mind, the relationship of balance of mind.

Sometimes when we check in—"What's my relationship to experience?"—it doesn't feel like there's much there. This might be because there are very subtle kinds of greed or aversion happening, or very subtle kinds of delusion. But you're present, and it doesn't seem like there's much going on. If it feels like nobody answers the door when you ring the doorbell, then don't go looking for anything. It might just be that what's happening is a little more subtle than you're familiar with. Or actually, it could be that you're not familiar with checking in and recognizing that calm is what's happening right now. Calm is a pretty subtle state. Peace is a pretty subtle state. Sometimes you check in and think, "Oh, nothing seems to be happening." You could try that on. You could just say, "Well, is it calm? Is it peace? Is it okayness? Is it no problem?"

This flavor of balance of mind as an attitude has many different possible manifestations, many different ways it might be experienced. Calmness, peace, a sense of "I don't mind this." One of my dear friends—she died a few years ago, but she had a really deep practice. I learned so much from her just talking about her practice. She said she was recognizing a subtle difference in this balance of mind shading into aversion. She said, "If my mind's going 'I don't care,' it's got a little bit of aversion. If it's saying 'I don't mind this,' that's more equanimity." That's the balance of mind. So checking into the attitude, if it's an "I don't care" kind of feeling, there may be just a little bit of aversion there.

This balance has flavors of "I don't mind this," calm, peace. It can also manifest as heart qualities. Philip this morning mentioned loving attention. It can have a feeling of love, of compassion sometimes, of friendliness to experience. Sometimes when we check in to our relationship, it might just feel friendly or loving or compassionate. It might have a flavor of delight, of curiosity, of interest—just subtly different ways that we experience these states. It might be a feeling of gratitude. Or it might have more of a sense of equanimity, of tranquility, or happiness.

So many different flavors when the mind is non-reactive, and opening to those flavors will support their nourishment. Actually recognizing, "Yes, happiness is here"—

This is the human experience of happiness. It's supportive for our movement towards freedom.

So I'd like to come back and explore delusion a little bit. Often when we explore this foundation of mindfulness and talk about delusion, people say, "But how do you see delusion? Is it even possible to see delusion?" And it is possible to see delusion. It's possible to know delusion, to know it's operating in our minds. What I'd like to do right now is take a little time to give you some information about ways that delusion functions, which may help you begin to see it.

Delusion often functions like a veil of some kind. We're seeing through a veil, and sometimes that veil is so cloudy that it feels like we're just disconnected—like we're not even connecting with experience. This is what I'll call the first level or layer of delusion: a flavor of lack of awareness. The non-mindful state is a state of delusion. A state when we're lost in thought is a state of delusion. And we can begin to get familiar with this.

Now, we cannot know what it's like to not be mindful in the moment of not being mindful. But in the moment when mindfulness returns, we can be curious about what that's like right there. In that moment when mindfulness returns—at least in my experience, when I've been really lost, when my mind has been in some constructed reality, lost in that world—as the mindfulness returns, there's a lingering memory of what it was like to be lost. We can begin to explore some of these disconnected states by being curious when mindfulness returns, curious about what's here when mindfulness returns.

Mindfulness can begin to connect with certain states that we think are inherently non-mindful. This is another piece I like to point out, because sometimes we have this assumption—like the state of spacing out, sleepiness, dullness, falling asleep. Often we think it's just not possible to be mindful there. But we can begin to be curious about those states, often in the moment when we're kind of waking up from being lost, being spaced out.

I'll give an example of this, because sometimes it's a little more helpful to tell the story. I was having breakfast one morning and trying to be mindful of eating—trying to pay attention to all of the eating, all of the movements, just trying to be particularly mindful of the physical sensations. And I kept noticing that I would be doing that and then suddenly I'd be spaced out. I would bring myself back to being mindful of the eating, and then at some point I'd be spaced out again. I would just recognize, okay, I wake up, I'm spaced out. And I would keep bringing myself back.

Then at some point, because I was trying so hard to stay with the experience of eating, I kind of noticed when the mindfulness—it's almost like it said, "Enough of this. I'm going to go someplace else." There was a sense of seeing the mindfulness leaving, letting go of paying attention to all the physical sensations. Rather than saying, "I've got the agenda, I know what I'm supposed to be doing, pay attention to those physical sensations," I explored: "Oh, okay, I'm seeing the mindfulness let go of that. Let's see where it goes."

At that point, I could watch the mind move into a state of spacing out, which felt like it was hovering up above my head, a little to the right, hanging out up there. And I just stayed with it, mindful in that state. In being mindful in that state, there was a recognition—not so much a verbal recognition, but just this knowing: "Oh, the mind is tired. It's needing rest. And it's taking its rest in this state of spacing out." I could do that mindfully. I could be present for that mindfully.

Then the next surprise was that within maybe thirty or forty seconds, that spacing out just kind of—it's like the mist cleared. And then I was present for my body and present for seeing and present for chewing. In some ways, I had been fighting that spacing out because I had some other agenda.

I had an agenda of what I thought I needed to be doing. And when I allowed, or got curious about, the state of spacing out itself, I discovered that spacing out is not inherently non-mindful. There are many, many states of mind in which we have a habit of not being mindful. But we can begin to be curious about them.

At this point, if there's any state that I think might not be possible for mindfulness to go there—some state of confusion or cloudiness, low energy or dullness—and my mind is telling me, "Can't be mindful right now," I just don't believe that thought anymore. I just get curious. Okay, let's just see. Is it possible for mindfulness to infuse that too?

So this kind of obvious level, this gross level of delusion—states in which we're habitually non-mindful—just being curious about the possibility of beginning to wake up in those states.

At another level or layer of delusion, that first layer is kind of a disconnected layer. That's the most obvious way that delusion manifests—we're just not attending to what's happening. At another level down, a more subtle level of delusion, we are knowing what's happening. We do know what's happening in our experience, but we know it through some kind of filter, some kind of perspective. And so that perspective influences how we take information in from the world.

A simple example of this: if we have some kind of an agenda to do something, to look at something, to find something. The way the mind works, when we get a project in mind, some kind of agenda, the mind organizes around that project and begins selecting things out of the environment that are useful to that project while ignoring things that are not useful. This is called selective attention in psychological terms. And it's a very useful function of mind. It allows us to focus on things and tune other things out.

When I was a kid, I had a very strong capacity for this. I would be reading a book in the living room, completely into that book. That was my world. And my dad would come up the stairs and say, "Hey, it's time for dinner." I would not hear him. I just did not hear him. He actually had to come up to me and touch me to get me to come out of my selective attention.

So sometimes we have this capacity to screen certain things in and other things out, based on an agenda, based on something that we're doing. This is a useful function of mind, and yet the place this shades into

delusion is that we think in some way our minds are kind of natural—like our eyes are cameras and our ears are microphones, and they just record everything, and we're seeing the world out there as it is. That we're seeing what's actually going on out there.

But when we see the world, we are seeing certain things and not other things based on perspectives. And when we're not aware of those perspectives, we mistakenly think we're seeing things accurately.

So this is just the way our minds work, but we need to begin to recognize when we have agendas, even a simple agenda. Many of you have probably heard the story about the basketball and the gorilla study. I'll just briefly review it for those who haven't heard it.

It was a study where people were asked to watch a videotape and count the number of times a basketball passed between players wearing white t-shirts. During that video, a person in a gorilla suit walked across the stage, across the basketball players, stood there for a while—it wasn't like he was hiding—standing there in this gorilla suit, and then walked off.

After the tape was played, pretty uniformly people could accurately say how many times the basketball passed. But a good sixty percent of the people did not see the gorilla. There were a few people who were like, "Wow, was there a gorilla in that video? What was that?" A lot of people just did not see the gorilla.

Now, that's not a problem right there. That part is not a problem because that's the way our minds work. Certain people's minds can really focus in and really take in: "Okay, this is the agenda. Count the number of basketball passes."

That's what we're doing. The other information is simply not taken in.

The place where delusion comes in is that in that study, when people were told there was a gorilla and shown the video—and you can't *not* see the gorilla when you're looking for it—they denied that it was the same video. Some number of people were so convinced that the gorilla could not have been in the video they saw, because surely they would have seen it. This is delusion. This is the danger of the way we think we're seeing things accurately. This kind of thing happens all the time.

So that's a pretty subtle form of delusion. This kind of thing also happens culturally. We're told something over and over again, and we begin to believe it. "America is the land of opportunity. Anyone who works hard enough can achieve their dream." We start to believe that. This leads to, for those people in more privileged positions, basically not seeing that there are cultural conditions that support some to achieve their dreams and don't support others—conditions that actually get actively in the way of others achieving their dreams. That delusion of white privilege. Again, it's this perspective we're holding and not seeing, basically, that the system is rigged.

We can also create views based on incomplete information. I was thinking about an example around this, and I thought: every single one of us standing on this planet—it sure feels like we're standing still. It sure

looks like the sun is moving across the sky. It sure looks like the moon is rising and setting. It doesn't feel like we're hurtling some massive number of miles an hour around the axis of the earth, and besides that, hurtling through space. That's not our experience, right? It sure feels like we're sitting still.

We know we're not sitting still. And sometimes I can even play with that—like when I watch the sunrise or the moon rise and know that it's the earth that's turning. But it's kind of effortful. We have to bring in the information we know. If we just operate with our physical senses, the feeling is that the earth is still and everything else is moving around us. That's incomplete information. And Galileo, when he said, "No, the earth is moving—the earth is moving really fast," the church said this was heresy and put him under house arrest for the rest of his life. This perspective of incomplete information has an impact on how we relate to each other. This kind of thing happens all the time. Delusion is shot through our day.

Now, don't despair. We can start to recognize—I think the first place to begin, since a lot of what I'm talking about here is views, perspective, views that we have—we can begin to recognize, "Okay, there's a view happening here." Some views are harder to see through, like the view that the planet is still. The feeling of the truth of that is much harder to penetrate when the information is not available. And yet many of the views we function with, we can begin to recognize—the views in particular that we function with interpersonally and within our own being.

When there's something happening in your experience and there's some kind of struggle, often there's some kind of "you" happening there. The question I like in those moments is: *What's being believed right now?* These beliefs, these views, are often not so obvious. But we can begin to be curious about what views we have. That question—what is being believed right now?—can begin to infiltrate this.

The third, most fundamental kind of delusion is another form of view, a deepest level of delusion. It's not so much the views that we deal with based on our culture or our families or just how we've navigated the world—those agendas and views that we live with in our daily life. Rather, these are human views that we share, partly because of the way our minds and bodies are put together. We tend to have views, we tend to misunderstand experience as being permanent when it's impermanent. We misunderstand it as being

reliable when it's unreliable. We take what is impermanent to be permanent. We take what's unreliable to be reliable. We take what is not self to be self.

This is a whole dharma talk in itself, this exploration of delusion. But we can begin being curious. Again, not trying to somehow skip over or tell ourselves, "Okay, I'm taking this to be permanent. I'm feeling like this thing is really solid and I know it's impermanent." Rather, we investigate. When it feels like something is really stable, when it feels like something is rock solid, just begin to explore: What's the solidity there? Is it really solid? How does it feel solid? Curiosity about that.

And likewise with what we think is reliable—where we think, "Yeah, that's where I'm going to be happy. That's what's going to make me happy." Noticing the feeling of that, and what is it that we think is reliable

about it? In general, this sense pleasure, this worldly pleasant we've been talking about, is so unreliable. And yet that's where we think we're going to find happiness.

So we investigate. One of the explorations, which Nikki touched into the other day, is this exploration of gratification, danger, and escape. When there's pleasant experience, we ask: How is this feeling gratifying? And then what the Buddha instructs is: How long does it last? How far does that gratification extend? So that we begin to be very consciously aware that this thing we think is going to do it for us has limits.

On retreat, we really can see this. I've actually recognized that the mind truly believes this piece of chocolate is going to do it for me—it's going to make me happy. And it does, for a moment, for thirty seconds. Actually, it lasted way longer than I thought, the happiness of chocolate. It was quite impressive. It lasted, I don't know, a couple of minutes. But it faded.

This is curiosity: How long does that pleasure last? I was playing with that. Okay, there is that feeling of, "Yeah, chocolate's going to do it for me," but how long does it actually do it for you? In doing that exploration, I discovered, "Wow, actually, I got to enjoy the chocolate for a really long time." And then it faded. It faded. And because I was there for it, there wasn't the sense of needing to grasp after another piece of chocolate or trying to find the next thing.

And then there's seeing what is not self as self. I'm sure we'll talk about this more as the retreat goes on. But just beginning to explore—it's not so helpful to try to put on the identity of not-self. We do that sometimes. What's much more interesting is to begin to look at what am I taking to be self?

Sometimes this is really obvious. Sometimes these senses of self come up quickly, obviously. And when that happens, you can just receive it. "Oh. Here's the argumentative self." That lasts for a while. "Here's the frustrated self." That lasts for a while. "Here's the interested self." That lasts for a while. And we begin to see this changing dynamic—no solid thing there.

So exploring, exploring the identities, exploring what feels like me.

As we become aware of these kinds of delusion, we can begin to notice when they're happening. We can begin to recognize, "Yeah, I'm feeling a sense of me here."

It may not feel like delusion, but you can know, okay, that's something to be curious about.

And then you might have a moment, or a few moments, where suddenly the sense of impermanence is so clear. Or the sense of the way that you had been holding onto something as reliable is suddenly so obvious. And it's like you see really directly: there's nothing that's reliable in the way I thought it was. Everything's just slipping through. And there's a moment where it's just so clear. It is so clear and it feels so obvious. Wow, there's nothing to hold on to.

And then a few moments later, we're holding on again. Delusion is back.

In exploring this, we have moments when delusion falls away and we see something clearly. But that's conditioned. That's an insight, and it's conditioned. And it's impermanent too. The conditions for the obscuring to return will arise again.

And yet, because you've seen it otherwise—because you've seen what it's like to not have that particular delusion—it's like then you can really clearly know: ah yes, this is delusion. The absence of delusion highlights delusion when it's present again.

The trick there is to not feel like you failed when delusion comes back. It's not a failure. It is simply the conditions.

So—noticing greed, aversion, delusion. Noticing the balance of mind. Checking the attitude. This is a direct pointing to what the Buddha said is freedom. He said freedom, nibbana—one of his clearest definitions—was the absence of greed, the absence of aversion, the absence of delusion.

And so this practice is helping to reveal greed, aversion, and delusion that were kind of below the radar. It's good news to have it revealed. Because when it's below the radar, it's kind of reinforcing itself. When it comes into consciousness, there's a possibility for transformation and release and freedom. Even small tastes of that letting go can be really freeing.

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