From Why to What (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 55:52

As human beings, we seem to be creatures of wanting to understand things. Often that expresses itself as trying to figure out why things happen. This happens to us in our practice as well. When we're meeting struggles of various kinds, there can be a temptation, a sense of "why is this happening?" This arises especially, it seems, after we've seen something a few times and begun to recognize it isn't so helpful, yet our mind keeps doing it. Why? Why does it keep doing this?

We may want to go back into our past and try to figure things out based on our history. There must be some very deep tendency in my family that makes me keep doing this. We feel like wanting to dig, wanting to understand what's going on based on our conditioning from the past.

Understanding conditioning is helpful and important. We talk about the conditioned nature of our experience and how valuable it is to understand that our experience is conditioned. Yet this kind of foray into the why—understanding the why of our experience—often involves thinking and trying to figure things out. It can involve our views, our ideas, our beliefs, our attitudes, the things that have shaped us.

This is something to recognize: when we are trying to understand something through the lens of our prior conditioning, our views and ideas and attitudes, we may well find what we're looking for. We'll find things that are shaped by those conditions. It can become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. We're looking for something, trying to find meaning, trying to understand why something's happening, but that very search is shaped by our conditioning and so tends to go in particular ways.

Our practice, instead of using this habit or familiar way of exploring why things are going on, encourages us to simply look at what is happening. What is happening right now in this present moment? This present moment is all that there is. It's all that we have access to in terms of understanding what is happening. So we explore what is actually happening right now, dropping below the ideas and views to simply ask: What is this? What is happening?

Last night Richard talked about one description of a difference between an enlightened person and an ordinary person. There's another sutta that has a similar contrast. In this one it says that an untaught ordinary person doesn't understand what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, they attend to those things unfit for attention and do not attend to those things fit for attention. This is how they attend unwisely:

"Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in

the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future?"

Or else they are inwardly perplexed about the present: "Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?"

In a way, these are all questions about the why. Where have I come from? Why am I here? Having been that in the past, why am I this now? This is that flavor of why, why, why—what's the meaning?

And then he goes on to say that a well-taught noble disciple understands what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, they do not attend to those things unfit for attention, and attend to those things fit for attention. They attend wisely: "This is suffering." They attend wisely: "This is the arising of suffering." They attend wisely: "This is the ending of suffering." They attend wisely: "This is the way leading to the ending of suffering."

You probably recognize those statements as expressions of the Four Noble Truths. When I first read this, when I first began studying this teaching, I just kind of blew past this part and thought, "Well, that's just the Four Noble Truths. An enlightened person understands the Four Noble Truths." I'd heard that this was the insight the Buddha had—the insight into the Four Noble Truths—and so I just moved on.

But what it's pointing to here, the way it's phrased, is that one attends wisely. *This*—what is happening right now—has one of these four flavors. It will be either suffering, or suffering coming into being, or suffering ending, or it will be the cultivation of qualities on the path leading to the end of suffering. We can use this framework of the Four Noble Truths as a framework for understanding our experience. And the Buddha says this is the way a wise person meets experience.

One way to look at the difference between these two approaches is that the ordinary person attends to experience through the perspective and view of their sense of self—who they are, all those questions of "why am I?" The enlightened person understands suffering and its arising, its ending, and what leads to the ending of suffering. There's no orientation around the perspective of a sense of self in that. It's just around suffering or the end of suffering.

This looking at what's happening right now—we can look at what's going on with respect to whether it's suffering or the arising of suffering. And that's the part I'd mostly like to explore this evening: those two pieces. How can we explore that, or know that, or understand that through this investigation of what is happening? Because as we shift our perspective, our habit of exploring things from the question of "why" to "what's here, what's going on?"—this is what we begin to see. We begin to understand suffering. We begin to see the conditions that lead to its arising.

This form of suffering that the Buddha expressed as being possible to be completely free of—this kind of suffering is pointed to here as arising in the present moment. That's what this pointing says to me. *This*, right now, what's happening right now—this is suffering. It's pointing to the experience right here in this moment. What is the experience of suffering right here in this moment? And can we know that? Can we

know it as suffering?

Actually, that is an insight—the recognition "this is suffering." We don't often think of it that way. We often think of it as a problem. But when we see it—"Oh, this is what's happening. Suffering is arising. The Buddha encouraged me to get to know this, to understand it"—and seeing it, suffering is arising here, now, in the present moment. This is the only place it can arise, and it's also the only place it can end.

We may think about or have the sense somehow that we've suffered in the past and that suffering is being carried along or dragged with us through our lives—that it's the same suffering we experienced months ago or years ago, and it's back, here to haunt us. Yet when we start to look at our experience, we see what happens in the present moment. We're not suffering the same suffering that happened in the past.

I saw this actually—I've seen this many times, but the first time it became so clear to me was on my first three-month course. A memory of a time when I got very embarrassed about something arose in my mind.

And that memory arose in my mind, and the feeling of embarrassment came along with it. At first it felt like this was the old embarrassment—the embarrassment that happened all those years ago when I was standing on stage in that play and forgot my line. That memory of standing there arose in my mind, and all of those feelings came up.

Over and over again this happened on that retreat, and I got to look at it over and over again. I began to recognize that the arising of the feelings of embarrassment were actually separate from the memory. I had thought at first they were interlocked, that it wasn't possible to have them be separate. But I could begin to see, just through noticing what's happening, that the memory arises, and then it's like the mind does something with that memory. It goes, "Oh yeah, that memory. Oh, I remember that. That was awful. It was terrible, and I was so embarrassed." And what happens? We become embarrassed in this moment. Our minds pick up the memory and all the things that happened there and reconstruct in this moment, right now—that suffering is being constructed. It's not the same suffering. It's being experienced now.

This happens a lot to us. We're sitting in meditation and a memory arises. Often, because thoughts are so powerful, memories are so powerful, many of the same feelings that we experienced at that time come into being in that moment. But they are now coming into being. They weren't there a few moments ago. This was a piece I didn't quite understand. I thought I was just tapping into some pool of embarrassment that was sitting there already. I didn't quite understand that it was actually being regenerated right in this moment.

Seeing that over and over again helped me to understand: this is suffering now. This is being created right now. Our suffering is created now based on conditions from the past, based on triggers that are associated with things that have happened to us, and based on how we relate to the entire thing right now. There are different threads that come into the creation of this suffering: our memories and thoughts, the habits and patterns of reactivity, and how the mind is right in this moment.

Just as an example, you've seen in your practice that sometimes something will arise that tends to be triggering for you, but you've had a good night of rest and the mindfulness is strong, and it's like it's there and it's seen and it goes. Barely any of that suffering arises because of the way the mind is in this moment. But other times maybe you didn't get a lot of sleep and you're hungry and it's been a rocky day of mindfulness, and that thing arises and a lot of suffering is created. There are many conditions that come into play for how suffering arises in the moment.

Everything we need to know about suffering—for its understanding, to be free from it, to release the suffering, for the mind to begin to understand how to let go of it—everything we need to know is happening in the present moment. That was actually a relief to me when I recognized that I don't have to figure out all the conditioning, all of that history, all of that "why" of family conditioning and conditioning in the schoolyard and all of those habits and patterns of mind that got shaped. It's a relief to recognize that everything we need to know to be free from suffering that's arising in this moment is available in this moment.

When we can see this way that suffering is put together in the moment—and this seeing happens by just being with what is happening in the present moment—as I said, everything that's needed is here in the present moment, so all we need to do is look at this present moment. Now, this doesn't mean we'll always be able to see it all in any present moment. But what we explore is the more we connect with now, connect with what's here, we begin to trust just that connection. It's enough to just connect with this. I don't need to think back through all of the whys. Sometimes even thinking we know the whys can get in the way or deceive us. It can send us down a wayward path.

This actually happened really early in my practice. I remember now—this was in the first few months of my practice. I was exploring emotions, doing this largely in daily life. I wasn't so interested in sitting down and doing sitting meditation when I first started practicing, but I was really interested in exploring and understanding my mind. And my mind was making me suffer. So I began looking at what was going on in my mind, and various threads were predominant at that time. One was anger. Another was loneliness. These were connected to a relationship that had ended in what I thought was a very unskillful way—the other person had ended it in a very unskillful way. So lots of anger, lots of loneliness, lots of grief.

I was feeling into all of this, and at one point I noticed that every night when I went to bed, I got really lonely.

This was not a surprise to me. I thought I understood why I was lonely. But I was interested in simply observing, so I just watched my mind. Each night I'd notice, "Yep, there's that loneliness again. Okay." It was really simple—a really, really simple mindfulness. Just, "Yep, there it is. Okay, I know I'm lonely. Loneliness is happening." It wasn't even a very detailed exploration of the body. It was just acknowledging, "That's what the mind is doing right now. It's lonely. There's loneliness happening." And I watched this pretty much every night as I went to bed.

Then one night—and I don't think I was particularly trying to be mindful that evening—something different happened. Maybe it was because I had become attuned to that quality of loneliness through getting familiar with it during that regular evening recognition: "Yep, there it is again. Okay." But this particular evening, I noticed that the loneliness turned on like somebody had flipped a switch—when I set my alarm clock. I picked up my alarm clock, set it, and the loneliness switched on. I thought, "What? What does setting an alarm clock have to do with loneliness?" I didn't know.

But I just kept watching each night. "Oh yeah, here it is. Here it is again when I set the alarm clock." I don't remember how many nights passed—probably not too many, maybe just one or two more. Then one night, when I set the alarm clock, I noticed a memory arise. I was with my ex-partner and we were in Disneyland together, looking up at a marquee in Tomorrowland that had a digital clock on it. I could see the connection between what I was doing in the present—setting a digital clock—and that memory, and how the memory was connected to the loneliness.

It was as if the mind was saying, "Oh yeah, I was so happy then, and I'm never going to be happy again." That particular memory was one of my cherished memories, and it felt like these memories had been destroyed or something. But that memory had flitted through my mind and it had been creating this loneliness. That was amazing to me—that I could see this. In that moment it was like, "Wow, I thought the loneliness was because I was going to bed alone. I didn't know it was about a memory of Disneyland."

So this was seeing more of the conditions of the present moment—the trigger, the thought, and the reaction to the thought. This is seeing the *why* of the present moment. Or we could say, perhaps, seeing *ho w* suffering is put together in the present moment.

The amazing thing was what happened next. The following night, as I went to bed, I clearly remembered the whole discovery from the night before. But the loneliness didn't come up. And in fact, that regular every-night-going-to-bed-lonely pattern stopped happening entirely. It was as if seeing how the suffering was put together had freed me from it.

The mind understood, in that moment—and this is my way of describing it after the fact—the mind understood its own participation in that suffering. And the mind understood how not to go there. I couldn't consciously say, "Oh yeah, I don't want to go there." But the mind, having seen that construction, having seen how it was put together and that its own processes were responsible, it was as if the mind said, "Yeah, I don't think so."

This was really amazing to me—to see how witnessing the *why* of the present moment, or how suffering was put together in the present moment at a clear level, had such power. It was seen very clearly in that moment. That was what mattered: seeing *what* happened in that moment, what was arising.

What was the mind doing with it, moment to moment? Seeing that created the conditions for the mind to let go of that suffering.

So this is the power of that "what" – of looking at the what. What is actually happening right now? It won't always be suffering. But so often when we're looking at what is happening right now, we are seeing it through our habits and our views and our beliefs and our attitudes. We may not be able to stop that, but we can be aware or curious about it. Yes, there are all of these ideas about what's happening, but can I actually be curious about what's actually happening here? What is actually happening? What's happening in the moment?

There are body sensations happening, and emotions and moods that are happening, and thoughts that are happening, and the other senses – the smells and sounds and sights. All of that is happening in the present moment. That's kind of the ground of our experience.

A thought arising in the present moment is just a thought arising in the present moment. That can be known as a what. But often our mind, when thoughts arise in the present moment, isn't simply recognizing, "Oh, there's a thought." We're jumping onto that thought and thinking about it and believing the views and ideas that it's expressing. But we can be aware: "Oh, there's a thought. There's a body sensation. This is what's happening. The body feels like this. The emotions feel like this. Frustration is arising. Confusion is happening. Delight is happening. Joy is happening." Whatever is happening, we can know that just as a happening, as an arising.

Another aspect of the what of our experience – there are a couple more pieces I want to point to – is that we can often have things hidden from our view or perspective of what's happening because of the habits of our mind, because of the ways that we tend to look at things. There can be perspectives in the back of our mind that we don't recognize because they're so familiar, or because that pattern is so familiar to us.

One way of touching into that, another way of seeing what's happening right now or opening to something more: there's a lot happening in the present moment, and there's a certain set of it that we're familiar with seeing and knowing and experiencing. A way to expand a little further is to check in with a simple question – and I think Kamala mentioned this morning – about what's the attitude, or what's the relationship to what's happening?

Often our relationship to what's happening can be a little behind the scenes. We can have habitual ways of relating and not really recognize that that's also a happening. Something unpleasant is happening and there's a sense of not liking it. Maybe that not liking is motivating a way of paying attention: "Well, if I look at this really carefully, maybe it'll go away. If I dive into that sensation or whatever, that unpleasantness, maybe it'll go away." Being motivated by a desire to get rid of it – that little bit of aversion – but not seen.

So checking in: What's happening? And what's the relationship? This is also something that's happening in the present moment. When we check into that, there's not much to do except notice that as a happening too. "Oh, this thing is happening and I don't like it." That's what's happening. Okay. Unpleasant and not liking. That's what's going on right now. That's the what of experience.

Sometimes there are other things hidden from view, or perspectives that are not within the realm of what we normally see. Another question that can be explored at times, which I've found is a little bit broader than "What is my relationship to the experience?" is something like: "Okay, this is stuff that's happening. I know this stuff that's happening. But what else is happening right now?"

At one point I was driving.

I noticed that my mind was leaping into the future in this frenzy of planning. I would call it restlessness and anxiety. That was the state of mind—churning, spinning, lots of thoughts and thinking. And I was like, "Whoa, wow, I'm driving. Let me come back." I would put my attention on my hands on the steering wheel and try to settle in. "Okay, seeing is happening. Hands on the steering wheel—what's happening?" And seconds later, I'd be back in that restless mind.

This happened enough times that I finally got a little curious. "Wow, something's really going on here. What else is happening right now?" When I stopped and just checked in with that—not looking for anything, but almost more like asking my system, "You tell me. I have no idea. You tell me what's going on here"—what arose in that moment, what I saw in the next moment, was that I was really, really happy. I had missed that entirely.

When I noticed that, I wondered what was going on with that happiness. As I saw over the course of my practice, I at one point reported to my teacher, "You know, I think I talk myself out of happiness." What was going on was that there was this feeling of happiness, but there was also this propelling into the future of, "Well, how can I make sure these conditions continue in some way that I can keep this happiness?" But I was missing it entirely. I was not even experiencing the happiness.

So that kind of opening of "what else is happening?"—that wouldn't have been met with "what's the attitude about this anxiety?" It wasn't the attitude there. It was something else that was going on, something that was simply missed until I was willing to step back and say, "Okay, yeah, show me." This is in that mode of receptivity that I spoke about the other day. Just kind of, "Okay, what else is there?" Settle back. Take a pause and let what arises arise. Let your system show you what's happening.

Sometimes our struggles are a little deeper, a little more multi-layered. There's emotions layered on emotions, layered on habits and views and beliefs, and it's just like a big mess—a very complex-seeming experience. We have a sense at times of the multi-layered nature of a lot of our deeper kinds of suffering. We may even have a sense that connected with anger, there's fear and resistance and vulnerability in the mix.

Having seen this, when anger comes up, we may think, "Okay, I know what this is about. There's vulnerability in there somewhere, so let me find it." But that mode of putting something under the microscope to pull it apart and figure it out—that is often not so helpful. That idea of thinking we know what's in the middle, thinking we know where we're going, why this thing is happening—maybe that's

what's happening, but our minds do lots of things and do them in many different ways, and this particular flavor might be different. So be willing to see what is actually here right now, as opposed to thinking, "Oh, I know what this is, let me find this."

The movement of meeting experience, of being with the what of experience—I like the phrase "being with," actually. We sometimes talk about investigation, and that word often invokes in our minds this exploration of why something is happening. Instead, I like to explore just the simplicity of what we mean by investigation: meeting experience, being with experience. Just landing with experience and being with this big mess of stuff.

Sometimes I just think, "Okay, well, it's a big mess. Can I hold it with really wide arms?" Meet whatever is obvious about that big mess. It's a mutating mess that turns in and out and inside out, and various pieces will come to the surface and become obvious. We can settle back and hold it with wide arms, letting ourselves see what comes to the surface, what's obvious in any given moment, and just meeting it, being with it. A gentle connection. Patience with allowing it to reveal itself. Letting the what of the present moment reveal itself.

It's really helpful not to make assumptions about what might be in there, because those assumptions may or may not be true.

And if you notice that there are assumptions, just see if you can hold them lightly. See if it can be a kind of, "Yeah, okay, that may be the case, but let's see." Just see if you can recognize whatever's obvious in this moment.

Another experience from my own practice. I hope that sharing these experiences gives you both a sense of how this can work and a sense of the possibility of what happens when we're willing to finally surrender and say, "Yeah, this is what's happening. Can I meet this?"

Over and over again in my own practice, when I finally surrendered, when I was capable of it... I mean, there are times, as we've mentioned, when mindfulness isn't strong enough to meet a really challenging pattern, when trying to meet something with mindfulness kind of takes us down the rabbit hole of it. When that's the case, we need to do other things, as Richard talked about last night—finding something else to pay attention to, opening our eyes or taking a walk, doing something to ground ourselves. I encourage people to find a place and a way to ground themselves, to have a kind of go-to method to help stabilize when something is overwhelming.

But many times, much of what I was doing—a lot of the actual reactivity—was around thinking it was a problem to be experiencing this difficulty. I had this view that as long as I was experiencing self-hatred or depression or anger or whatever it was, because I had a lot of this unpleasant, painful stuff going on in my mind, the practice wasn't actually going anywhere. It's like I had to wait for the practice to start until those went away.

When I finally recognized that this actually *is* the practice—to meet this self-hatred, to recognize, "Oh, depression, that's what's arising right now"—I could just surrender and recognize, "Yeah, this is what's happening right now. That's the honest truth." Being honest with myself: this is what's happening. And when I'm able to meet it, just holding it in a simple, simple way—"Oh yeah, here's depression. Yep, that's what's happening"—noticing when it comes, when it goes, just being with it when it's there.

The story I was thinking about sharing involves assumptions—and setting them aside, actually—because I saw something around depression. I was practicing in Burma at Sayadaw U Tejaniya's monastery for an extended period of time. There it's not always a silent community, so while I was in silence much of the time, usually once a day I would take a walk with a friend and we would have a conversation. At other times of the day, I would see other people meeting up for walk-and-talks while I'd be by myself, and I would often notice this depression coming up when I'd see other people together.

Immediately my mind went to, "Oh, I know what this is about. This is about all those times on the playground when I was excluded." I saw that and thought, "Okay, well, maybe..." And I just kind of set that aside. There was a little bit of a view in there that this was where it came from. But I just kept watching, kept noticing, kept exploring over the course of several weeks—exploring this mild, low-grade depression that was there a lot.

Then one day I felt into it in a new way. Maybe because I had been able to meet it over time, I was more familiar with it, more comfortable with meeting it and being with it. It no longer felt so threatening. That day when I was sitting with it, it felt like it was just growing. I was sitting in my room and it felt like the feeling of depression was getting really big. I thought, "Wow, that's different. What is that about?" It was just like, "Okay, what does this feel like for it to get really, really, really big, this depression?"

At some point, as it got so big, it felt like it flipped inside out. And it became mettā. It was this really vast, open heart of mettā. The very next thought in my mind was—in the midst of feeling this beautiful quality of mettā—my mind said, "This is stupid, this is sappy."

That moment was like an "Ah!" This felt like a connection to that expansive mettā being pushed down as somehow not right, as stupid and sappy. There was a repression of that feeling that was connected to the depression. That was not what I thought was at the center of that depression. That was not what my understanding of it had been.

In seeing that, it was like, "Wow, there's work to do here. There's work to do about understanding that relationship with mettā." But as I remember it, the depression was no longer so much of an issue on that retreat. Though there was other stuff to look at.

So with these multi-layered patterns, these many-flavored, messy kinds of patterns, patience is helpful. In my own experience, I've gone through many of these kinds, and there's a long arc of practicing with them. I practiced with a pattern around anger for many years, this depression over several weeks, self-hatred

for many years. Just gradually the mind began to understand pieces of it and began to shift and let go of some of the ways in which it clung.

And so patience is essential, because we can jump in and think, "Okay, I've been with the what of experience for five minutes—why am I not getting an insight?"

It can take a long time. And yet this is not meant to be depressing, because in my own experience, as I think it's said in the suttas, the Dharma is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end.

Even just the beginning, where we start to recognize, "Oh, anger is happening—that's what's going on"—the mind gets some space around it. It's not like the anger is dissolving and vanishing, but we have a completely different relationship to it than when we're caught in the anger. So this opening to being with experience—immediately we start to experience the benefits. The whole releasing of these patterns can take time, but the Dharma is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end.

Sometimes, as I've pointed to, our views and beliefs and ideas can shape what we're experiencing if we're not careful. We tend to look for meaning—the why of things. "Why is this happening?" It's a movement towards meaning. And as we look for particular meaning, we may find something connected with our views about that. So again, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This overlay of views or concepts or ideas, beliefs, can happen in such a subtle way that we don't really recognize it—a kind of attribution of something happening.

Our bodies and minds have an intimate feedback loop. Sometimes things happen in our body and it affects our mind. Sometimes things happen in our mind and it affects our body. The emotional terrain is really in this mix. When a thought arises in the mind, it might move us towards an emotion and then physical sensations arise. Sometimes we can have physical sensations arise, and because they're similar to an emotion, the mind says, "Oh yeah, that must be what I'm feeling." Then that gets constructed because we're expecting it. So it's a two-way street.

We can just be curious when we're experiencing something, when we think we're experiencing certain sensations in the body. At times I've seen, "Oh, there's that kind of heaviness around the heart. Why am I feeling that way? I must be lonely." Well, maybe, maybe not. Maybe it's just a sensation.

On another retreat, I was waiting for an interview, and I'm sure many of you also experience a little bit of anxiety or agitation or restlessness of mind right before the interview. I certainly experienced that. "I'm getting ready—I haven't talked in three days and I'm getting ready to talk to my teacher. What is he going to think? Am I going to have something good to say? If I didn't write my report down, what am I going to do?" The mind doing its stuff.

This particular day, I was waiting for Joseph to finish his interview, and it went on a long time. So I got to sit there ten minutes feeling this feeling. I was like, "Okay, yep, I know—this is agitation, this is anxiety. Okay, anxiety. Yep, anxiety, anxiety, anxiety." Feeling all of these sensations and naming them anxiety.

By that point in the retreat, often the really being with an experience and meeting it clearly—there was something that happened, a shifting of the experience, maybe a settling, or something was revealed, or something new was seen. And that didn't happen. That very non-existence of something happening piqued my interest. What's going on? Kind of like that question I had when I was driving: What else is happening here?

I began realizing there was a lot of vibratory energy in the body, kind of like shaking all the way from my toes up my legs. It was intense. I started feeling it. And I stopped naming it as anxiety and just sat back and said, "What is this?"

And what I discovered in that moment was that it was rapture.

The sensations of rapture and the sensations of anxiety can be remarkably similar. In that moment, my mind had attributed anxiety to those sensations because of the situation—sitting there waiting for an interview. This is the kind of thing that happens: the views, the ideas, the beliefs we bring can shape our experience in the most amazing ways. It's quite something to start recognizing this.

Sometimes when we're observing emotions—and we haven't talked about this in the instructions yet, I think that's tomorrow—it can be useful, if you're noticing the physical experience associated with an emotion, to investigate more closely. Say you're noticing that fear is happening. What are the physical sensations? Well, there's tightness in the throat and a kind of quivering in the stomach. You might let go of the idea of fear and just connect with the physical. Because sometimes there's a lot of overlap in terms of the physicality of various emotions. And sometimes they're vastly different, as was the case for me between anxiety and rapture. It was quite startling.

Being with our experience in this way—asking what is happening, what is happening—takes some courage. It requires shaking up our habitual ways of being with experience, because there are so many habits. We think we know. We think we know what's happening. But to keep stepping in and asking, "What actually is going on here? Is there something else happening?"—this is really simple.

This can be very, very simple. What's revealed is mind-bendingly elaborate and complex. But the practice that reveals it is so simple: What is this? What is this? What is this? Whether it's self-hatred or bliss—what is this?

That kind of commitment to asking "what is this" begins to point out and reveal these misconceptions, these overlays of concept that we're seeing through and believing. It reveals them just through the commitment. Just this, just this. We don't have to try to figure it all out. Just that simplicity.

The power of the mind and of mindfulness to understand how this is all constructed and put together is phenomenal. But that's the power of the mind and mindfulness—that's not something we can actually pick up and do ourselves. Thank goodness I don't have to figure that out. I would not know where to begin. But just the simple practice: What's this? What's this? What's this?

So let's sit and just be with ourselves for a few moments.

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