Rhythms of Practice

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 49:15

Aware with whatever is arising in this moment. Sometimes what's arising are habits, old patterns of confusion or reactivity. This can be seen, received. Sometimes what's arising is spaciousness, ease. This can be seen, met, received.

In terms of the cultivation of awareness and wisdom, both reveal the nature of experience: impermanent, unreliable as a place to land, and not self—conditioned arising in dependence on conditions and causes.

It's quite natural for there to be a shifting between the arising of reactivity, of struggle, patterns and old habits, and for there to be times of spaciousness, of ease, of the mind more settled. One teacher called this the rhythms of purity and purification. Michelle McDonald called this purity and purification.

This is part of how the practice unfolds. It's not a mistake. It's not a problem. Just noticing the relationship, especially when there's a shift—a shift from spaciousness and ease to old reactive habits and patterns. What's the relationship? Wanting to hold on to the ease, resistance to the arising of the habits and patterns? Or simply, "Oh, this now. Just this."

We tend to like the purity side and resist the purification. We can sometimes think we're doing something wrong. Surely if I was practicing properly this reactivity would not be arising. But it's a natural cycling. It's not actually even cycling—it's more of a spiral deepening. Often we're seeing something at a deeper level, a more subtle form of grasping arising. And so just noticing how it is, aware with this, just this.

These rhythms, these shifts between ease and seeing our habits and patterns, seeing how greed, aversion, and delusion are arising—these shifts between purity and purification, as Michelle McDonald puts it, are simply part of how the practice seems to work. It's not a mistake, nothing that we've done wrong.

We tend to like the shift from purification to purity. We think we've figured it out. And it is often a meeting of some kind of reactivity or holding or clinging. That meeting allows for a release, allows for a shift into letting go, openness, more spaciousness and ease.

These shifts can sometimes happen simply because the mind picks up on something else instead of attuning to the reactivity. It meets some other experience, and that becomes what the attention rests with, and it shifts to more ease. There are different ways that shift can happen from purification to the quality of mind that's spacious and at ease, balanced, calm.

We get a taste of that spaciousness and ease, and then reactivity returns for different reasons. Sometimes in that space of more calm and ease, it's almost like the habitual ways that we've been keeping things held

down begin to release—ways that we've repressed things or not seen things. Those kinds of repression structures get released, and so it's quite natural that some of those things that have not been seen start to be able to be seen.

Or sometimes in that space of ease and calm, we get a little complacent. We're not really clearly noticing the quality of the mind that is easeful and receptive and interested. We're not really recognizing what it's like to have a mind that's at ease. And in that complacency, the mindfulness weakens. And the habits of greed, aversion, and delusion arise. It's natural that this happens. Again, it's not a problem. It's just something to notice.

Wherever we are, whatever's arising, this is what is asking to be seen in this moment. It's not random; it's arising in dependence on conditions and causes.

Another way the shifts between purity and purification can be recognized or experienced is that in that space of ease, the mind gets more attuned to that spaciousness, that ease, that balance of mind. It feels to me sometimes like a whole layer of reactivity can fall away. Patterns and habits, bigger patterns and habits of reactivity, can fall away, and then we have a period of time where we're in a space of more ease.

That reactivity, that old pattern, is simply not arising—or not arising as much. And then, in that space of ease, we start to see subtler kinds, subtler forms, subtler flavors of greed, aversion, and delusion that were masked by the larger reactivity and are now being revealed by the quieting of the mind.

It's like the ease is revealing that there are still subtler ripples—subtler ripples of greed, aversion, and delusion still working. They're being revealed. It's not a problem.

And then we start to feel those subtler ripples, and sometimes, because we've had that feeling or that sense of spaciousness and ease, they can actually feel like pretty strong dukkha. We've experienced a sense of not having reactivity. But then we begin to see those flavors of greed, aversion, and delusion, and they begin to weaken and release. And we have another period where it feels more spacious, more easeful.

We can maybe go through these cycles—it's almost like going down into deeper and deeper layers. Ease, ripples, release. Ease, ripples, release.

For myself, whenever I would notice any kind of shift, that would spark a curiosity. What's happening? There's something new arising, or something new being seen, perhaps. So, what's this?

The instructions are so simple: What's this? And noticing the relationship. Noticing the quality of mind meeting the experiences.

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