The Present Moment

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 51:56

Tonight I'd like to talk about the present moment.

As meditators, we emphasize the present moment. We come back to our breath over and over again to train ourselves to wake up to the present moment. But after we've practiced for a while, sometimes it gets kind of rote to us, this coming back over and over again. And we begin to think, what does this have to do with anything? Why am I doing this? Why am I spending my time coming back to the in-breath and the out-breath over and over again?

So that's what I'd like to address tonight. Why do we do this? What are the benefits of it?

As I was contemplating this, the first thing that came into my mind is that a lot of us do it because it feels good. When we come back to the breath over and over again, it begins to steady the mind and stabilize the attention, and some concentration starts to develop. Concentration in and of itself feels good. It gets quiet, and there can be all kinds of pleasant sensations in the body and in the mind that arise through the concentration.

But another thing that we start to see as we do this practice and get a little bit concentrated is that the mind has stopped its normal mode. It gets out of its habitual tendencies as it becomes a little bit concentrated. And we start to see, even if only for a few moments, that a lot of our difficulties, a lot of our struggles are released in this letting go of what our habitual tendencies are—letting go of the tendency of the mind to go off, and simply coming back. So even for a few moments, we start to see the benefits of the lessening of reactivity.

This reactivity of mind that has us moving out from the present moment is a lot of the reason why we suffer, why we struggle. At its core, what is reactivity actually? When we think about it, we usually think of states of mind like anger or resentment or hostility or avarice—something like that where there's a very strong sense of reactivity in the mind. But at its core, at its very beginnings, the reactivity is born out of contact with something being either pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. And out of that experience of pleasant or unpleasant, there's a movement either towards it, if it's pleasant, or away from it, if it's unpleasant. If something is pleasant, we like it, we want it, we want to get more of it. If something is unpleasant, we usually want to try to get rid of it. So that's the birth of reactivity—that place where the pleasant moves into liking, to wanting, to grasping.

A lot of what we see as we come back to the present moment, as we practice this training, is the fact that it's really hard to stay here. And we actually think that's a problem, that we can't stay here. But that's part

of what the training is—to see what makes us unable to be here.

As we come back again and again, we start to see the mind will go off into some rant with a friend. "Boy, why did that person do that?" And we're off into some kind of reactivity. Or perhaps we're paying attention to our breath and there's a little bit of pleasant feeling coming, and suddenly we find ourselves off on a beach in Tahiti. The practice is to come back, but also to notice what has taken us away. What are the habits of mind that take us away? That's part of the training—to witness that. It's not a problem when the mind has wandered. It's part of what we see, part of the training to actually understand what our habitual tendencies of mind are, what we react to, how we respond to pleasant and unpleasant.

Becoming free of the reactive mind happens in several ways through the course of our meditation. Part of it happens in the way that I mentioned earlier, just because concentration develops slowly over time. Because that concentration has developed, some of the reactivity becomes quiescent. That's one of the ways we begin to let go of our reactivity. And as the reactivity becomes quiescent, we begin to get a sense of, "Wow, it's kind of nice to be without the mind going all over the place. It feels pretty good."

Another way we start to let go of reactivity is when we begin to see that it's unskillful for us, that it makes us suffer. Part of the practice is actually witnessing how we suffer in our anger, in our frustration, in our impatience—that reactivity causes us suffering. Often we are so outwardly focused on what we are angry at or frustrated with or impatient with that we don't really see that we're suffering in the process. The practice of becoming present, waking up in the midst of the reactivity, lets us see that it's actually not so skillful. That's another way we begin to learn how to let go of the reactivity. As the mind sees the suffering that's generated, it begins to let go of the things that cause it.

And likewise, another thing we begin to see as we cultivate this coming back is the benefits of the peace, the tranquility, the equanimity that's cultivated as we do this practice.

We begin to see that those kinds of states of mind make us happier, make us more peaceful, make us more balanced. So through these three ways, as we do this coming back over and over again in our meditation, all three are becoming cultivated.

Mindfulness has a really wonderful property to it. And what I mean by mindfulness is a non-reactive, non-judgmental awareness of what is happening while it's happening. In my experience, with that kind of awareness, it has what feel initially like some kind of magic properties.

It has the property that when you bring your attention to some of these wholesome states of mind—tranquility, equanimity, peace, generosity—when you bring your awareness to states of mind like that, it creates the conditions for those states to arise more frequently in the future. And when you bring your attention to unwholesome or unskillful states of mind like anger, frustration, hostility, avarice, it creates the conditions for those states to arise less frequently in the future.

Now that first one makes sense to a lot of people, and it certainly made sense to me. What I pay attention

to tends to increase. That second one—what I pay attention to tends to decrease—I didn't quite understand for a while. But my understanding of what happens is this: when you pay attention with a non-judgmental awareness to a state of mind like anger, and you've got your attention on the anger itself, what you see is the suffering. You see how detrimental it is to your own being. So the mindfulness, the turning of our attention back on some of these unskillful states of mind, shows us that they are unskillful. We get a direct hit of the fact: this is not so good for me.

So it's really wonderful—this one simple quality of mind, this mindfulness, has this power. It's like this incredible wedge that creates a path for us through our experience, showing us what is skillful and what is unskillful, if we're willing to pay attention to it.

The other reason the present moment is such a valuable place to pay attention to is because it's the only place anything ever happens. A lot of us spend a lot of our time thinking about the past, thinking about the future. And as we begin to do this practice and witness our own minds, it can be really humbling to see just how much we do this. It's astonishing how little we're actually here. It's amazing we can get anything done because our minds are continually off. We get these little moments of being here, a little moment of "oh, there's something," and then the mind is off thinking about how it compares to this or that, or why I like it, or why I don't like it, or why I want more of it. And in the midst of that, there may be a little awareness of some thought, and then there's a reaction to that, and the mind is off on that.

So there are these little moments during our day—many of them, actually—where we do have some presence of mind. But the vast majority of our day, we are in our thoughts, thinking about this or that, the past and the future.

Let's explore a little bit about the past and the future. The past doesn't actually exist anywhere. We can't point to it. We can't say, "There it is." What the past actually is, is a thought in the present moment. That's all the past is. That's all the reality it has—what exists in our thoughts. We have a cultural group agreement that the past exists, and we create it over and over again in the present moment by thinking it. As a collective community, sometimes we think about the past together. Likewise for the future. The future doesn't exist. It simply exists as a thought in the present moment. So if we're not actually awake in the present moment, we're missing our lives.

There's another aspect of awareness, as distinct from mindfulness, that I'd like to explore. And this again relates to the quality of bringing awareness into the present moment. Awareness is happening all the time. Every second of our day, there's some kind of awareness going on. And probably even in our sleep, there's some kind of awareness happening. But it's not always an awareness that is connected with the present moment.

I'll give you an example of this. It was the first time in my practice that this became really clear to me. I was on a retreat, sitting in the dining hall, and I was kind of spaced out. I wasn't really paying much attention, just in my thoughts. I don't even know what I was thinking about. But I noticed somebody come

into the room and put some food on their plate and then leave. And then I noticed another person come into the room and put some food on their plate and then leave. While this was going on, I was thinking about the people who came into the room. And then after they both had left, there was a recognition: oh, I'm awake now. I'm actually here now, and I wasn't before. I'm present. But I was curious about the fact that I could remember what had just happened, even though I hadn't been awake in the present moment.

I'm sure you've all had this kind of experience. If you're sitting in a room reading a book and somebody walks in and leaves, you're concentrated on the book.

But if somebody came in and said, "Did somebody come in?" you can probably remember, "Yeah, somebody came in." So there was an awareness going on. But that moment where I saw, "Oh, I'm actually awake now in the present moment"—what was the difference?

One of my teachers, Gil, gave me a term for this. He called it passive awareness versus active awareness. And in later discussions with some of my Burmese teachers, what they have said is that the awareness is not concurrent with the present moment in that kind of passive awareness. There's an awareness happening, but it's not concurrent with what's happening. It's not aware of what's happening while it's happening.

And so that active form of awareness brings you into the present moment, and you are aware of what's happening right now in this very moment. You're aware of the pressure on your seat. You're aware of your hands at your knees, whatever. There's just an awareness of what's happening, whatever moods or mind states are going on right now.

Another benefit—one of the most powerful reasons to come into the present moment—and what we can learn in the present moment has to do with choice. The present moment is the only place we have a choice. We have the possibility in this moment to have some input into the direction of our lives, how we want our lives to go. It's the only place that we have this option. If we're not present to make our choices, if we're not present in the present moment to be aware of that possibility that a choice can be made right now, our habitual tendencies will make our choice for us. So if we see this moment of choice, we have the opportunity to influence the course of our lives.

What I mean by our habitual tendencies making our choice for us is that as we go through our day, there are so many different things that operate in our minds—patterns, just ways that we move through the world. Even a simple, small example: every day when I get to a certain point in my day, I have to choose to go out for my aerobic walk. And I would say most days the thought crosses my mind, "I don't want to do that." And if I weren't conscious of it, I would probably half the time just blow off the walk that day. But because I'm conscious of the fact that I'm making a choice, I can choose, "I'm going to do this." And every day, even though I feel like I'm not going to do this today, I choose to do this.

So being aware of that moment when those thoughts cross our mind—"I don't want to do this," "I've got

better things to do," "I've got these eight other things that are calling me," "I don't have time to take my walk this morning"—those habitual tendencies would choose for us. That's a very simple example of what I mean by our habitual tendencies making our choices for us. If we're not aware of the fact that we have this choice, our habits will make the choice for us.

There are some ways that we can start to practice with this in our meditation practice. I'd like to talk about some of those and share a little bit about my experiences with them.

One of them was an exercise that I learned from Jack Kornfield's book, *A Path with Heart*. In it, he suggests that in order to pay attention to this movement of mind, of making a choice, you pick a time for meditation when you don't have to have a specific length of time for the practice. So don't set your alarm to go off after thirty or forty-five minutes. Just have it be an unspecified period of time for your meditation.

Then the instructions are that you sit until a very strong urge to get up has crossed your mind three times. So that first time the urge crosses your mind, you simply observe it. You watch the fact that you want to get up. And this is easiest to do if you actually turn toward the experience: What does it feel like to want to get up? As opposed to kind of gritting and bearing, "Okay, I've got to sit through this." Just observe. What does it feel like? What is the pull? What's happening in the mind?

So observe that whole process of what that wanting feels like. And after some period of time—and it actually doesn't take that long, a minute, maybe two at most—that desire will pass, and the desire to get up will no longer be there. So you can now just settle into your meditation again. You may want to notice if there's any kind of deepening that's happened through that firm attention that's been cultivated by paying attention to the wanting.

And sometime sooner, perhaps, or later, another urge will come, and you pay attention to that. Again, the third time it comes, you can get up.

When I tried this the first time, I had been sitting about twenty minutes a day. And I just assumed my body kind of told me I needed to get up after twenty minutes. I thought, "Well, that's just the way my body is, I guess." I wasn't particularly judgmental about it.

But I tried this exercise, and at the end of the time, after I'd had these three urges pass, I looked at the clock and it had been forty minutes. I thought, "Wow, I guess I can sit for forty minutes." And from then on, I sat for forty minutes. So it had a very strong impact on my practice just to witness that. My assumption—basically I had an assumption that was untrue—and this exercise revealed that to me. Now your experience may reveal something different to you, but it's a really great exercise and I'd encourage you to try it.

You can extend this exercise too, if you can't particularly find a time when you can have an unspecified period of time for your practice. You can extend this to a vow of stillness in the sitting—for instance, not

moving to scratch an itch or not moving for a pain in the knee until the urge has come and gone three times. So you can play with this and see how it deepens your practice and how it shows you about this power of choice.

That moment where the mind says, "It's time to get up"—that's a moment of choice. And that movement of the mind saying it's time to get up is our habitual tendency telling us it's time to get up, as opposed to it being an actual decision based on evaluating the circumstances. Observing that choice point can help us start to see these choice points in our lives.

Another great place to practice with this, seeing the choice points, is in walking meditation. If you do formal walking meditation, typically in this practice we do a back and forth walking where you stop, you walk, you come to the end of a path, you stop, you turn, and then you start walking again. All of those points—the starting to walk, the deciding to end walking, the turning, the moving—they all involve choice. So it's a great place to see it, because there's something happening at each end of the path where it's a very clear choice that can be made. When do I turn? Which direction do I turn? It's a wonderful place to observe that.

Another wonderful place to look at this is in speech. I'd suggest doing this with a friend who knows what you're doing—maybe as a pair, a dharma buddy. You get together and decide, "Okay, we're going to pay attention to deciding to speak." The way I suggest doing this initially is to simply pause before you speak. Know that you're going to speak before you speak. You don't have to stop yourself from speaking, but know that you're going to speak before you speak. Know that choice is being made: "I'm going to speak right now." Simply pause, and try to carry on a conversation with a friend in which that pause is part of the practice.

Through starting small, we can begin to cultivate the ability to be present for this moment of choice. And it can help us in our day to begin to see where we're starting to make our bigger choices—or where we're missing the fact that we've made a bigger choice, where we're suddenly driving down the road in search of the latest electronic device because we had this wanting and we are suddenly off and going without ever having seen that we were going to get there.

The other thing I'd like to mention about choice is that when we see that moment of choice, as we practice, as we start playing with looking at a choice being made—with this pause before speaking, with waiting to move in our meditation—what we'll likely see at that moment, kind of all by itself, is not only that a choice is being made, but we will also very likely get to see why we're making that choice. What's the motivation? What reason is pushing us in that direction?

So in the sitting example, you may discover a thought: "Time to clean the refrigerator. Oh, this is a great time to clean the refrigerator! I have forty-five minutes." We get to see what the motivation is, what is triggering it. There may be motivations of boredom, of wanting to get away from the sitting. There may be a motivation of feeling like there's a lot of things pressing on us that we have to do, other things that are

more important to us. So we begin to discover the reason why we want to get up.

I really saw this clearly at one time practicing in Burma. I had witnessed the intention in walking meditation quite a lot before this, but at one point I was really witnessing these pairs—the motivation in conjunction with the intention to do something. On one particular walking period, every time I came to the end of the path and I was standing there, I would note "standing, standing, standing," and then I would notice an intention to turn. And there was always something accompanying it. It was usually boredom, frustration, wanting to get on with things. It was never a wholesome mind state—it was always some kind of aversion, a feeling of "just don't want to be standing here anymore, time to turn around." There was just a little hint of some kind of aversion accompanying that desire to turn.

At that point I was in fairly deep retreat, not really wanting to act on unwholesome intentions. So I was kind of stuck. It was like, "Well, can't turn now." I'd see the intention, I'd see the aversion, I'd see the boredom. "Oh, won't turn on that one."

What do I do? I mean, I'm not seeing a wholesome reason to turn around. And I went and reported this to my teacher. I was like, what do I do? I don't want to act on an unwholesome intention, but all of the intentions that accompany the intention to turn are unwholesome. I was in quite a state.

His instructions to me were quite simple and really brilliant. He said, "Note standing five times, and then turn." Basically, it cut through any internal reason to turn and made it a very structured reason, a kind of neutral reason. Note standing five times, and then turn. So we can really start to see these small movements of mind.

Now, this may sound like something so subtle in some ways—to see that kind of aversion happening before we turn. But what I'd like to suggest is that what we see in our meditation is really a microcosm of what's happening in our minds anyway. Our minds don't really change because we are meditating. We just get to clearly see what they're doing. So that kind of pattern of the mind to be averse to things, to have that tendency to not want to be in a particular state, to have that kind of pushing something away—this is a habitual tendency of my mind. We really get to witness in this microcosm of paying attention in our meditation how our minds function at large. And it's very helpful to begin to see these habitual tendencies.

So see if you can start to witness the moment of intention to action accompanied by a moment of motivation behind that action. And again, we have the opportunity at that point—when we see that choice point and we see whether there's a skillful motivation or an unskillful motivation—we can hopefully begin to choose towards taking the action or making the movement when the motivation is skillful, and to not go that direction when the motivation is unskillful. It begins to instruct us. This path, this mindfulness, really points out how we can move through our lives skillfully.

We're not always going to be able to choose skillfully, even if we see it. We're not always going to be able

to choose skillfully. But at least we've seen it, and that's a wonderful step. And if we do notice that a motivation is skillful—if we notice a motivation of generosity or kindness or equanimity or peace behind an action, or compassion—we can take joy in the noticing of that mind state itself. We may be motivated by more wholesome intentions more often than we realize. And as I mentioned earlier, the recognition or the awareness of that wholesome, skillful mind state—of joy, of generosity, of kindness—the recognition of that while it's happening creates the conditions for it to arise more frequently. So notice when you have a skillful intention arising, and take delight in it. It's a wonderful thing to happen.

These moments of motivation, intention, and action happen all the time, every moment of our life. Even while I'm sitting here moving my hand this way, every moment through that path of my hand moving, there's a moment of choice. It keeps moving or it stops. It keeps moving or it stops. So there's a moment of choice. It's astounding, actually, when we begin to see how widespread, how much choice we have in our lives. It's overwhelming, actually, to some extent—we cannot really see all of those intentions. But we can begin to see, through this practice of cultivating the awareness of this choice point, the larger, more obvious choice points: the choice to get up from sitting to standing, the choice to start walking, the choice to go get in our car and go shopping. We can begin to see the more major choice points in our life when we start to pay attention to them in our meditation.

This is one of the biggest powers of mindfulness: the ability to witness that moment of choice and to actually decide how to act, instead of having our habitual tendencies choose for us.

I had a very wonderful experience of this pretty early in my practice, and this event is actually what really got me going into the practice. It really showed me the power of the practice, and I'd like to tell this story.

I really got into the meditation practice because of overwhelming anger. I was really, really angry at a particular person. And the anger was so extreme that when it really came up, I was pretty much non-functional. I couldn't function in my work. I would just be enraged and consumed with this anger. And this is what actually got me into the meditation practice—there's got to be a way to deal with this.

I wasn't functional. There had to be a way to deal with this.

A friend had sent me a book on mindfulness, and I thought, okay, I'm going to try this. I haven't got any other things to try. I'm going to see if I can be mindful of my anger. I used it almost like a mindfulness bell—whenever I got angry, I vowed that I would wake up for that experience and recognize what it felt like.

What I noticed initially was that I would be in a full-blown rage by the time I remembered I was supposed to be paying attention. And then it was pretty unpleasant to be in this state of anger. I really noticed the suffering. I really noticed how difficult it was to be present for myself. I couldn't actually do much other than just say, "Yep, I'm angry." Just really gross noticing of anger at that point. I was pretty new in the practice also. I hadn't had a lot of instructions. I didn't know about how to pay attention to my body. This

was just a very gross recognition: yep, I'm angry. What am I supposed to do with this? And at some point, I would be able to put it aside and go back to my work.

Over the course of months of this happening, what I began to realize was that I was waking up a little bit earlier in the process. I wouldn't be in such a rage—it would be more like normal anger when I woke up and remembered, oh, I'm supposed to be paying attention to this. And then over even more months, I began to see that I was waking up when it was more like irritation.

I was beginning to recognize it before the mind fed it and allowed it to escalate. That's what I was witnessing: if I broke into the cycle of anger earlier, it didn't get a chance to escalate into rage. And then earlier and earlier—if I broke into it at irritation, it didn't get a chance to escalate into that full-blown anger.

Then one day I was in my kitchen, no anger present. I was just pretty much paying attention to what I was doing—cutting an apple. In that moment of cutting the apple, I saw a thought appear in my mind. I saw a memory of being at a fruit stand with this person I was so angry with. And I saw at that moment that I wasn't angry. I also saw the inclination of the mind to jump on that thought as if it were a train and ride it right into anger—to construct the anger by thinking, "He did this and he did that and he shouldn't have done this."

Having spent several months looking at the anger and seeing how much suffering it caused me—this is my understanding in retrospect; I didn't know this at the time—but having seen so much suffering in that state of anger, the mind simply said, "I don't have to go there. I don't have to get on that thought and ride it into anger. I have a choice."

And I didn't.

The next moment I stood there kind of waiting to get angry, because I'd not had the experience in the previous few months of this person arising in my mind without anger arising in my mind. I thought they had to go together. But I didn't get angry.

In that moment it was like, wow, this is really powerful stuff—that this practice can show me where my anger begins and show me that I have a choice. I was blown away by the power of simple mindfulness to reveal that to me.

Looking back at it now, I think what often happens when we have this kind of reactivity to somebody over and over again is that we'll have a moment like that where we see the choice. And then a few moments later, that thought comes back to bait us again. Another thought about that person will return, and if we don't notice it, we'll jump on that one and get angry.

But in my experience in this particular case, I was so overwhelmed by the power of the practice that it completely drove thoughts of him out of my mind. I was left with so much gratitude and appreciation.

That was the operative experience in that moment—the gratitude for the practice. Wow, what can this do for me? It really made me want to keep going.

So with all of this attention on the present moment and cultivating skillful actions, and knowing that as we cultivate skillful actions it tends to make those states appear more often, we do have to be careful in this process. We must be careful not to choose skillful actions in order that a certain result will happen.

We cannot actually control the results of our actions. While we have some choice about the present moment and what we do when we see this choice point, we don't really have a choice about how that action will manifest once it's out in the world—how people will respond, how other events will unfold on the basis of that action. So we need to let go of the results of our actions. This is really the wide web of karma. We can't control how other people will respond to us, and we can't control how our actions will influence the environment. A simple neutral choice, such as turning left or turning right, might mean life or death. We don't know. And that's another great reason to be in the present moment. We never know when that moment will come, that moment of death. We never know whether we've chosen something that will have that be the result of our actions. So wake up for your life, wake up. You're missing your life unless you are present in the present moment with mindfulness.

Someone asked about the interplay between concentration and mindfulness. In concentration practices, what we do is try to keep coming back to a particular object and let go of everything else. In mindfulness practice per se, at some point the practice is simply to be present, simply to be awake for whatever is happening. So that moment of noticing, "Oh, I'm lost," is a moment of mindfulness. You can wake up right in that moment, aware of whatever is happening. You are already awake right in that moment, aware of whatever is happening. And you have a choice. You can then skillfully choose, "Okay, come back," or you can choose to stay present with whatever is happening.

This connects to something I had wanted to mention in that discussion of passive versus active awareness. One of the best ways to really see the distinction between mindfulness and concentration is to cultivate a recognition of what it feels like to be present, what it feels like to be awake. Then it doesn't matter what we're paying attention to in mindfulness practice. If we want to develop concentration, we can actually develop it through simple presence to changing experience. But if we want to develop deep states of concentration, we typically have to focus on a particular object. So that awareness or recognition of presence—what does it feel like to be awake?—is a great thing to cultivate.

Initially I didn't really understand what this meant. People would give instructions in guided meditations and say, "Feel the presence in your body." And I would think, "What does that mean?" I had no clue what it meant for years. Over time, I began to understand it. And one of the places that I learned most to see this is in that very moment you talked about—the moment when we wake up after we've been lost, or the moment where we recognize, "I'm off, I'm off the breath." There's something that I was focused here, and then something pulled me away, and I'm awake now. That moment of recognition—"I'm awake now"—is

the best place to recognize and see the difference between passive and active awareness.

Because in that moment, there's a little hint, there's tendrils, there's a remembrance in the mind of what it felt like to not be present—a little bit of a sense of the vagueness of mind or the lack of clarity—and the sense of what does it feel like now. It's quite clear once we begin to look for it, once we begin to see, "Oh, that's what it feels like to be awake."

In order to do this exercise, you really have to be awake and present for the moment you notice, "Oh, I've been lost." And this exercise, at least for me, really helped to cut that little bit of judgment around the fact that I'd been lost, because I was starting to take an interest in that interface. I was starting to take an interest in what it felt like to be lost. So in order to do that, I had to be present and not judging myself for having gotten lost. I started to try to ask: What is the soonest I can possibly see the fact that I've woken up?

It stopped being a problem that the mind wandered because I was so interested in what it meant to come back. So that's a really great place to explore that interface and also to help loosen the tie of the judging mind around that coming back.

Question: Could you comment on the difference between active awareness and mindfulness?

No, I'm not so much drawing a distinction between active awareness and mindfulness. I was wanting to draw a distinction between active and passive awareness. But essentially, they're the same thing.

Comment from participant: I learned tonight that you're supposed to clean the refrigerator, so now I know what's wrong in life.

Another participant: I have a little over four months left in a year-to-live practice. That really puts the commodity of time right on your plate. Early on, I started looking for what this present moment looks like—this razor's edge between the past and the future. How do I dive into that and find more of it? The more I've been sitting with it, I find it's just very, very open. The present moment is a very huge place. A lot gets done, and it keeps changing within now rather than now moving through some fixed time. When you talk about thoughts of past and future, it's much more like—I understand it as construct, and I've been able to gain a lot of insight into a knot up in this, you know, the construct of "this is my past, these are the things I've been through, these are the things that constantly reinforce that I'm an individual, separate self." And I ask, do I really cling to that? It's behind this kind of practice that I've been able to see that, and really see the illusion of the self that we cling to as if it were the truth.

That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. This idea you mentioned about the present moment getting really big—that's true. It's kind of amazing that it's just this infinitely changing now. And it gets really big. It contains everything, essentially. So it's quite amazing. Thank you for sharing that.

So it's about ten of right now, and I'm told we should stop. Thank you very much for your attention.

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