The Problem Lies in the Looking

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43:27

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

This morning we discussed these three characteristics. What we were concerned with is the first of the Noble Eightfold Path, this business of right view, right understanding. What the Buddha is saying is that it's actually in the way that we're looking which is at fault. It's the way we understand things. The quality of that understanding is deep within the actual intelligence that we are — the Buddha nature within, for want of a better word. We call it a delusion. He calls it a delusion.

The definition of a delusion is that of course you don't know you're deluded — this is the problem. If somebody is deluded, what we're saying is that they don't know how mad they are. So here we are, you see, completely mad and not knowing it. Something awakens us to that delusion, and it's suffering. The Buddha actually says quite clearly that it's suffering, that coming to look at suffering, which leads us to the end of suffering. So although it's not a pleasant thing, it actually is a goal for us to find where the end of suffering is, how we can bring suffering to an end.

I like to tell my sad tale with an optician. I got these new pair of glasses and the left eye felt uncomfortable. But as far as I could see, I saw properly. So I went back and I said, "The left eye feels uncomfortable." She tested me — there's another optician — said it was a wrong prescription. It had not taken into account astigmatism. Now for those of you with twenty-twenty eyesight, astigmatism is a wave in the lens. You know, like the old glass used to have a wave and when you look through it, it would distort the image. So that's what astigmatism does. She corrected it, I had a new lens, and the discomfort disappeared.

What was amazing to me was that I could see no difference between the seeing with the wrong lens and the actual process of seeing with the right lens. It all seemed exactly the same to me, except that there was a discomfort. I think that's a wonderful metaphor for our situation. That somehow being here is *dukkha*. *D ukkha* means a hard place. One of the little epithets they use, one of the little descriptions they use, is of an axle which doesn't fit the wheel right. It's just not quite right. That essential delusion, that essential wrong way of looking is what we're trying to correct when we see these three characteristics.

We're in a better position than the Buddha himself because when he started off, there would seem to be very little information as to where suffering might arise. Through his own efforts, he came to be able to pinpoint exactly where the problem lay. We talked this morning about a mistake, because the process begins at the level of not knowing. It's through not knowing that we presume to know. So as a child, what do we know? There you are. Gurgling. Weeping. You just presume yourself to be this little bundle of flesh.

It just continues.

As we said this morning, what we're trying to do is to create heaven on earth. Interestingly enough, no religion predicts heaven on earth. They always say you have to die, then you go. You can't get it here. You get a glimpse of it here, but you can't maintain it here because of the situation of the world.

When we come to see that, our next task, having seen the problem, having seen that we create continuity where there isn't continuity, we create solidity, substantiality, a sense of self where there isn't one, and we try to find happiness in the world which can't deliver — once we begin to understand that, begin to see that in ourselves, then the next question comes up: well, how do we then create the transformation? How do we then become Buddha? Because that's what he did, and he said there was no distinction to be made between himself and anybody else.

Our problem is now, having perceived these wrong views, these wrong understanding, how do we proceed in order to get rid of our suffering and — this is the positive side, remember — to end up with this beautiful mind, the beautiful heart.

Remember that once the Buddha had liberated himself from that delusion, it wasn't as though he turned into some gormless, amorphic blob sat by the road. He was obviously quite charismatic. In fact, very shortly after his enlightenment, his awakening, he actually is wandering to see these five earlier companions to tell them about what he has to teach them, and he meets one of these ascetics on the way. The ascetic says to him, "You look so bright, you're gleaming. What's your understanding? Who's your teacher?" And he goes into this wonderful self-panegyric about how he is the enlightened one, the fully self-enlightened. Understandably, the ascetic goes, "Oh, very interesting," and then wanders off. That was one of his first understandings, that it wasn't quite the way to teach ascetics.

When he actually approaches his disciples, they know him as this Siddhartha who'd been struggling like them. They think he's gone soft anyway because he'd eaten and stuff. They refuse really to acknowledge him. But as he comes close, they feel there's something quite strange, quite different about him and almost unwillingly they prepare a seat for him and start listening to him. He starts to try and convince them and they're saying, "Well, yeah, yeah, yeah." Then he says to them, "Have you ever heard me speaking like this before? Have you ever heard me ever say things like this before?" And they say no. That's when they open up.

Even by the end of the first talks, one of them has become on the first rung of enlightenment, the rung of awakening. So the teaching isn't just about trying to see something — it's about this process of transformation.

There are two processes that we have to go through. The first one is the more passive one, and the second one is the active one. The passive one is already happening when we practice *Vipassanā*. Just by turning our gaze away from the symptoms of our disease, away from the symptoms of our wrong view, these

symptoms begin to disappear.

What are these symptoms? These symptoms are the five hindrances. There are all the things that we desire. Desire meaning this drive to find happiness in a central world. There are all those things that we're averse to, get angry about, upset about. There are all those things that we get — that habit we have of going into oblivion to escape problems. You know, like when you feel a bit off, you feel a bit things got on top of you, or you feel a bit down, you get this neon lights: head for the bed, throw yourself on the couch, disappear for a while, using sleep as a suppressant — well it is a suppressant — push it away, push it down.

All the stuff that makes us restless, and that includes things like guilt and shame, which are secondary emotions arising out of wrong actions. And doubts — doubts that doggers, not only spiritual doubts, just ordinary doubts. Should I be in this job, should I be with this person, should I not be with this person? Just doubts that doggers. And doubts that are not honest doubts, for want of a better word, a sense of wonder, but doubts which rest upon fear, fear of commitment.

All these turbulence that we have, all the depressions, all the anxieties, all the guilt and the shame, all the rubbish that slides inside us, these are all symptoms. They're all symptoms of this fundamental mistake. That doesn't mean to say that you can't treat them as symptoms. Often when I speak like this people think that I'm talking against things like therapy and stuff like that — not at all. But therapy itself won't actually get to the root of the problem, although it obviously can be extremely helpful.

There was a book called — you might know it — *Emotional Intelligence*. Well there was another author, a woman, who wrote *Intelligent Emotions* as a commentary. It's an excellent book. Her understanding of how we make these emotions worse and worse is second to none. But the preface tells us quite distinctly that there is no end to suffering. It's a Freudian position where all we can do is accommodate. We can only come to this position of a sanity about life, where it's always going to be uncomfortable and there's no way out of that. Which isn't a particularly — but I mean, as truthful as she, from her point of view, perfectly truthful.

So that we can cut the hard edge of our suffering. We can cut the sharp edge of it. But basically, we simply cannot be happy at all. There's no end to it. At least in this lifetime. The reason is that when you read you see that she hasn't quite perceived where the core problem lies, and the core problem lies in not seeing these three characteristics.

Now when we avert our gaze to those three characteristics, the hindrances still come up. They come up. We can see them in our fantasies. We suddenly get caught up on some erotic, lustful or romantic dream. We're suddenly building a huge business which is going to take the world over. We're suddenly saving the world. That's a lovely one. We suddenly have the answers to our climate problems — all these lovely compassionate ideas.

So that's all desire, even if it's arising out of some sort of compassion or some sort of love, it's still a production of the ego of wanting to save the world. You'll notice that the direction is always to stop the dream, to stop the fantasy. That's your symptom. The fantasy is the symptom of the disorder. Then when you come in, at least you're at a secondary level of the disorder, which is the emotional state that you can experience.

As you descend into the body, and the answer always lies in the body, as you descend into the body and you feel that restlessness, then the questions may arise: why is this, where's it come from, etcetera, etcetera. So that's again treating with the symptom. The Buddha's image for that is of a man who shot by an arrow. We all know it. They come to help him take it out and he said, "Well, hold on. I want to know who fired it, why they find it, who made the arrow." Well, right, well before they know, he's dead.

So it's a case of recognizing that even here the fundamental answer to our problems doesn't lie. Asking those questions may be interesting, might be interesting to have a nice therapeutic session with somebody and find out why that happened, but it won't actually pull the original thorn out of the system.

So again we avert our gaze. We're not concerned with the problem as such, the problem of this restlessness. We're now concerned with either seeing its transient nature or the fact that we distance from it and we create in that distance a feeling of it being not me, not mine. When we do that, to our amazement, the thing begins to evaporate, begins to exhaust itself. That's one way that we come to understand that these emotions, these states don't have any reality. They don't have any substance to them at all. They're just forms of energy. In allowing them to dissipate like that, we begin to see that when it comes to this therapy level of things, the wonder of the system is that you don't have to do anything. You don't have to do a damn thing. You just have to sit there and bear it, sit there and allow it to express itself. In so doing, it's just a force — it just evaporates.

The other thing that we can do apart from seeing it from these two vantage points of it being impermanent, transient, getting into the texture of the feeling, the actual texture, the different little sensations that arise with that restlessness in the heart or in the body, and this other business of creating that distance so that it's quite clear it's not me, not mine.

There's a little warning there that sometimes we're using that to actually gently suppress it. Be careful. When you're noting something like restlessness, restlessness, careful you're not using the word to gently kill it. Because you won't kill it. All you're doing is just gently pushing it away. That distancing is a little technique which allows us to regain a certain equanimity within a situation. But once that equanimity is gained, we have to go into it, we have to feel it, to experience it. At that point, its impermanent, insubstantial quality becomes more apparent, and it's seeing its non-substantial nature which undermines the idea of it being a me, a mine.

The third approach is by way of a very simple psychology which is open to everybody, and that is having experienced this restlessness, to catch our relationship to it — our perhaps aversion to it or our desire to

indulge it. Either way we're actually turning the turbulence, we're actually steering the turbulence.

When you suppress it, the very force with which you suppress it with, that negative force of pushing it away, simply feeds back into the system. It's like a spring that's waiting to be sprung. It comes up with the energy of that resistance. As you resist it, your attention is on the feeling of that resistance. Is it just an aversion or is it fear? Or is it subtly moving from fear to aversion? Fear and aversion are two sides of the same coin. They're very close together. Anger and anxiety, fear and hatred are very close. The mind can switch from one to the other almost at lightning speed.

This was apparent to me when I was rather, I confess, cruel to a little pup. I was playing with it and I kept pushing it away and it kept barking at me. But when I pushed it too much, it would whine with fear. I could see very clearly that my same action of pushing it and pushing it away created a dual movement within this little being. One minute it was barking at me fiercely and the next minute it was trying to get away. That's all we're doing all the time with anything that we feel negative towards.

But of course there is this other more — sorry, the great thing about aversion or fear is at least it distances us from the object, at least we can create a not wanting, not wanting that. In a paradoxical way, it does make us stick to the object. You know this, for instance, if you've lived in a place where you've heard next door's music and it's come through just as a continuous thump of the bass. Dum, da-dum, dum, da-dum. This aversion comes. Well, you just cannot get your ear off that wall. The aversion makes your ear stick to that wall more and more and more. As soon as the aversion goes or you're distracted, you don't hear it anymore.

The peculiar thing about aversion and fear is that it attaches you to the object while at the same time distancing it. But it still has to be observed, it still has to be felt. Again, this is a conditioning. So if you try to suppress that, if you try to push that away, you find yourself in the same old situation where you're empowering the negativity within yourself.

So again, it's a case of opening up. See, that's this business of that default position where you allow things to come in their fullness. You're aware of that fear, of that aversion that might come. As it comes up sometimes, it comes up at a speed which is difficult to handle. Sometimes, as it were, our openness allows it to manifest too quickly for us, and you find yourself perhaps feeling a bit panicky. So when that happens, you just chill out. You just cool the whole system and regain your equanimity. The way to do that, if it's very bad, is just to get up in the posture and just go for a walk.

But if it's not that bad, just put your attention on a neutral sensation, like your breath or your knees or your hands, and that neutrality allows that reaction to begin to diminish.

At a much more subtle level, there is that identity, that indulgence. And that, of course, is extremely difficult to counteract because it's such a conditioned force in us to indulge what we like. But even so, when that feeling comes, something that's desirable, you have to be with it.

Now let's take, for instance, some dream that we have, something that we want to achieve in our lives, and the mind is constantly creating scenarios whereby we can achieve it. Let's say, set up a small business or something. So you see here in meditation we're observing how this desire is constantly manufacturing this inner world. And remember that everything that human beings have done have started with that image. Everything that you see from jet planes to computers to whatever you see has always begun with an idea. It's always begun coming out of the mind.

As you come off that desire and you come back into the body and you may feel that sort of excitement that's around it, keep your attention within the body, but if you can, just feel that energy which is moving out to create the world, which is moving out to create the dream. You can feel it, it's quite a strong pull.

Now, if your attention stays with the original excitement in the body, and with that feeling of wanting to go back into the dream world, if you stay at that level of feeling, and you wait until this power, which wants to manifest the excitement as a dream, and you wait for it to die away, then you'll see, you're emptying the mind of that desire. And that's not that difficult to do so long as you know where to look for it. And the way you look for it is always starting with that physical base. You can't do it in the mind, the mind's too quick. Once you've manifested through a mind, through a dream, you've lost it, you've become unconscious, you might say. You've lost that sort of awareness, that mindfulness.

So that's why when you wake up from a dream, you note, planning, planning, that gives you the in, you know something is in the heart that wants to achieve something. And that's when you come back down into the body and try to contact it. If you can't contact it, fine, you just stay with the breath, it's not a problem.

So anything to do with desire, which is the first of these hindrances, try to find that excitement in the body, whatever it might be. And then that movement that wants to manifest it. And just stay there. And again, remind yourself, you don't have to do anything. You don't have to do a single thing. All you have to do is allow the energy to manifest.

And this is our unfortunate position. These turbulences cannot release themselves except into consciousness. And they've only got two ways to go, either through some feeling emotional state, or if they're too suppressed, too repressed, they'll come out through the body as illness, or at least as some form of discomfort. So that's why in your meditation you get, people get headaches, they feel nausea, they get backaches. And all that is this turbulence manifesting through the body. And once they go, something goes, but you never know what it, for the most part, you never know what the hell it was. All you know is that something's gone.

Even, say, for about four to five weeks, I was just getting this continual pain at the back of my neck for seemingly no reason. I couldn't understand it at all. And then it just disappeared and it's just one of those things. So as your psyche begins to empty itself as your psychology begins to purify itself this process of purification is always a process which is not particularly pleasant and you have to be prepared for that.

So it's the same with these other things such as all the hatreds and aversions, the angers that we've got locked in the system. Once you allow them to manifest as dreams, as fantasies unwittingly, you're developing them. You know that from your just ordinary daily life experience where somebody has said something to you in the morning which has been just a little upsetting. And you've brushed it aside. And then while you're having your cup of tea, you're bloody coming here. And by lunchtime, you're biting the fork. Evening, you're taking aspirin. And it all builds up.

I mean, the person only insulted you or said something slightly hurtful once. You've had them repeat it millions of times just to drive the point home. So the danger, so this mind that we have, which is so creative and has created so many beautiful things, the music, the art and all that, is also incredibly destructive. And we have to see that within ourselves. And we have to see, we have to be very clear that when the mind is wandering off on an aversion or whatever it is, that it's not suppressing anything to pull the mind out, to pull the attention out of it. That's not suppressing it. And it's of little value to investigate the causes of it. If it's an obvious thing, like somebody's upsetting you, say at work, who's bullying you, then obviously one has to investigate that. But in terms of our inner psychology, something that perhaps has been there from childhood and in Buddhist understanding even before, there's absolutely nothing to be gained by it. And therefore the attention is now drawn back into the body.

And in a sense it's only through your own practice that you become confident that it's staying with the heart, staying with these turbulences at a feeling level, that they're actually beginning to exhaust themselves. I wouldn't want to give anybody the wrong impression that if one works hard enough within a couple of months, one is perfectly... Think in terms of a quarter century, then to see tremendous progress. But I think even in the short term, six months or a year, one can see that at least things might be getting just a wee bit better.

Now it's the same with this sloth and torpor. It's been translated as sloth, which gives it a sort of moral twist. But this sort of dullness, dullness in the head and a lethargy in the body. So remember that that's also a consequence of developing that attitude, that of seeking comfort in oblivion. Not just conking out. And the great thing about oblivion is that there really is no suffering there. It's perfect. There is a place where you can go where there is no suffering. Unfortunately, we wake up. And, in the Buddha's understanding, there will always be a waking up. So long as there's a self, there will be a form of existence. There will always be a seeking of that consciousness to find expression.

So, recognizing that, be careful in your daily life not to enter into that state. Rather go for a walk or do something or just keep awake, as it were, not to begin to develop that lethargy. I mean, in bad cases of depression, I remember a woman. She was sleeping then 16, 18 hours a day, making things worse for herself, really.

Then there's all this business of restlessness, and that can be caused by anything really, just a sense of restlessness. And it's a case of, remember, when, just like dullness, when it's in the mind, when there's

restlessness in the mind or dullness in the head, to actually put your attention there, just stay with it, attend to it, as a nurse might to a patient. You don't have to do anything, you just bear with it.

Now when the mind's rushing off all over the place, it's just patiently bringing it back, patiently bringing it back. Now when we do this business of reflection at the end of a sitting and I say, just reflect on your meditation. If the whole of your meditation you've just been coming back off this turbulent mind, that's a good meditation. But if you give in, if you say, well, I will think about that, then that's it. You could say to yourself, that was a really bad meditation.

If you feel that dullness in the head and you're feeling lethargic and you're constantly waking yourself up and stretching the body and opening your eyes and standing up, and even if it stays with you in your walking meditation, but you're constantly just keeping awake, just keeping above it, making those feelings, those sensations, something to observe, something to feel, experience, then that's a good meditation. But if at any time you say to yourself, well, I'll just have a kip, knowing full well, knowing full well that there is not real tiredness, then one can say to oneself, that was a bad meditation. One should feel guilty. One should feel shame.

So that whenever that thought arises, the shame and the guilt arises with it, which one does not want to suffer. And the Buddha puts on the same hindrance, this quality of guilt, shame, remorse. Remorse, of course, is a healing feeling, but it's still not a pleasant feeling, remorse. So remember that guilt and shame are guilt or, I mean here we talk about the dread of consequences, the dread of consequences.

So it's actually beginning to understand that there's a way in which we are creating our own suffering. And the true statement would be that we can only create our own suffering and only we create our own suffering. Nobody can create suffering for us. It's always the way that we relate to what we're actually experiencing.

So when we perceive that, then we need to take full responsibility for our situation. Which at first is disappointing, because it's always nice to blame somebody else. Or blame the system or the government. But actually, when you turn into yourself and you realize that you're the only one creating your suffering. I'm the only one creating my suffering. Taking on that responsibility at least now narrows the avenue of escape to at least just me. Before I had to change the world. Before I had to get rid of my enemies and all the people who were making it awful for me. But now, it's just me. That makes it very simple. Because all I have to do now is investigate myself, my own psychology, to realize where I'm making the mistakes.

And the final one is this business of doubt. So, doubt in the spiritual life is a real, it's a pernicious illness because it stops you committing yourself. If you doubt the practice, then you won't do it. If you doubt yourself, if you say that, well, everybody else can do it but not me, then that'll stop you doing it. So doubt is, this sort of skeptical doubt is something that has to be investigated. And again, it's very simple. You don't get caught up in the mind. You don't get caught up in what the mind is saying. You go into the feelings of doubt, the feelings that surround this so-called doubt. And I think invariably you'll find some

form of resistance, some form of fear, some form of fear of consequences or lack of confidence, which is only another form of self-aversion, lack of confidence. And it's investigating it at that level of feeling, at that level of emotional feeling that these things begin to evaporate.

That sense of doubt, don't confuse that with a sense of wonder. Wonder is the philosopher's emotion, isn't it? It's the philosopher within us that wonders. Now that's the emotion, that's the drive that the Buddha actually wants us to develop. That's what we mean by curiosity. That's one of the seven factors of enlightenment, the desire of wanting to know. And it's as though we come from that position of belief, the Buddha said this, therefore it must be right. It's the Buddha said this, now let's see if it's right for me. That's our attitude, that's the attitude that he would want us to develop. So that we go into the investigation always from that position of not sure, don't know.

So now, in your meditation, when you're sitting, that's part of your process of developing the skills of meditation. Whenever a mental state arises, if you're not sure as to what to do, make sure you find out. When a mental state arises, there should arise with it how to deal with it. And it's through dealing with it in a proper way that this process of purifying the heart is taking place.

So that's why that reflection at the end of a sitting is important even if it's only a single reflection even if it's only just looking back and thinking well now how did I fall asleep again, why did I move at that point. It's like going back and just saying well okay next time I'll do this next time I'll do that.

Even if you don't do it, even if you forget, that's fine. Just in your next sitting, when you make the same mistake, note that this has happened before, and that you must make a firm determination not to fall into that same error. And then very slowly, you just train yourself, just train yourself into the skills of meditation.

So, here we have, we've got a technique, we've all got a technique, a basic way of doing it, watching the breath, noting, going slow, I haven't stressed the going slow, I'll do that tomorrow, and we've got that technique, but we also know what it is we're looking at, so we're looking at the impermanence, we're looking at the sense of non-substantiality, the not-me, not-mine, the distance that is between the knower and the knowing. We're looking at the way we react to things, learnt reactions. And in that, we're looking at all those negative things that come up. Negative things to do with those things that we desire that cause excitement, that cause us to dream of a better life and all that. We're looking at all the aversions. We're looking at this dullness and lethargy. We're looking at the restlessness and we're looking at the doubt.

But also, we're looking at our responses to those things and not getting caught up in the indulgence, in the aversion. So we're constantly lifting ourselves out of the mind with its machinations. And we're not getting drawn into any history. Whatever happened in the past, this is a product which is happening now. The product itself is the problem, not the past. It manifests now as this mental state. In dealing with this mental state, the past loses its effect.

So, when we practice *vipassanā*, these two things are happening. We're correcting that initial delusion, that stigmatism in our faculty of knowing, in our intuitive intelligence, in the Buddha within, and we're allowing the heart to purify itself. That's what vipassanā is doing. And that's what we're practicing over this weekend.

The positive side, which we practice at the end of the weekend, is how we transform that energy into its opposite. And that's through the practice of *mettā*. That's the first step in that transformation. So in the Eightfold Path, having got the right understanding of how the whole thing works, the psychophysical organism, we then purify the heart, which is part of the attitudinal, the second step and then we begin to work with attitudes to begin to transform them so from hatred to love from cruelty to compassion and so on and then these are established they are confirmed they are developed through right speech right action and right language so that whole process of liberation is systemic.

If it stops up in the head, there's a danger of it becoming intellectual and callous. If it stops in the heart, there's a danger of it becoming mawkish and sentimental. So that whole process has to be really taken through to its logical conclusion, which is the good life. The wholesome, virtuous life.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later. So, it might be good to do a little walking meditation. About a quarter of an hour. Don't worry about the schedule. If you do some walking meditation. Give me about 20 minutes. And then we'll do another section. The evening will unfold. Now, if there's any questions that arise from that.

If anything arises from that, just put down your questions and all will be revealed.

So let's have a look at this business of looking. We've been talking about investigation, and I said earlier that sometimes the investigation can be, well, let's say problematic. Let me give you an example from my own practice.

I remember sitting in meditation one day, and I was feeling quite concentrated, quite settled. Then I noticed that there was some tension in my shoulder. So naturally, being a good meditator, I thought, "Right, I'll investigate this tension." So I turned my attention to the shoulder, and I started looking at it very carefully. I was really examining it, you know, trying to see what was there, trying to understand the nature of the sensation.

But what happened was that the more I looked at it, the more tense it became. The more I investigated, the more solid and problematic it seemed to become. I was creating more of what I was trying to investigate. The very act of looking was making the thing I was looking at more prominent, more solid, more of a problem.

This is a very common experience in meditation. We notice something - maybe it's a pain, maybe it's an emotion, maybe it's just some mental chatter - and we think, "Ah, I should investigate this. I should look at this mindfully." But then we find that our looking actually makes it worse. The problem seems to grow

under our gaze.

Now, this is where we need to understand something quite subtle about awareness. There's a difference between awareness and looking. When we're looking at something, there's often a sense of effort, a sense of focusing, a sense of trying to get something, trying to understand something, trying to fix something. There's a subject here looking at an object over there.

But awareness - pure awareness - is much more spacious than that. It's not focused in the same way. It's more like the sky that holds the clouds, rather than a spotlight that illuminates an object. When we rest in this more spacious awareness, things can be present without being problematic. They can be noticed without being magnified.

So when I went back to that tension in my shoulder, instead of looking at it, I tried to just let it be present in awareness. I didn't focus on it, I didn't try to understand it, I didn't try to make it go away. I just let it be there, held in this broader field of awareness. And what happened? It started to soften. It started to dissolve. Not because I was trying to make it dissolve, but because I wasn't feeding it with my attention in that focused, problematic way.

This is what I mean when I say the problem lies in the looking. It's not that we shouldn't be aware. Of course we should be aware. But we need to understand the difference between this spacious, open awareness and the more focused, effortful kind of attention that we often mistake for mindfulness.

You see, when we're really looking at something - examining it, investigating it, trying to figure it out - there's usually a sense of self involved. There's someone here looking at something over there. There's a subject and an object. And as long as that division is there, as long as there's this sense of self trying to deal with experience, then we're in the realm of *dukkha*. We're in the realm of suffering.

But when we rest in pure awareness, this division starts to soften. The sense of someone looking at something begins to fade. There's just knowing. There's just awareness itself, without a knower. And in that space, things can be as they are without being problematic.

This is why the Buddha said that the highest knowledge is the knowledge of no-self, *anattā*. It's not that we figure out what the self is and then get rid of it. It's that we stop looking for it altogether. We stop creating this division between observer and observed. We rest in awareness itself.

Now, this might sound very philosophical, but it's actually extremely practical. In your meditation, when you notice something - a sensation, a thought, an emotion - see if you can be aware of it without looking at it. See if you can let it be present without focusing on it, without trying to understand it, without trying to change it. Just let it float in this open space of awareness.

This takes some practice, of course. We're so used to focusing, so used to trying to fix things, so used to being someone dealing with something. But gradually, we can learn to rest in this more spacious way of

being. And when we do, we often find that the things we thought were problems weren't really problems at all. They were just experiences arising and passing away in the vast space of awareness.

So the invitation is this: next time you're meditating and you notice something that seems to require investigation, pause. Ask yourself, "Am I looking at this, or am I simply aware of it?" If you find you're looking - focusing, trying, efforting - see if you can relax that looking. See if you can let go of the investigator and just rest in awareness itself.

This is the deepest teaching of *vipassanā*. It's not about becoming a better investigator. It's about discovering that there was never really anything to investigate in the first place. There's just this - awareness aware of itself, with no one looking at anything.

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