All Skillful Means Are For The Purification Of The Heart-Mind

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 57:47

Well, last week I was talking about virya, energy, and the balance of that. Something that I didn't get to really at the end of the talk was to discuss skillful means, which is really all the different techniques and methods that we use both in meditation and in our life to balance the energy, to help us wake up. So that's kind of the jumping off point I want to start with tonight: skillful means. But really the point being that all the skillful means are in the service of one thing only, which is what the Buddha said he taught, very famously.

The Buddha said, "I teach one thing: suffering and the end of suffering." He said that a lot. And all skillful means, not only meditation but in our life, are to help us understand, to realize the end of suffering—but not only as a goal. In the moment, to actualize the heart and mind of non-clinging. That's a simple way to say it.

I just want to read this little bit from the Buddha just because I like it. This is just little snippets from one of the many suttas where he's talking about the Four Noble Truths. I'm not going to do the whole truths, but he's talking about how he first discovered the profound truth that can't be gained by mere reasoning, by thinking about it, visible only to the wise:

"The world, however, is given to pleasure, delighted with pleasure, enchanted with pleasure. Truly, such beings will find it hard to understand dependent arising, this profound truth. Yet there are beings whose eyes are only a little bit covered with dust. They will understand the truth."

So we can only hope that we're some of those beings whose eyes are a little bit covered with dust.

But I was really reading it because this is sort of how he describes the cause of suffering—that the world and beings are enchanted by pleasure, given to pleasure, attracted to pleasure. That's sort of our dilemma, you could say, in life and practice. No difference. And so when he talks about the ending, the extinction of suffering, it's exactly this attachment to pleasure, this craving that he addresses. So he could talk about the mind, the heart of non-clinging, as one way of saying it.

A more simple way—and that's how I'll refer to it later—but again, I just want to read one of his many descriptions of how that manifests and how it can manifest:

"One who has considered all the contrasts of this earth and is no more disturbed by anything whatever in the world, the peaceful one, freed from rage, from sorrow, and from longing, has passed beyond birth and

decay. This I call neither arising nor passing away, neither standing still nor being born nor dying. There is neither foothold nor development nor any basis. This is the end of suffering."

To me it's inspiring. It's also kind of grand. But we can also talk about it, as he often does, as the heart, the mind of non-clinging. Or another way of putting it, as I've been talking about the whole time, is the mind, the heart that's free in a moment even from any of the internal torments: clinging, aversion—two sides of the same coin—delusion, confusion, attachment to sense of self, which gives rise to the craving and the aversion.

And so any skillful means, any of the forms of meditation that we do, and any of the other aspects of our life are all in service of cultivating the wisdom that ultimately sees through the delusion that gives rise to clinging and aversion. Right? Big picture. All of the different techniques are ultimately for that end.

Whether it's mindfulness and the myriad of techniques of mindfulness, whether it's absorption practice in the way that the Buddha taught it—absorption practice, shamatha practice, absorption of the mind very, very deeply into one object is not the end in itself. It's to cultivate a quality of mind that then comes out of absorption to explore the nature of reality, to understand it. His thesis is: when we understand things the way they are, the way they already are, clinging and aversion will naturally cease because they don't make any sense. And as long as we think they're serving us and making sense—well, so long there's an "us" that we think it's serving and making sense—it just keeps on cycling.

And as he said, the world, people love pleasure. We do. It's very, very deeply ingrained in us, and so we need all these different skillful means at different times. Not to get to some particular state, not to have a better experience, not to get rid of what we don't like—but the skillful means in themselves, even in a moment, are ways of in that moment not feeding the torments, starving the torments. So in the moment, any of the skillful means are also a manifestation of a heart and mind of non-clinging.

So you see what I mean? The means are the end. The end are the means. We can't practice in a way of wanting and hating and trying to get rid of something and fool ourselves that this is the way to understand non-clinging. It just doesn't work.

So that's what all the skillful means share. And I just want to talk about one template that I really like because I find it very helpful, interesting, in the different ways that some aspects of our life of awakening—not only intensive practice—work, you could say, to purify, to cultivate purity of the mind and the heart in the moment.

So in this template, which I first heard from Sayadaw U Pandita (but he didn't make it up), he talks about how this purification—now when I say purification, it's kind of, in my mind, a bit of a loaded word. It's not something I grew up with, purification.

I don't know. In my mind, it has a connotation that's a little holier-than-thou. But I don't mean that. When I say purification, I'm using it because I can't think of a better word. And what I mean is simply this: in the

moment, the heart, the mind, the citta, the consciousness, when it's pure, in that moment it isn't clouded by the torments, by the afflictions, by any form of aversion or greed or delusion. Just for a moment. We're not all the way to never being bothered again by anything in the world, but in the moment—that's what all of our life of awakening is about. Cultivating that purity, recognizing it when it's present, and recognizing what goes along with it so we appreciate it.

So on three levels, this happens in our life and in our practice. And interestingly enough, they're the three groupings of the Eightfold Path: sila, morality; samadhi, collectedness of mind; and panna, wisdom.

They say that with sila, in other words with ethical conduct of body and speech, what we're free from when we're acting from these simple five precepts, from non-harming in speech and action, is that in that moment the heart is freed from, purified from, what's called the torments, the kilesas of transgression—the grossest level. So you see, just as mindfulness and wisdom get more and more subtle, so also do our friends the kilesas get more and more subtle. We start by working on the really gross level. And that's hard enough, God knows. Just keeping our mouth shut and not saying something aversive. Keeping our hand relaxed and not writing something aversive. On that level, when we are refraining, we're purifying the heart and mind from that level of kilesa, that level of affliction. And that's not nothing. That's really what lays the basis for purification on more and more subtle levels, for us to see and understand and see through the need for the kilesas on more subtle levels.

There's a lovely saying that when we are acting according to the precepts, when we're not acting from hatred, from aversion, from cruelty, from greed, watching our speech and actions, we are giving ourselves freedom from remorse. And how many of you have mentioned having stuff come up in your practice—memories from however long ago? We all have them. Stupid or worse than stupid, painful, harmful things that we've done or said, and the suffering, really the remorse. Which is different from guilt. Guilt is like, "I'm such a stupid jerk." That's just adding aversion on top of it. But remorse is that sense of wisdom meeting that memory and seeing the causes and conditions for why we did it, the ignorance of it, but feeling the pain of it. So freedom from remorse and, of course, granting to others in our field of presence the gift of fearlessness, knowing that we're not going to hurt one another. That's already a great thing.

Then on the next level, the next round of purification, the level of samadhi—in the time that there's samadhi in the mind, the level of kilesa or torment that is kept away, that's cleared out, is called the obsessive level of torment. Which I think you might be able to relate to. It's the level mostly of thought and mental energy. Whether it's greed or worry or aversion to something, upset comes up over and over. You know, just like, "Oh my God, why is this happening?"

I want to clarify samadhi. The best description I like is that it's collectedness of the dispersed mental energy. It doesn't have to be one-pointed on one object. Samadhi is a moment-to-moment mental factor, just like everything. Everything's moment to moment. So it's a time when the mental energy—you know

how it's just going all over? You're sort of aware of the breath and you're sort of with sound and there's this thinking going on and there's some feelings in the back and you have that little memory. You could kind of say you're aware of it all, but it's not very collected. It's not really very satisfying somehow. A moment of samadhi is when all that mental energy is collected, unified. It's not squirting in all these different directions. That's what we call samadhi.

As with virya, samadhi is not necessarily wholesome. It can go either way. The mind could be extremely focused and totally driven by anger or greed. Let's pick greed. That can happen in life, of course. We get totally focused on how to get whatever it is we want. It can happen here too. If you found yourself totally absorbed in something you really need, or how to be first in line for lunch, or how you can scheme to get the extra pillow or something—totally stupid when you step outside of it. But at the time, it could completely absorb your mind, right? All the energy of that collectedness goes into being driven by greed.

This is not the path factor of samādhi. The path factor of samādhi is, of course, wholesome, meaning that in that moment there isn't greed, hatred, or confusion. So there's that sense of the unification of heart and mind.

It can manifest in what we call absorption states, where attention is unified on one particular object. You're coming back, coming back—whether it's ānāpāna, whether it's mettā phrases, whether it's a light, whatever it is. It can also be what Mahasi calls khaṇika samādhi, momentary samādhi, which is that steadiness, that collectedness of attention just in a moment, but the object could be changing moment to moment. The samādhi isn't about the object. It's about that quality of collectedness in the mind.

We can notice what samādhi feels like, just as we can notice what greed feels like. Samādhi has a stability. It doesn't mean that you don't get distracted or that greed or aversion doesn't ever slip in, but the mind doesn't get carried so far, and it comes back more easily. The stronger and more steady the samādhi becomes, the less the afflictions—greed, hatred, and delusion—arise. Really, in a way, that's one of the reasons everyone loves concentration.

I don't want to exactly equate samādhi and concentration, because we often talk about concentration as this one-pointed focus, getting really deep. And then we don't appreciate the quality of samādhi that can be present moment to moment as we move around with changing objects—where the attention is collected, the mind and energy are collected, but the objects are changing. When the samādhi is strong and steady, it basically keeps the hindrances, the afflictions, away. They don't have room to slip in.

I remember one time I was on a long intensive retreat with Sayadaw U Pandita where you note every moment, every waking moment. The object of attention is changing, but that steadiness of connecting and noting, connecting and noting, from the moment you get up until the moment you go to sleep—that develops a really strong and stable kind of samādhi.

But I also really saw how that kind of samādhi is very state-dependent. I was noticing that when there was

that steady noting, no greed was coming, no aversion was coming—just noticing: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting. And I was playing with it one day. I was noting seeing. The attention was connected to seeing something. Then I deliberately pulled back the attention. I stopped noting. I stopped letting it connect. I just let the mind hang for a minute.

Immediately—immediately—some affliction rushed in. I forget if it was wanting or aversion or what. I saw it right away. It didn't go anywhere. It was like, "Oh my gosh, all this work, and as soon as I stopped—boom—here they come again."

It's not always like that, but I remember that so clearly because I thought, "Somehow this isn't enough. This isn't enough."

And I know now that that samādhi, that steadiness, was strong, but it was suppressing the afflictions. And that's extremely useful. For one thing, it strengthens mind and faith. You get a sense of the brightness, the lightness, what a sense of purity of mind and heart can feel like. Sometimes people say they didn't even know—you don't even know how much garbage is in there. You don't even know that it's possible to have just a moment where nothing special is happening, but it feels so clean and so pure. Sometimes it feels happy. Sometimes it feels calm. But just to notice that.

Over time on retreats—we've done longer retreats with a lot of very steady concentration—there's a feeling of the consciousness being cleansed, moment after moment. It just feels like it's being... sometimes it felt scoured, a little bit rough. Sometimes just like it's being washed and cleared and cleansed, and you feel a lot brighter and purer for a while.

So that's the suppressive level—state-dependent, very useful, not to be confused with liberation.

Also, sometimes with different kinds of samādhi, very strong and wholesome pleasant states arise, like pīti, rapture, or sukha, a real comfort and ease in the body. Those are great. Those are fine. Appreciate them. But those are also states that come and go. They don't have to be there for the mind, the consciousness, the heart to be pure. When it's pure, all kinds of different wholesome states can arise. But they don't have to be present. There could just be calm, which is also a wholesome state.

And so then the third level, that of paññā, of wisdom. And this I really like. It's said to purify the latent underlying tendencies—the really subtle levels of these torments, these afflictions of our mind.

Many of you have talked about this in interviews, using different words. It's as if things are going fine, the mind is really quite mindful, and nothing is really bothering you. Then out of nowhere, seemingly, suddenly aversion arises. Suddenly greed. Suddenly "me, me, me" is just all over the place. And why?

This latent, underlying level is described as if it's a seed. There's not really a seed, okay? There's no concrete thing called a seed of greed sitting in any of us. This is a metaphor. But it's as if there's a seed, and when the latent tendencies are still existing, still coming up in our mind stream, when the conditions are

appropriate, that seed can sprout.

That's why when the Buddha talks about different levels of awakening—or the absolute awakening of a Buddha where there are no more seeds—that's what is said: it's no longer possible for those seeds to sprout. They're gone. That would be nice! But for us to see, without any aversion but just seeing how that works, is kind of interesting.

And wisdom is said to be necessary because these latent underlying tendencies can't be seen through by thinking, by right intention, by samādhi, but only by wisdom—by really seeing those moments of insight where we understand some aspect of reality the way it is, whether it's impermanence or not-self, or just seeing the clinging come up, seeing it so clearly, and it goes. That's a moment of wisdom. In that moment, it's dissolved.

Just a little example. I use this a lot because it's so clear in my mind. One night I was driving down Lockwood Road on the way up to the retreat center to give a talk a couple of years ago. Not really late, but you know how sometimes you have exactly no extra minute to spare to get there in time. So I was driving down, and it's a kind of narrow driveway in the middle of the road. I was present, but not one hundred percent. A little bit of rushing back there that I didn't quite see. So those were the conditions.

And then there was some person—I don't know who—walking ever so slowly and mindfully in the middle of the driveway. Did they move when they heard the car? No. Slowly and mindfully in the middle of the driveway.

I was present enough that I saw, just in that moment, this shoot of aversion come up. Just like, "Oh, what do they think?" Like that. And it was so sudden, because there hadn't been any aversion present. And so strong and sudden that I just couldn't not see it. Wow, aversion—look at that!

And that was really a sense of that latent seed—not so latent, right—but the latent seed sprouting in that moment. It was met with... it was so obvious that awareness was right there. It wasn't even judging it, just kind of like, "Wow, look at that. Aversion's like that."

So in that moment, because it was met with mindfulness and wisdom—I wasn't judging the aversion, I wasn't owning it—oh, look at that, it went right... immediately disappeared. That's a simple example of how when there's mindfulness with wisdom, it takes care of things. In that moment, aversion was not being fed.

That's the purification of paññā, of wisdom. Seeing clearly with understanding. Oh, aversion arises due to these conditions. It isn't personal. You see it, the conditions change, it's gone. And it's not like it went back down underground, working here to come up again. That's an inaccurate assumption. It was gone. Another time, another aversion will come, sure. But that one was gone.

And that's really—you get a sense—that's the purification of wisdom. And actually, that level is a lot of

what we see on a silent intensive retreat. Until we've tuned into it on retreat, we might not notice it so much in our daily life. Believe me, it's happening. Like that was my daily life.

It happens in our daily life. But to kind of tune ourselves into all these different ways—how we act, how we focus our mind, how we notice and pay attention to what's happening—these are all aspects of purifying our heart and mind, of tuning into the possibility of living with a heart and mind that's free from clinging.

What I like about this template is that it includes the whole Eightfold Path. It's not just about meditation. In terms of skillful means, we're not just talking about meditation. Meditation, despite all the myriad different ways of meditating, is only one of the skillful means embedded in a path—a path of wisdom, a path of sīla, of non-harming conduct, always paying attention, a path of paying attention to our intentions, a path of generosity, a path of friendliness, of loving-kindness. All of these aspects of how we live our life are part of the skillful means of opening.

When we talk about an open heart, or often we use the phrase "gladdening the heart"—that sense of sensitivity, connectivity, of love—all of those are expressions in the moment of a pure-hearted mind. In that moment, it can show up in many different ways.

What I appreciate about how the Eightfold Path works, how this template works, is that each aspect of sīla, samādhi, and paññā, the purification, the wisdom that comes from them, serve as a kind of feedback loop. They keep strengthening each other. Just like with the Eightfold Path, we wouldn't start without some little piece of right view, of wisdom. Otherwise, we wouldn't even set foot on the path. We wouldn't even think there was a problem.

If I read to you, "beings are lost in pleasure and wanting pleasure, and freedom from suffering is freedom from clinging," and you thought, "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard. I'm out of here. You're right, I want pleasure. I love pleasure. I'm going for pleasure because that makes me happy"—you wouldn't be sitting here listening to me talk about this. You'd be out there looking for pleasure until finally you saw it's not working, and then you'd come back in again.

That initial wisdom leads to our meditating, leads to samādhi, leads then to how we act in the world. That leads back to deeper wisdom. And it keeps cycling and cycling. It opens up our faith. It opens us up to greater purity, really, in all the different levels. And we just start where we are—on the meditation retreat, off the meditation retreat, doing your yogi job, whatever. We start where we are in that moment. What skillful means will help to starve the torment if it's present, help to feed non-clinging?

This is a story I love of St. Francis, because to me it's inspiring in how, from the story, he started where he was before he was a saint. When he was just Francis living in Assisi as a young man, he was the son of a very wealthy merchant. In the couple of biographies I've read, when he was a young grown man, late teens or early twenties, he was kind of a wild guy—rich, hanging out with a lot of other rich, wild young

men. They basically partied and drank and chased women, I guess like current-day rock stars or something. That's how he was, pretty wild. It's not how I ever imagined St. Francis would have started. I think of him as just popping out as St. Francis from the time he's a baby, but not so.

In this story, at that time there were a lot of people in Europe with leprosy, now called Hansen's disease. People who had leprosy were forced by the different townships, the different governments, to live in hospitals or homes—probably not very well taken care of—on the outside of the city, so they wouldn't be among the townspeople. People were really scared because it was contagious; they didn't know how you got it. They were also disgusted by how people looked with it. So people with leprosy had to live outside the city, and whenever they were walking on a road, they had to always be ringing a bell, so that anyone walking or riding their horse along could hear the bell and avoid them. That's where that phrase comes from—"Are you treating me like a leper?" Completely like you're disgusting, ring a bell so I don't ever have to see you.

And St. Francis was like that too. He was really afraid and disgusted by anyone with leprosy, afraid to even get near them.

The thing that touches me is how he started where he was. Who knows what motivated him, because this was before he had his vision of Jesus speaking to him from the cross, before he moved into great devotion. But something started him. He knew he had to break down his barriers, his fear, his self-centeredness.

So he started one time when he heard someone ringing the bell while he was riding by on his horse. He threw some alms, some money down on the ground for the person. That was the start. Then another time, he managed to get off his horse and hand the money hand to hand, which for him was huge—just to touch someone. And from there, he moved on to really looking the person in the eye, kissing his hand, and then going down to do volunteer work in the place where the lepers lived. That's where he started, and he turned into St. Francis.

We don't know where we need to start. We don't know how it's going to unfold. But I think it's important not to have a hierarchy, not to think that somehow the subtlety of deep samādhi is better than the purification of watching our speech and our actions. All of it, all of the different ways work. In any moment, any skillful means arises out of a heart and mind that's pure and feeds the non-clinging, feeds the non-aversion.

When we're not paying attention—this is a phrase the Buddha uses a lot, feeding and starving—when we're just not really noticing what's going on and just acting, like that example I gave of greed and concentration where we're totally focused on getting what we want for half a day, we're feeding greed. That's basically throwing another log on the fire. "Oh, I could get it that way. Yeah, throw on another log." And that place where the pleasant fantasies feel good—"Let's go for another one"—feeding greed. "I am right. They are wrong. I should be angry"—feeding anger. Not with judgment, but just looking and seeing how this happens.

How one experiences in any particular moment the heart-mind of non-clinging—it can respond or show up in a situation in many different ways. I'm saying this because I know my mind, and I don't think it's alone, has a really amazing capability of taking anything and saying, "Okay, now that's how it is. This is how it should feel. And everything else isn't right. It should feel like that."

I know we often—when I was talking the other morning, some of you were here—about how sometimes with mindfulness we conflate it, we include other qualities and think of mindfulness as always precise. That's what good mindfulness is, for example. And it doesn't have to be. Or we think the purified heart and mind, we experience it maybe most frequently or most noticeably in a state of absorption or deeper concentration. And so we think, "Well, the purified heart and mind means always calm, or always a lot of sukha, or always that glitzy brightness of absorption." Just know that's limited.

The heart and mind of non-clinging just means the citta, the consciousness, the heart-mind. Citta is translated as "heart and mind" into English. In Pali there's not that distinction. The moment of awareness, of consciousness, just means it's not clouded by greed, by hatred, by confusion, by any of the suffering states. So it's clear. Any of the various wholesome states could be there. There could be pīti, rapture. There could be sukha. Or not. There could be calmness. There could be a sense of peace. There could be a sense of joy. There could be equanimity.

Just simple, calmed-out equanimity and clarity. It could be a kind of simple quietness that then responds differently depending on the situation the mind is faced with in a particular moment. This is what the Tibetans call the emptiness that's ceaselessly responsive.

Often we talk about this with people on retreat—that space where people say their heart has really opened, or they're feeling really sensitive and connected. We use different techniques to gladden the mind, gladden the heart. And how does that show up? Often in response to a situation.

So if you're out walking and you see a little bird that's struggling or suffering, the sense of compassion will just spring up naturally. You feel that connectedness. If you see a bird that's just flying and looks happy, a sense of friendliness, of metta comes up, or mudita, appreciative joy. Or often you see some complicated thing going on and you don't know what's happening. It's just equanimity. Okay, that's what's happening.

Like today I was walking down the driveway and there were five or six turkeys—the big adult one and the babies, though they're still pretty big. And there was a cat lurking. The cat was a third the size of the smallest turkeys. The turkeys were pretty much ignoring the cat, but the cat was lurking around and charging at them, trying to... And the turkeys would react, and then the cat would back off, and then they would just ignore it. They were walking all around it. It was kind of fun to watch.

At first I thought, should I do something? I've got to save the turkeys. Then I said, come on. They're taking care of themselves. The cat's taking care of itself. I don't know what needs to happen. There was just a sense that this is life living itself. We keep on going.

So ceaselessly responsive, it shows up in all of these ways. All of them are manifestations of a heart, a mind, citta, that is free from clinging, free from aversion and confusion. But we don't need to hold on to any of these particular manifestations as "this is what I need, this is how it should feel." No. See right away—we're back in clinging.

All the skillful means and different techniques of meditation, except for the Brahmaviharas, aren't meant to make a particular state of mind come. I set aside the Brahmaviharas because of course in practicing metta you're cultivating the state of mind of metta, practicing karuna you're cultivating the state of mind of karuna. But still, in the bigger picture, we don't hold on to metta or karuna, because when a real moment of metta or compassion comes, it can only come from a heart and mind that's free from clinging. Otherwise it isn't really metta. There's still that me-ing about it, that limitation.

I'm mentioning these just so we know not to cling to manifestation, but then to see that all of our skillful means might show up with different states yet share the same quality. The goal, you could say, the aspiration, is really uprooting the seeds, freeing the heart and mind more and more of even the tendency for confusion and clinging. But what skillful means share is that you forget about the goal. They are very pragmatic. They express that quality of pure heart and mind right now, in the middle of it.

And that's really how we can evaluate whether the technique we choose in a particular moment is skillful or not. It's not like there's a list saying these are skillful and these aren't. It's really about what it's feeding and what it's starving.

In very simple terms: you're all caught up, just lost in fear. You're noticing fear. It's intense, but you have a sense of "fear is like this." We don't like it, but fear is fear. Fear doesn't change into not-fear. It's fear. But you have a sense that you're not feeding the fear. You're allowing it to be, and there's awareness. That's skillful means. Okay, keep watching it. Keep noticing it.

Another time, same story, similar fear. The energy is lower. The mindfulness is more distracted. And the fear is getting stronger and stronger. The stories are getting stronger and stronger. And you really start to feel out of control. Maybe not so skillful, because it's not really mindfulness anymore—it's feeding the fear. Maybe more helpful then to get up, go outside, open the senses to something else: seeing, hearing. Redirect the attention. That's not an avoidance out of aversion. That's a movement of skillful means. And you'll know it because then you'll notice that the fear goes down, and either calm or balance or mindfulness is fed. The next day it could be totally turned around again. So it's always about what's happening right now. You do the best you can, you notice what happens.

I want to offer something the Buddha often talks about as a skillful means, which is really working with what you could call the qualities of devotion or gratitude. But again, I want to emphasize that it's not to get somewhere other than we are.

This is from Dogen, the very famous Zen master: "Truth is not far away. It is ever present. It's not

something to be attained since not one of your steps can lead away from it. The practice of meditation is not a method for the attainment of realization. It is enlightenment itself."

Just to approach how we practice, how we live our life, how we're meeting our mind in any particular moment, what skillful means we're drawing on—with that attitude. Not to get to some goal, but to express awakening itself in this moment.

The Buddha talks in one sutta about directed and undirected meditation, and I want to show how this moves into a contemplation on gratitude or devotion. In this sutta, he's actually talking to Ananda, and Ananda has been telling him about some nuns who are doing really good practice. So just so you know, this sutta is about the nuns too. Then he's talking to Ananda—the nuns aren't there—and he says, "For one who is abiding contemplating body as body..." You're familiar with this line from the Satipatthana Sutta, the four foundations of mindfulness, which is the classic sutta on how to do mindfulness meditation from the Buddha. The four foundations are the body; vedana, feeling tone—pleasant, unpleasant, neutral; the citta, the state of mind, the quality of mind; and dhammas, which is a whole list including the hindrances and the four noble truths and the qualities of mind.

He goes through all four, but I'll just work with the body here. "For one who is abiding contemplating body as body, with the mind clear and balanced, it can happen that a bodily object arises, a fever in the body." Bhikkhu Bodhi says that this means a fever of kilesa, a fever of torment in relation to the body, or a sluggishness of mind. It can happen that these arise. And either that fever in the body, that fever of kilesa in the mind, causes the mind to scatter outward—that's the Buddha's words. Either we get completely lost and distracted, or we scatter outward into reactivity to the kilesa, to the torment. Basically, it's no longer mindfulness. We're lost.

So he says at that point, the nun or the bhikkhu should direct her mind to some inspiring sign. What he means by an inspiring sign is to place the mind on an object that inspires confidence, that inspires inspiration, that inspires devotion. This is when you're in the middle of a sitting, for example, or a walking, or whatever you're doing. And it's not just that you don't like what's happening—let us be clear. It's that the mind is really caught in a fever of kilesa, and the more we try to meditate on that particular object, the more the kilesa is being fed. So you deliberately direct the attention to an inspiring sign, to some image, to some object that inspires confidence or devotion.

The example he gives in another sutta is recollection of the Buddha. That may not be the one for us, but in this sutta he says you recollect the Tathagata—that's the Buddha. We could imagine really bringing to mind, in this state, if the Buddha inspires you, great. Maybe there's some teacher you've had, or someone you know or don't know, who really inspires confidence in some aspect of the pure heart and mind of awakening. Maybe it inspires loving kindness, or...

the truth of compassion in you. Maybe it inspires this sense of onward leading. I know people talk so much about the Dalai Lama because he inspires this so much in people.

I remember quite a few years ago, it was the early nineties, I went with some friends to Nepal, and we spent some time with Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, who's dead now, who was really one of the main Dzogchen teachers—a very revered and respected Dzogchen master. He was wonderful. I didn't spend that much time with him, just ten or fifteen days. I took refuge with him and all. But taking refuge with him, I didn't even realize it at the time, but it made a connection in my heart and my mind, a kind of inspiration. I didn't think about it so much.

But I was on retreat quite a few years later—he was dead by then—and I was on retreat here doing walking meditation. I forget what was going on, but somehow I needed some sense of inspiration. And somehow, I didn't even consciously direct my mind, he just came up. And it brought up such a sense of gratitude and brightness and purity and appreciation and basically love of the Dhamma. It was palpable. It was amazing, actually. It was so inspiring. And not to hold on to that as a happy experience, but the whole point of it is basically to feed the purification of mind so we can then go back to the meditation.

This is what the Buddha says when you do that, when you recollect the Tathagata: "At any time when a noble disciple is recollecting the Tathagata, her mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. Her mind heads straight. When the mind is headed straight, the disciple gains a sense of the Dhamma, experiences joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease, and then the mind becomes collected."

That's the same thing he said in the other sutta I was reading. He goes through the same progression where basically the mind, or we would say the heart, opens to gratitude, to appreciation, to goodness, to faith in the Dhamma, to loving-kindness—whichever it is. And then as it goes through those phases, we're no longer struggling with the kilesas. The heart, the mind is calm again, collected again.

And then he says, "One then reflects: the purpose for which I directed my mind has been accomplished." It's really a very specific, skillful means. So now I withdraw the directed attention from that object of devotion, that object of appreciation. It's not denigrating or putting down the appreciation, but saying even that, we don't just hang out there because it feels good. It's really because it's purifying in that moment. We're lost in kilesas. We can't see through them with mindfulness of that particular object, so we switch objects. It's great to consciously bring in what opens the mind and heart.

I would say for some people, a few minutes of loving-kindness meditation or compassion meditation does that same thing. It moves the attention. It stops feeding the aversion or the greed and starts feeding the openness of unconditional love, of unconditional compassion. And then when that's accomplished—in other words, the mind has stopped feeding unwholesomeness and is now feeding wholesomeness—we can go back to moment-to-moment mindfulness. That's directed meditation.

And then he says "undirected," which is basically just moment-to-moment noticing whatever arises. He understands it's not focused on before or after. I'm just abiding, observing. The body is body. Ardent, fully

aware, mindful, and I am content. Just moment-to-moment noticing.

I want to say a little bit more about the gratitude and devotion, the ways it's been helpful. I want to give you the other examples the Buddha uses in the sutta as objects that can help. When you develop this recollection of the Buddha, he says, you can do it while you're walking, while you're standing, while you're sitting, while you're lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children. Basically saying: no excuse that you're too busy, you can't do it.

It's something we can do no matter what.

Other recollections include recollecting the Dhamma. For me personally, that really inspires me more than the Buddha, or as I say, particular teachers. We can recollect the Sangha, the Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples. It might be other people we know who have inspired us.

These next two are interesting because I don't think we do them. You can recollect your own virtues, your own wholesome, kind behavior. This is actually something that's accessible to all of us, and we really rarely do it. We think of that as an ego thing. But recollecting with that sense of the purity, the wholesomeness of our virtues and of our past behavior—that's really a way of gladdening the heart, brightening the mind, and purifying the consciousness at a particular moment. Similarly, you can recollect your own generosity. That's also very lovely. It brings happiness.

And you can see, you can feel when you're feeding the purity, the brightening of the heart. You can feel when it kind of switches over to "Yeah, I really was generous, wasn't I?" Then you notice, oh, we're not feeding purity anymore—we're feeding "me." Okay, put it down. It feels worlds different when we're paying attention.

I want to say something about how this devotion works, this gratitude to beings, our gratitude to Dhamma, our appreciation of our own goodness—it's not about the person. As the Buddha said to someone who kept looking at him and wanting to be near him all the time, who said, "I need to see you. You're inspiring me so much." The Buddha responded, "The holy life is not about seeing the Buddha's person or being with the Tathagata's person. One who sees the Dhamma sees me."

So when he's talking about recollecting the qualities of himself, he's not saying, "Hey, come hang out with me. That's really great. I'm giving you shaktipat." He's not saying that. He's saying it brightens the heart, it brightens the mind, it opens us out of self-concern and self-interest into vastness, into the surrender to the unknown, into just that sensitivity of presence.

This is how Tulku Urgyen describes it: "The present moment method for becoming quickly accustomed to the unfabricated state of awareness is to have devotion to enlightened beings and compassion to unenlightened sentient beings. Devotion and compassion are both love. And in the moment of love, the empty nature dawns nakedly. If in that moment, the moment of love, you can look inwardly, it is like seeing the sun unobscured by clouds. The nature of emptiness is nakedly manifest."

Yet, he says, in the beginning we need the fabricated devotion—consciously thinking of someone, of the Dhamma—because the natural, unfabricated, naturally arising devotion and our uncontrived compassion does not occur immediately. Obviously, we're not just walking around like that. So great, use the fabricated, what the Buddha is talking about. Consciously bring to mind beings, your actions. Allow the heart and mind by itself to contemplate the goodness, to open through gratitude, through devotion. And just see that empty awareness—the heart, the mind that's purified in that moment—naturally arising together with love, with compassion. They're really both wonderful.

In some ways, I think the bhakti path, which they use more in the Tibetan tradition and Hindu tradition, places a lot of emphasis on finding a particular guru and doing much of the work through total devotion to that guru. I know from standing outside, you might wonder, "How can you see all the faults of that person?" And it's not about the person. It's about opening up that channel of unconditional devotion, of inspiration, of love, of compassion, of trust—that then allows us to be so present, so pure in heart and mind, that we notice, we recognize, and we trust the moments of that citta, of the mind, of the heart, that is free, that is pure.

There are so many moments of that in all of our days. So I'm talking about all the ways to notice it, to feed it, to create it. But also just notice all the times when it's already like that, when the mind, the citta, is not clouded by greed, by hatred, by confusion. And just noticing that is feeding it.

Notice all the different manifestations. Don't try to limit it. Just open into not knowing. As soon as we need to know "it's like this," we know that's wrong. Just being open to discover—through devotion, through compassion, through mettā, through moment-to-moment mindfulness, through concentration, through taking a walk, through looking at the mind. Sitting, walking, standing, lying down, eating, working—not with aversion but with love. With surrender. With really appreciating the infinite possibility that's available here and now, to all of us.

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