Mingling Our Minds With The Dhamma

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:03:13

There's a line from Dogen Khentse Rinpoche that I really like, and it's sort of the theme I want to talk about tonight. He speaks about the importance of mingling our mind with the Dharma until it permeates our whole being.

He says that the Buddha's teachings are inconceivably extensive and profound, and to achieve an exhaustive intellectual understanding of them would be a rare and remarkable achievement. But that's not enough by itself. Until we also achieve inner realization by actually applying the teachings and mingling them with our minds, whatever knowledge we may gain remains theoretical. Leaving the doctor's prescription by the bedside will not cure the illness. So turn your mind inward and ponder deeply the meaning of the Dharma until it permeates your whole being.

I just love that—ponder the Dharma, practice the Dharma, explore the Dharma until it permeates our whole being. That's really what this path is about, in retreat and out of retreat, no different. When we talk about mingling our mind with the Dharma, in essence one way of looking at it is the Eightfold Path—different aspects of how we live our life. All of our activities, everything we do, from the smallest thing to the biggest thing, can become part of helping us mingle our minds with the Dharma. Nothing left out.

When we talk about the Eightfold Path, as you know, it's really more like a circle than a path. It begins with right view, wise understanding, and of course keeps on increasing, keeps on strengthening. So what do we mean by right view, right understanding, the beginning of the path?

The first aspect is just what Dogen Khentse is saying—the theoretical level. Learning, where we hear something, read something, learn something. That's what gets us to even think there might be another way in this life, or piques our interest, gets us to do a little bit of meditation or begin to look at our mind or even think there's another way to live. So theoretical information is very important. It actually has a word in Pali: *sutamayā paññā*. There are three levels of wisdom, and *sutamayā paññā—suta* really means what is heard, the teachings. We hear it theoretically. It begins to turn our mind in the direction of Dharma, of wisdom.

The second level is called *cintāmayā paññā*—the way we think about things. We've taken in, for example, impermanence. Just hearing "all things are impermanent, they arise"—that's theoretical knowledge. With *cintāmayā paññā,* using our mind, our reflections, our contemplation, we think about it. We can really come to some deep recognition: "Oh yes, that really seems true." We can look, we can see, we can contemplate it. We're actually using the thinking mind in our meditation, in our life, in a supportive way.

Thinking is one of the six senses. We don't hate it. Let's learn to use it. This is a deeper level of knowledge. We hear it, we contemplate it, we explore it with the mind, but it still isn't really deeply yet right view, right understanding.

The depth of it is the third level, which in Pali is *bhāvanāmayā paññā*—mental cultivation, or what I would simply call insight. That moment when we really understand in a different way. Insight is basically a shift of perception. I love the translation "right view" because I feel like it's actually literal—we're viewing an experience more accurately than we were before.

Take *anicca*, which is a good example. We hear it, it makes sense. We think about it: yes, I know that. We would all probably say, "Yeah, I really know things are impermanent." But if there's really right view, deep understanding, it automatically leads to the second step of the path, which is intention, wise intention—what leads to the next steps of speech and action.

If we really understood, not just in contemplation but through insight, that everything is impermanent, that impacts our intentions of mind, how we speak, how we act. Sometimes that's how we find out whether our understanding was actually theoretical or coming from really seeing clearly—when we move into the next step of the path of intention and then into speech and action.

Because we can talk up the wazoo. "I really know everything's impermanent." And if you're sitting there having a difficult experience in meditation or in life, saying, "I know this is impermanent, I know it's impermanent"—if we really know it's impermanent, we don't get filled with aversion. We don't get filled with fear. We don't start running around like a chicken with its head cut off trying to do everything to get rid of this experience, because we know it's impermanent.

So when there's really insight, it's like just that shift of perception where we see something that's already here in a different way. The difference between knowing things are impermanent and actually experiencing a moment or period of time—and it can be in meditation or out of meditation, like someone was mentioning today—just really seeing moods, emotions, patterns coming and going, coming and going, coming and going. To the extent that there's nothing to think about, it's just so clear. That's how it is. It's the actual perception. It's not of thought anymore. That's right view in that moment. And that can happen with many, many different things. I'm just using impermanence for an example.

When it's right view in that moment, the intentions that arise, the thoughts, the intentions, the thoughts leading to speech and action—they aren't going to be that of fear or clinging. In those moments of real, accurate perception, insight, deep wisdom, for that moment of right view of impermanence, clinging to stuff doesn't arise. We don't have to talk ourselves out of it. It doesn't arise because it doesn't make any sense. Something is coming. We know—we don't have to think about it—we know it's going. Clinging to it is just laughable. Okay, next day, next hour, that's just a fond memory. And it informs our mind stream. It informs our understanding. But in the moment of the clear insight, in that moment, it's as if really quite deeply our minds are mingled with the Dharma.

That understanding is what leads to intention, is how we think about things, how we relate to experience, which leads to how we speak, how we act, the decisions that we make. It's just quite obvious. And in that sense—this is how I'm interpreting what Ajahn Chah says—in that moment, the mind, the heart, the perception, the right view, the intentions, the speech, the action, it's all mingled with the Dharma, with the truth, using Dharma in the terms of just the truth of how things are. There's no tension in that way. There's no friction. It's just, "Oh, that's how it is."

And we've all—yes, even you—we've all had many moments of that. And then later, as I said, it's a fond memory. Maybe it gets less and less fond as we struggle and struggle to have that experience again. That's why it's a path. That's why a few moments of really mingling gives us a taste. It informs our understanding. That's the beginning, the continuing of the path of right view. But that's why it is an ongoing path.

We use all aspects of our life to work with intention, how we speak, how we act, how we are in this world. It leads to our willingness to use the last stages of the path—of energy, of mindfulness, of collectedness of attention—to pay attention to the other aspects. The whole path becomes more alive, a template through which we can use that template of the path to put on the actions of our life, to help us see when our understanding, our intentions, our actions, our speech are mingling with the Dharma, when they're not. And to help us, because assuming this is something that's a deep motivation for us, to help us further align.

So as we were saying this morning, kamma just means action. And as the Buddha said, the seed, the heart of action is in the intention. So how we understand, how we perceive—that leads to how we think, the intentions in our mind—that leads to how we speak and act.

Remember when Sally was talking about the vipallāsas, the distortions of perception? Again, it's the same thing, back with right view, the beginning and the place we keep coming to in deeper and deeper spirals of mingling our hearts, our minds with the Dharma, with the truth.

So how we perceive something: We perceive permanence, really, a distortion of perception. We perceive impermanence. We perceive something as being me or mine. We perceive, "Oh, just arising and passing, no me or mine." That perception, accurate or inaccurate, distorted or accurate, then leads to how we think about the thing. How we think about it hardens into a view, what we believe. And this actually is on the level of the deep Dharma understandings, the views that we don't often even realize we have—the view that things are permanent, the view that I'm my body, or these emotions are me, or just that I am somehow separate. We don't go around with little neon signs in our mind going, "I am now holding this view that this experience is permanent."

I mean, if we did, it would be helpful. We'd know why we were suffering. But we don't really. We don't just sit there as things are arising and suddenly notice, "Oh, view coming up! I am a separate, eternal self—coming up. This emotion belongs to me." We don't get that. We don't realize we're holding the view.

But the view is just a hardening of the perception, the thought, and that's what leads to intention or action.

So you see how it all can go through misperception or through perception. But it all is very logical. And we can see how it affects, how it colors our decisions, our actions in the world—really who we are, how we show up. So how does our right view show up in the world, or our wrong view? How does our mingling with the Dhamma show up—by how we speak, by how we act, but even more just by who we are, who we are as we go through life. You don't have to be Gandhi or someone and do incredible, amazing things. It's just seeing who we are, coming to understand how we perceive and understand, how that colors the intentions, and how this level of intention is really a place that we can include in our mindfulness and awareness practice—not just on retreat, but also in our life.

The subtle moment-to-moment intentions, like before I lift my hand—it's a little easier to see those in the silence of retreat. But the second step of the path, which is variously translated as wise intention or wise attitude or wise aspiration, can also be looked at in a broader application. This is where we've been getting caught up sometimes in the wording, where we sometimes talk about intention, sometimes talk about motivation, sometimes talk about aspiration.

Intention, *cetanā*, could just be that momentary impulse—the "about to" that comes before every movement, before every speech. Aspiration or a sense of motivation could be something larger. In the commentaries under *sampajañña*, clear comprehension, this is discussed. Mindfulness and clear comprehension are often talked about together. Mindfulness is the knowing in the moment what something is. Clear comprehension is the broader context—clearly knowing what you're doing and the context you're doing it in.

This is helpful. Someone was saying you can get really mindful and very concentrated, so focused on what you're doing that you're completely oblivious to everything around you. Has anybody noticed that?

I'll tell you—this is embarrassing. It was a long time ago, so I can say it. I was practicing at IMS many, many years ago. I was walking through this coatroom where you put your coats, and then you walk down a few stairs into an upper walking room, and through that room into the meditation hall. I was walking very slowly and mindfully, noting "lifting, moving, placing"—incredibly focused on the sensations. So incredibly focused that I just fell down the stairs without even noticing they were there. That was embarrassing. You think, "Hmm, there's something missing." I was mindful, and yet there's something missing. So that's the clear comprehension piece, right? One aspect of it.

In terms of working with intention, it's the aspiration or larger orientation. Remember, when I talked the other night about cultivating or getting in touch with our intention for practice, or the intention of bodhicitta, for example—that's vast. It's not that that's present every moment, but it serves as a wider aspiration that we can attune to in moments. I'll talk more about that in a minute. But just to see how we understand the situation, how we understand ourselves in the world, and what we see—whether it's conscious or unconscious—what we're holding as our larger purpose, our larger aspiration, is really going

to affect the decisions we make, the actions we take.

There was an experiment that was talked about in the book *The Tipping Point*, which is really interesting. It has all kinds of little different examples of how we affect one another, how motivation and understanding affect things. This experiment—I don't have all the details—they called it the Good Samaritan Experiment. It was with some seminarians, men and women who were training to be ministers of some sort. I'm assuming, because they're seminarians, that they went there on purpose, and that they must be relatively good people with some sense of wanting to serve.

In this experiment, they divided the seminarians in half. One half had to go from one place to another on the campus, and they were given this very urgent mission—I don't remember what it was, but very urgent. It was really impressed on them how important it was. They had to get to this other place really quickly in order to carry out this very important mission, which seemed like a good thing to do. The others didn't have that extra purpose, but they were also told to go in a hurry to that same place.

But the real experiment was that on the way—which is why it was called the Good Samaritan Experiment—on the way there was someone they'd planted who was really in need of assistance. Not dying-level need, but really in strong need of assistance—distraught and asking for help.

And by far the ones who had been given this very urgent mission didn't stop to help, because they had this other more important urgent thing to do. Whereas the ones who didn't have that bigger goal did stop to help.

So it's just interesting to see how our mind makes priorities and makes choices based on our understanding—consciously or not—of what's really important to us, of what's really important in life. We see how our view affects our intentions, and our intentions affect our decisions about how to act, how to speak.

With right view, paññā, wisdom, accurate seeing, our intentions—both larger and smaller—naturally transform. It just happens by itself. But also, what I think I've noticed in myself is that as our smaller intentions transform, our larger purpose and aspiration hopefully begins to change as well. We may or may not consciously access that, and I'll talk a little about actually doing that, because I find it so supportive and consciously helpful in how we meet our life and how we live our life.

Do we live our life in a way that deepens our mingling our minds with the Dhamma? Or do we just kind of respond haphazardly or by habit to circumstances? Sometimes we do both. But it's possible to tune in much more consciously, with much more caring and intentionality, to what really is true for you as a larger aspiration, as a more compelling motivation. What is your view? What do you really believe is important in life, from your understanding?

Can we consciously—now, later, tomorrow, through the days—take some time to really allow that to bubble up in your heart, in your mind? Don't just start with the first superficial thought that comes up. It

may not be the best thought. Sometimes that's true, but sometimes it's like, "Oh, well, I just want to do the best I can, you know, being a loser that I am." But sometimes something much more profound and touching can arise, and it can come up by surprise. It can come, and you think, "No, I don't think so. No way that's possible for me." Don't listen to the habitual disclaimers or the habitual "no." You can feel it—it feels different.

If you just give some space, you maybe already know what it is for you. And it can be changing all the time too. But giving some space to consciously allow that to come from the unconscious into consciousness—it comes again as an understanding, as a view that we can consciously turn to, call in, to work on the level of intention in our life, helping us make choices in our speech, in our action, in our intentions, in what we choose to give importance to, to pay attention to. Because that's really where the rubber meets the road. That's, as I said before, where we find out what we really understand—by how we relate to our own mind and heart, by how we relate to situations in the world, by how we relate to others. This isn't a judgment. If you're looking at this through judgment, that isn't so helpful.

You can see how this step of the Eightfold Path is a kind of template, a list, about how the Dharma, how reality, how our understanding does begin and continue to permeate our heart, our mind, our whole being. How this mingling the mind with the Dhamma, the understanding, moves from concept, idea, information, to a perception, a clear understanding, a view that's based more in reality. And how that view then becomes strong enough to inform our intentions and our actions.

That also leads us to be more inclined towards the mental cultivation, the other aspects of the path—to give more appreciation and value to the energy, the effort it takes just to pay attention to ourselves. It doesn't take growing effort, but it takes some willingness, some interest to show up, to pay attention to what's going on in our mind and heart. The mindfulness, the concentration—by concentration, I just mean the collectedness, the balance, the stability.

And it keeps feeding back, because as our understanding deepens and our intentions begin to purify and we see the effect this can have on how we show up in life and who we are, this in turn strengthens our understanding and our faith. And it just keeps spiraling, cycling deeper and deeper and deeper.

You start to see—I know you've already seen—how our habits of intention, which can show up just as a thought, can show up as how we think about ourselves, how we react internally to experience. You see how they begin to change. How, for instance, the self-judgment or the self-hating or the putting oneself down or the greed isn't always the intention of choice anymore. Sometimes the wisdom comes in and you consciously see, "Oh, I need to—no, I don't," and it's a little bit of consciously doing it. Other times you don't even need to consciously refer to your greater aspiration because—oh, it just doesn't arise.

I'll give you a little example. I noticed today how the shift of intention based on understanding really can change the whole inner climate. This is like a meditation experience because it's so small, but it makes a big difference in life.

I was noticing in my mind—I think it was in the sitting this morning—some familiar negative pattern was coming up, probably self-judgment. That's the most familiar pattern. Recognized, felt, all those things. "Oh yeah, it's not good, don't want it," all that stuff. But there was a tinge of aversion, which I didn't see at first, because the view that it was being met with wasn't really clear. The view was, "This is bad and it shouldn't be here and I don't like it"—basically, not good. And so that was aversion.

So I was sitting there, and then suddenly it just clicked in my mind—it came in, this had all happened by itself—that my aspiration was more in the moment, and through the day, to be able to really be here with people in an open and compassionate way. That just came in. And so in that moment, there wasn't aversion or clinging or greed. And also there was clear seeing. And in that moment, I said, "Oh, so this self-judgment—it's not like it's bad." I could feel how that's in the way of compassionate, open presence.

And that didn't make me hate it. *Oh, that's the aspiration—to be open, compassionate, and present. Oh, I see how self-judging really is a blocking of that.* Isn't that interesting? Let me pay more attention to the self-judging.

It completely shifted my attitude to it. Not that it has to go away or anything, but more wisdom was there, intelligence that wants to understand how these things work. *Oh, self-judgment. I feel it as an obstacle because my motivation is understanding and compassion.* It's not like getting out the baseball bat and getting rid of it because it's in the way. Do you get a sense of what I mean?

The motivation is working kind of behind things. The thought could be the same: *This isn't a helpful feeling to be having.* But the motivation—one was from delusion: I don't like it, it's no good, it's got to go away. The other is from wisdom and compassion based in my larger aspiration. It's a little thing, but it felt like a big thing to me. It's just an example of how that can work for anything in our life.

Our habits really begin to switch. As we begin to understand this, both on the cushion and off the cushion, we can put more energy, work more actively, take more care with this second step of the path—this area of wise intention. Not from a should. Not from judgment at all, but again from getting in touch with your greater sense of purpose.

As they say, it's part of the clear comprehension that's talked about in the commentaries—clear comprehension of your greater sense of purpose, your aspiration. It's sort of not a goal exactly, but what colors our path, what's our beacon, what's our guidepost in times when we do need to make decisions. What's important, what's not important, what choices do I want to make?

So, as I said, if you don't already have a sense of it, or if you haven't really connected with it for a while, I would suggest at some point to take some time and just make it an open, felt question in your heart: What is really, truly—not what should be most important, not what sounds good or bad or whatever—but just really, what is most important in my life? Because that will become a beacon, a guidepost, a support in times of choice. Not to make yourself crazy—should I have chocolate ice cream or vanilla ice cream? Or

should I have ice cream at all? No, I shouldn't, because my... you know. But there are times, and you know when they are, if you open up, that we really can tune into this.

It's said in the commentaries that having a sense of your greater sense of purpose collects our dispersed energy. And it's really true. When we have a sense of what's really important, it's like a way of helping us align our actions and our decisions with that instead of just randomly responding.

When Sally last night talked about Greg Mortenson building schools in Pakistan, he's a great example. His story is a great example of how a sense of purpose really gives us incredible strength. It's sort of the same way concentration collects all the dispersed mental energy and focuses it on something. Again, it needs to be wise concentration—not incredible striving. But in this same way, our greater sense of purpose does help us make decisions.

For all of us, we all have that. We wouldn't be here through a whole month retreat. How many moments have you thought, *What am I doing here? I wish I could be anywhere—home, somewhere else—but not here in this mind, listening to this crap. I want to be out of here.* Is there anyone who hasn't had any moment like that this whole retreat? So there's some greater sense of purpose. Maybe it's just shame, you know—so that might be it. It's helpful to know. Don't kid ourselves. Sometimes public group shame is all that keeps us in a sitting or keeps us at a retreat. Hopefully we transcend that and come to appreciate that it was all for a greater purpose.

But really, I'm kind of joking, kind of not. Hopefully that's not the only reason you're here. You didn't come here out of shame, hopefully. So you see what I mean—the sense of purpose.

If this is the first time for you, perhaps you never thought you could seriously do this for a month. Remember when you went to your first retreat? You thought, who could do this for two days, or ten days? And now maybe you're thinking—some of you are here for two months. Some of you have already done lots of long retreats. And the rest of you who are leaving, I know, are saying, "Oh, I so wish I had another month here. Let me sign up for next year."

But that sense of greater purpose—you see what I mean? We call on that all the time. And sometimes that's all we can call on. We don't have the clear seeing that this really difficult thing is impermanent. I know it, I can sink into it. Sometimes we can't access that. But sometimes we can access just this sense of purpose. I don't feel like I'm doing the meditation. I don't feel like I'm getting anywhere. But somehow I know and trust this is really what's important to me—whether it's understanding, or developing compassion, or whatever it is for you. And there's some trust that this is helpful, so you keep doing it.

We all have this really strongly, and we can call on it even more. It's like that guy Greg Mortensen—he had incredible resolution, incredible resolve. We all have the power, as Sally talked about, differing strengths at different times. But calling on this sense of purpose is something I have found so helpful. Sometimes I forget about it, and then it will come up when I'm thinking, "Well, should I do this? I don't want to go teach

that retreat. I just want to take a vacation." Sometimes you need a vacation. Sometimes a vacation is what's going to help you balance and relax in order to keep on serving. It's not a sense of what's right or wrong in that moment—it's the big picture.

I remember when I first thought of this, and then I forgot about it. And somewhere later, out of nowhere, came up this idea: I just want to love and serve the Dharma. And I thought, who, me? I don't think so. That immediate dismissal. But it kind of came up from somewhere else. You know how that is. These insights, these deep intuitions, they come up and you really can't ignore them without trying awfully hard.

So I advise you: don't ignore it. Don't buy into all the stupid habitual stuff your mind says. Let yourself resonate with it. Let yourself feel whatever it is—it doesn't have to be any particular thing. Let it give you strength. Let it give you courage. Let it give you inspiration to really do things we never thought we could do, and to go in a direction where we never really know what's going to happen.

For me, if I thought ten years ago what I'd be doing now, or twenty years ago, or when I made different choices—did I know where they were going to end up? No way. No clue. In fact, that's one of my favorite things I say to myself all the time: I don't have a clue. It's really helpful. I just have no clue. You let go of trying to have a clue. And then you just make the best decision you can based on the clearest intention, based on the real wisdom that you can access—the wisdom of heart, the kindness of mind. We don't know where it's going to go. So we just do the clearest intention we can. Align with

your reference point, your deep motivation.

In terms of living our life from this place, aligning over and over with what's really our deepest purpose, trying as well as we can to remember to access our purest understanding, our kindest and most accurate intentions—this mingling of our mind and heart with the Dharma is, minimally, a lifelong task. That's the least it is. If we have any sense of belief that perhaps it goes more than one life, well, this mingling of our hearts and minds with the Dharma, with the truth, just seems endless and opening. But not endless in a depressive way.

Because it's endless anyway. So it might as well be endless and opening to the truth rather than endless in the ping-pong back and forth of greed, hatred, and delusion—liking, disliking, going this way because I want it, going that way because I don't want it. What kind of life is that? That's what we call samsara. Ping-pong, ping-pong, over and over, endless. It feels like that sometimes, doesn't it?

But when it's really this opening to the depth—how deep can compassion get? How wide can wisdom get? How vast is impermanence? How big is emptiness? It's endless. There's always more to see. How subtle is the mind? What's the nature of consciousness? You think you're going to answer that with one talk? I don't think so.

It's opening into endless questions. And that's exciting. If you don't have a clue and you don't need a clue, it's really exciting. Maybe that's my purpose now, just not to need a clue. I know that might not sound too

inspiring. But the sense of the vastness, the subtlety, the beauty—that there's always deeper to go in mingling our hearts and minds with the truth—that's lovely.

So you don't have to feel like, "Well, this is my goal, my deep intention, and I haven't done it yet. I'm already seventy-two years old. I've already sat three three-month retreats. What's the problem?" When we just throw that out the window, it's like—just right now. What's in the mind and heart? What intentions are arising? Why am I saying and doing what I'm saying and doing?

Now, that's not a judging question. It's really interested. "Oh, how does self-judging work in the mind right now?" It's interested. It just wants to see and know.

That kind of interest has so much trust—trust that wisdom will do the work itself. We don't have to figure it out. Just get interested. Meet what's happening and trust that right view arises because it's simply the way things are. You don't have to make it be that way. It already is. When our tightness and holding and views are not so in the way, the way things are reveals itself.

Naturally, the intention purifies. Naturally, our speech and action starts to reflect that. Who we are in the world starts to reflect that. We can't stop that. But we can trust it, that wisdom really does that work.

This is where we use, though, the energy, the mindfulness, the samādhi, the collectedness—to keep noticing, to keep paying attention. So we have some choice there, some energy, some effort, but just to pay attention. And really trusting that wisdom opens by itself. And the manifestation, as we've talked about, of compassion or of equanimity or of muditā or of mettā—that shows up by itself as well.

There's one other aspect I want to explore tonight in terms of this path we're on, this mingling of our hearts and minds with the truth. It's the clear comprehension of purpose within the Eightfold Path, but also the recognition that while we can totally trust this process, it is also difficult. It's hard.

As the Buddha said, practicing the Dhamma is like swimming upstream against the main current of the culture. It was the same back then as it is now. We'll have our perceptions, we'll really have some wise understanding, some wise views, some purified intentions. We act from kindness, from understanding, but it's not always met. The rest of the culture doesn't necessarily stand up and cheer and say, "Yes, I'm so glad that you're here. You're renouncing that greed. Yes, I'm so glad that you've stopped acting in that way." It doesn't necessarily happen.

So what's really helpful is what the Buddha called kalyāṇamitta, or spiritual friend—really realizing that we don't have to do this path alone. We aren't on it alone. Here we are all together, and there are many other beings—and I'm not even talking about Buddha Dhamma here—but there are many beings here and in the world who are committed to understanding, to compassion, to honesty, to generosity, to all the aspects of how we are in the world, including wisdom.

We need to tune into how much we affect each other, in both wholesomeness and unwholesomeness.

Basically, who we are and who other people are is contagious in a way. We catch things from each other.

Part of being on this path is tuning into both truly wise, awakened beings and the aspects in each of us that offer inspiration. One of the reasons we tell stories about different people that inspire us—people who have done wonderful things or come to awakening—is because when I read about or think about any of these people, like the story I told about James Lawson the other night, it brings up such a deep sense of love, courage, inspiration, a kind of pīti, a kind of joy. That's really important.

You see, someone can only inspire us because it awakens those qualities in ourselves. So touching into inspiration is really important, but then we mustn't leave it as all being about the other person while we feel so unworthy. It can only be inspiring because those qualities are touched and awakened within ourselves.

This is why we talk about all these people—look for that in life, whether it's teachers, reading, listening to Dhamma talks, gathering with other people, articles in newspapers. I love reading about anyone like that.

But it works the other way too. This is why it's like swimming upstream. The power of the media is appalling to me—the power of affecting the mind. I remember so long ago when Iran went through their revolution and they held the American embassy people hostage for four hundred and something days. During part of that time, I was somewhere watching the news on TV every night, which I often didn't do.

The TV news in this country—and this is a personal judgment—really amps things up. It's sensationalist, playing on emotions with those little sound bites. It doesn't have much subtlety. By the end of two or three weeks of that, listening to the news every night, I was becoming terror-filled. I was convinced World War III was about to start. It was affecting my mind states and my judgments and how I thought and felt about things.

When I stopped watching the news, that level of fear and intensity also diminished. I could still read the paper, stay in touch with the news, but without that amount of bombardment. I saw then, and I see now, how much what we hear and see can affect us if we're not aware, if we're not mindful—how it shapes what we think, our mind, our heart.

Both wholesome and unwholesome influences work this way. I remember reading about a big nightclub fire in Rhode Island a few years ago. A lot of people died in it.

I read sometime later that a survivor said at first everyone was filing out quickly but orderly. And then this person said a couple of people really panicked, and their fear and their panic was so immediately contagious that everyone panicked. The reason people died is because they panicked—they were trampled, people couldn't get out the doors. How contagious that fear is, that panic.

Just seeing that, but then seeing that who we are in a wholesome sense, in a beautiful sense, is equally contagious.

In terms of kalyānamitta, in terms of inspiration, we both need to tune in to receive this inspiration from others, but also to recognize that who we are and how we live our lives, how we live our understanding—you're kalyānamitta. Often you're the one inspiring others, and you may not even know it, but it's just as contagious. And it doesn't have to be, as I said, you don't have to be Gandhi out there doing big things. Just in the middle of a conversation.

I remember a few years ago having a conversation with a very wise friend, but for whatever reason, she was in a mood and was just really sniping and putting down a mutual friend. And I just happened to have a moment of clarity—I don't claim I always do in conversations. It's so easy, isn't it, to fall into that? And then you feel kind of dirty and kind of bad later. But for some reason she was doing it, and suddenly I realized. And my moment of clarity was not to say, "What are you doing? Don't you know better?" That's not really so helpful. But I just slipped in something really positive about this person in a nice way. That's all I had to do, because she was a very wise friend. As soon as I did that, it stopped the whole flow. She completely stopped and turned around, and we went into a more wholesome and kind way of speaking.

It doesn't take much. It just takes clarity—understanding what we're doing, what's being fed in my mind and heart, what's being starved—and just to offer, just to be that wholesomeness, that goodness, that kindness. Not with any result needed, but just being that. You being the kalyānamitta, the spiritual friend to others at that point.

And I really feel like we can't wait till we're arahants, or we're St. Francis, or we're Gandhi, or Dr. Martin Luther King. We're going to do lots of stupid stuff—maybe you aren't, but I find I do lots of stupid stuff, lots of stuff from ignorance, from not such helpful motivation. But more and more and more, you're going to do a lot of kind, loving, wise intention, a lot of generosity, a lot of wholesomeness. Shine that out.

I really feel like it's our duty. Buddhadāsa used to say, "Dhamma is duty. Duty is Dhamma." I feel it's our Dhamma duty not to shrink away and say, "Well, I'm not good enough yet to say anything or do anything." I don't mean you have to stand up and proclaim the Dhamma in Hyde Park on a box. I mean just honoring your deepest motivation, tuning into it, and being who you are. Let your light shine, really seeing how contagious it is.

Sally was talking about the pāramīs last night, and really seeing how contagious those are. Generosity, for example—I really learned that from the times I go to Burma, which has been about once a year these last few years. Sure, there's plenty of really horrific stuff that goes on there in Burma, no question. But there's some way that mettā and generosity, in a very natural way, is a part of many of the people in the culture. Along with other stuff—I'm not trying to say it's all magic—but there's some way it's there. And it slips up on you. I know it's not just me. In the beginning, you don't notice it. "Oh, isn't that person nice? Isn't that person nice?" And after a while—"Isn't that taxi driver nice? Isn't that lady in the store? They're so generous."

A friend just told me they came back from a couple of weeks, their first time in Burma, saying, "My heart's

so full." This is what you come back with—your heart's so full. You can't pinpoint what it was. It's not like one amazing person, but generosity of spirit, generosity with things, generosity of kindness, just being so happy to see you. And whoever, if you go to see a friend and you bring along someone they've never met—

They're always welcome. There's never this kind of inclusion-exclusion dynamic. I've never run into it. And whenever I come back, no matter what's been going on, I'm happier. I'm happy from that generosity. And that happiness spills out of me and touches other people. Whenever I talk like this, I can see in the room people who've experienced something similar because their faces light up. That's the contagion. And it doesn't have to be Burma—I'm just using that as an example.

Someone told me the other day about how something one of us said reminded them of a really generous act they had done, and it brought so much joy. Don't sit on that. I don't mean you go around saying, "I'm the generous person of the ages, appreciate me." I don't mean that. But as Sally said, feel the joy and let it shine out. Because when you're generous and you're doing it from happiness, that's contagious and it spreads.

Another friend of mine came back from Burma and said, "I was just so filled. I wanted to spread it to the people I met. I wanted to keep that cycle going." Not in a conscious way, but it just spills over. It's a beautiful thing. I find that immediacy not so accessible in our culture, although we're all really generous. But there's some way we don't let the contagion of it out, or we don't appreciate it. So I just hope you can let that in and let that out—not just generosity, but mettā, compassion, sīla, non-harming conduct.

The Buddha often talked about the power of good friends, the power of our companions, how much it's catching. A friend of mine was sitting for several months, and she told me she'd noticed when she came back from that long retreat that when she was with people who were relatively pure—people who had pretty good sīla, pretty wholesome actions, who didn't engage in a lot of negative behavior—she felt it drew that out of herself. She felt more inclined toward that kind of purity of behavior, that appreciation, that subtlety, that honesty.

But when she hung out with people whose behavior was a little more muddled or a little less honest, or just a little more distracted—not evil or bad, but just choosing things that lead to confusion and distraction—she would find that it colored her consciousness, and she would more easily get drawn into confusion and distraction herself.

This isn't a judgment; it's just noticing how we affect and are affected by each other. Sometimes we're the muddled one, and we can look for friends who inspire us and can pull us in their wake a little bit, reminding us, "Oh yes, that's important to me." Other times we're going to be the clearer one, the loving one, the honest one. And not with self-righteousness, but just as a modeling, as a sharing, as a gift to your friends and the world.

"I don't think I want to do that right now." You don't even say it, but in your heart: "I just don't want to

engage in putting this person down right now." Or someone says, "Let's go out drinking," and you think, "No, maybe let's not go out drinking." Not saying, "You're so bad," but just, "No, let's not do that. Let's do this other thing instead."

There's a way that who you are—coming from your right view, from your understanding—begins to color your choices and actions. And that feeds back into purifying your heart and mind more and more. We begin to appreciate the wholesome more and more over the years of our path. Until we had moments of experiencing clarity, we didn't even know how murky it feels when our mind is clouded with wanting or aversion or confusion or doubt.

When we have those moments where that's not there—no fancy or great things going on, because then we get into wanting again—many people have said that just moments of quiet, of purity, nothing special happening, calm or not, and the heart just feels like it's getting cleaned a little bit. I get that feeling sometimes, like you've got Windex and it's just getting clearer and clearer, getting washed out in a nice way. And it's like, "That's nice." We incline toward it a little more. We didn't even know before that this was possible.

And that just naturally happens—our heart and mind mingling more deeply with the Dhamma just by itself. Because wholesomeness, compassion, wisdom, beauty—they naturally call us, they naturally inspire us.

Wisdom calls itself. Beauty calls itself. Compassion calls itself. And again, we can really trust that if we're willing to let it in. Just who we are is enough.

I heard an interview with Desmond Tutu—the archbishop in South Africa who was part of the whole reconciliation process after apartheid ended. He had been giving a talk in Boston, and I heard this little snippet where he was talking to some students from a really rough area, high school age or a little older, young men from neighborhoods with a lot of crime, a lot of guns and weapons, a lot of drugs.

He was telling them, "We're not born hating. We learn to hate." He was saying that really, goodness, love, wisdom—that's our truer nature. We learn to hate.

And one of the students said, "How can you tell us, in the midst of a culture of violence, where we grow up with violence, we need to protect ourselves—how can we learn to love?"

And he said this with so much force and emphasis. I could just imagine him really talking right to these young men. He said, with such emphasis: "You—you can make a difference. You, just like you are. One person can make a big difference. Start with you, right now."

It's powerful. Saying "not me, I'm not good enough"—that's delusional. That delusion that I'm not good enough is the delusion of the small, separate self. You can make a difference when you shine forth, when you let the truth shine forth in whatever way it manifests in your mind, in your body, in your personality.

Just let it manifest. You can't make it manifest, but we can allow it to when it comes up. Don't shut it down with our little thoughts of "not me, I'm not good enough, blah, blah, blah." Let it come out, because it's nothing to do with you, really. We're only getting in the way. Me, me, me—getting in the way.

I want to end with something that has been a little practice inspiring to me, again from Dilgo Khyentse, talking about—I'm just giving you a taste of it, because it's a whole huge Tibetan practice that I haven't done and don't have the right to be teaching at all. So I'm just giving you a snippet that's been inspiring to me.

He talks about Chenrezig, the bodhisattva of compassion, who simply manifests and embodies the great compassion of the Buddha, inseparable from vast wisdom. And he talks about empowerment where, in his words: "Through the blessing of Chenrezig's body, you perceive the whole universe as Chenrezig. You perceive all matter as Chenrezig's Buddhafield. Through the blessing of Chenrezig's speech, you perceive all the sounds in the universe—the sounds of water, fire, wind, the cries of animals, human voices. Any sound is the reverberation of Chenrezig's own voice, the voice of compassion. Through the blessing of Chenrezig's mind, you experience all thoughts as a display of awareness, as Chenrezig's own mind. Through these blessings of Chenrezig's body, speech, and mind together, you realize that in reality, body, speech, and mind are not three separate entities, but are Chenrezig's one nature—voidness and compassion, inseparable."

Play with that. Imagine every thought is just the manifestation of Chenrezig's mind. Every thought, every sound, every sight is just Chenrezig speaking or manifesting in form or making sound. It's a lot harder to get upset at things. I was playing with this on a self-retreat once and it was really interesting. Just all thoughts, all experiences, the manifestation of Chenrezig—compassion and emptiness—all here teaching me in a way. It really changes something. The union of compassion and emptiness.

As Dilgo Khyentse says: "What you might formerly have perceived as evil and obstructive forces, you then see as manifestations of the bodhisattva of compassion, through which you strengthen loving-kindness and compassion. In this way, suffering fades away, and the negative forces, obstacles, and difficulties actually serve you to make progress on your path."

Let's end with this from Nisargadatta: "Once you can say with confidence, born from direct experience, 'I am the world, the world is myself,' you are free from desire and fear on the one hand and become totally responsible for the world on the other. The senseless sorrow of humankind becomes your sole concern."

And from Rumi: "On a day when the wind is perfect, the sail just needs to open and the world is full of beauty. Today is such a day."

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