Shifting The Paradigm

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:21

So tonight I want to talk about changing paradigms, or stepping out of samsara. We wish.

Last night James spoke so beautifully about the Buddha saying that he taught suffering and its end. He asked, with a show of hands, how many people here actually come to practice because of suffering, somehow wanting to end suffering, to be happy. And of course I said in the metta meditation that I led that the Buddha also said it's our natural birthright, really, to be happy.

The whole point of the meditation, though, is that this understanding of suffering and happiness starts to change, hopefully begins to change. What we think when we come into beginning our practice, and what we may think as we go along—usually we don't even realize what we think—as to what happiness is and the way we go about trying to achieve that and to end suffering, doesn't work. Just as it doesn't work in our daily life, the same motivations, the same understandings that we have in our daily life, of course we bring to meditation, because that's how we see the world.

And when the meditation really starts to light up, take fire, start to cause us trouble—when everything's exploding and falling down on me today—that's when it's getting good. Because that's when the ways that we unconsciously hold our assumptions about who we are and what the world is and what happiness is are starting to show that they're not working. And of course we don't like that, so we're suffering. But that's really where the rubber is starting to meet the road.

I'm sure you know the very famous quotation from the Buddha in the Dhammapada, where one translation is: refrain from the unwholesome, do good, purify the mind. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas. This is really essential, and especially what I want to talk about tonight is this last one: purify the mind.

This is essentially the whole work, the whole point, the whole thing that meditation practice, that spiritual practice is about. Whether you want to say purifying the mind, or understanding what pure mind and heart is and how we get seduced away from resting in the natural possibility of pure mind and heart—either way, that's really the place where the whole practice lives: what's going on in the mind.

And this is radical. Even though we may agree with it intellectually, it doesn't really do us any good. Don't believe me. Look and see for yourself.

Again, this is very famous from the Dhammapada, the first two verses. This is Gil Fronsdal's translation: "All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. All experience is preceded by mind, led by

mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind and happiness follows like a never departing shadow."

Mind, heart, citta—translated into English it's the same word. Guy kind of likes the translation "psyche," our whole sense of what's happening in consciousness and awareness in a moment. The whole seed of happiness and suffering is not at all the suffering that the Buddha is talking about when he's teaching what suffering is and what the ending of it is. As James said last night, we're all going to experience pain, we're all going to get old. If we don't get old, it's because we experience greater pain first. Things are going to go wrong. Stuff happens. The Buddha wasn't teaching freedom from that. But he's teaching freedom from suffering, and the suffering and the freedom from it is all what's going on in the mind, in the awareness.

And this is radical, you know? It's really saying that that's where all our practice is, that's where all our interest, our investigation, our growth, our freedom lies—in this insubstantial, nothing you can hold on to, changing every single moment, mind. And all of our focus on what we like and what we don't like, on our practices and what we're getting in our life and how we're living and our personality and you name it—it doesn't make any difference whatsoever. Whatsoever. It's radical. Freedom and suffering is all in the mind, all the work of the mind.

And really, in my experience, all the different meditation techniques, in various ways—I'm not going to go into that tonight—but in various ways, they are ways of accessing, recognizing the purity of mind or heart, as well as recognizing how we get seduced away from the purity of mind and heart, how we tend to take refuge in what is a corrupt mind. There's no great translation that we feel good about for that word. But corrupt mind basically means when the kilesas, the corruptions, the defilements—forms of greed, hatred, aversion, fear, or delusion, confusion, not knowing, not recognizing accurately—when some form of any of those mental factors arise and pass like everything else, present in the mind, the heart, unrecognized, unseen, that's what he's referring to as a corrupt mind.

Unseen, unrecognized, it leads to how we view the world, our perceptions, our thoughts, our explanations of the world, our views, what we believe is true, the assumptions we make without even knowing that they're assumptions, and then the decisions we make, how we act, how we relate to ourselves, to our own experience, to others.

So I think this is why in the Noble Eightfold Path, the path we follow of practice, the first step is wise view, wise understanding. Not, of course—it's the first step, so it's not totally, completely purified understanding, obviously—but a sense of just beginning to tune in, to notice how we understand the world, how we understand ourselves or experience, because this is so key. Not that we have to change it, but we just need to know, to recognize, to get interested, just to begin with, in the assumptions, the attitudes, the views we have about ourselves and the world. And these are what are so challenged, really, by dharma practice, by spiritual path.

I sat a retreat with Ajahn Sumedho here at Spirit Rock this past summer, and in a group interview—I forget what we were talking about—he always talks about trusting or having confidence in receptive awareness, natural awareness, which I love the way he talks about it, and I use his language a lot.

But anyway, in the interview, somehow we both just kind of fell into it together. It was a kind of transmission moment where we were both simply feeling it, falling into that sense of purity of awareness, to say. And he just kind of chuckled and said, "It's really the opposite of everything we've ever been taught, isn't it?"

And it's true. It is.

Now, that doesn't have to be a problem once we recognize what we're believing and what we've been taught. We don't have to dump it, but we can just have a little space around it. Just maybe have the sense: maybe this isn't the only possible way.

Just a little example of how our assumptions and our views color the way we describe and explain the world, a little story. I was just in Burma, and we were staying at a meditation center with Sayadaw U Tejaniya. We had brought in some money, so we were doing a lot of very formal offerings of food and rice and this and that in different locations. Maybe I'll talk more about that later.

But it's a very photogenic kind of thing. Every time you're doing offerings, someone's taking photos. And most of the people love to have their photo taken and see it. So I was taking photos and two of my friends were as well—three different cameras. Then one of the friends put her camera on the other friend's computer and she was looking at the photos. Several of them, quite a lot actually, had these kind of circular bright spots in different places. There was one that was all over the lungi I was wearing.

My friend who had taken the photos has lived the better part of seventeen years in Burma. She's a nun there, so she's very much in the culture. And the Burmese culture is a Buddhist culture, very traditional Theravada Buddhist, with a strong sense of faith in the traditional Buddhist teachings, which include different world systems. So right away, she thought, "Wow, those are devas." Not that those are actually devas, but the reflection of the devas' energy.

My other friend, who was on the computer, is also a nun, but she was a scientist with a very scientific mind. She just looked at me and rolled her eyes, then said, "Of course there's some kind of moisture in the camera," and offered all these explanations.

Then they brought Sayadaw in and he was looking at it and laughing. I really don't know what he thinks, but he started teasing us all about the devas and how I was bringing devas with me. Anyway, yesterday I looked at the pictures from my camera on my computer and there they were.

Who knows? Who knows? But it's just—we don't have to know. We can simply see in each case that it's a very complete worldview explanation of what it is.

So the first attitude that it's very helpful to bring to our practice is that willingness to not know. Just the willingness to not know. If we could just keep meeting each moment of experience with "I don't know"—what should happen, what this means about me, how it could be better, how my practice is going, how it compares to last retreat, how it compares to the instructions, how it could be better, yada yada yada.

Oh, this is Sayadaw Tejaniya's language: "It's like this." That's all. Burning is like this. Self-judgment is like this. My breath is so tight, I can't stay with the breath for two seconds after all these years of practice. Judgment is like this. Nothing to do or change or fix. No need to construct a story about what it means.

Oh, we almost can't stand it. We want the story, we need the story. Where would we be without the story? Who would I be without the story? Even though—how often is the story a suffering one? How often? Still, though, it's my story. And without that story, it's like, "But... what? Can't be... what?" You know, I have to have some certainty. I have to know.

When we can just begin with that very first attitude, just that sense of not knowing, the willingness to just rest in this moment as it is without needing to add anything to it—that already is cutting against our lifelong habit of wanting, of disliking, of it's all about me, me, me. You know that very clearly.

Let me see what Sayadaw Tejaniya said about this, if I can find it. He describes it kind of pithily.

He says the automatic habit of our mind is that we basically spend every day of our life as sense objects come in and out. And you know sense objects—the six sense doors are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling or sensing with the body. And the sixth sense door is the mind, mental objects. So that would be thoughts, emotions, mental factors like, say, concentration. It's not an emotion exactly, but it's a factor of mind. Wisdom. Ignorance, greed, love—mental factors coming and going.

We've spent every day of our life as the sense objects come and go: like this one, don't like that one, like this one, don't like that one. It's just automatic. Notice sometime when you're just a bit relaxed, just noticing your mind, not trying to control it, not trying to focus. Play with it sometime. When you're walking down to the dining room, or walking through the dining room as you're lining up for the meal, and you're not trying to make your mind do anything—just notice, as you're with the process, how the mind tends to relate in each moment.

It may not be so clear, but I've really noticed it in myself. I'll walk through the dining room and my mind's going: like, don't like. They look nice, they don't. Recoil, go forward. This is pleasant, this isn't. It's not that clear, so we don't notice it. But it's basically forward, back, forward, back. Eh, not worth noticing. Forward, back, forward, back. Eh, nothing. Forward, back, forward, back. And then the next minute: what does it mean about me? What does it mean about me? It's exhausting, for one thing. Exhausting.

And then we see it's exhausting, but we haven't stepped out of the paradigm. We see it's exhausting, we decide it's stupid, so we hate it. Right? That helps. That really helps a lot. But that's the kind of staying

within the same paradigm and trying to meditate from that. We bring this liking, not liking, it doesn't matter. Liking, not liking, I don't care. Liking, not liking, it's all about me. We bring the same orientation to the meditation. And then we wonder why it's a struggle.

Because really ingrained there—and I know maybe I'm making it a bit simplistic just to talk about, but I don't think it's untrue for being simplistic—that's why we can laugh. It's good you can laugh. That means there's a little space to see, oh, it isn't always that way. But it's so deeply habituated that when something is slightly pleasant, the mind experiences something as slightly pleasant—that vedana, the second foundation of mindfulness—and without awareness, this habit of liking, disliking, just the liking, wanting, leaning forward ever so slightly, just naturally kicks in.

And it feels so familiar that it feels just natural, doesn't it? So of course I like what's pleasant. Don't tell me not to like what's pleasant. And then it goes off into whichever way your mind wants to go with that. Unpleasant—not even painful, just slightly unpleasant—that subtle recoiling, the subtle not liking, the subtle preference for the pleasant, that's just natural. And as Tejania says, we're practicing that ten million times a day, our whole life. Of course it feels natural.

And then so-called neutral, or something that doesn't make much of an impression—we often just don't notice much at all, or we go off into a story. Or the third way—so that's greed, hatred, or dosa. I like the Pali word that's usually translated as hatred, the second of the kilesas.

The Pali word is *dosa*. I like to use that personally much better than "hatred" because it's broader and not so charged. *Dosa* means not just hatred—it includes hatred, fear, or even just that subtle recoil of not liking. *Dosa* in the mind.

As I get into talking about how our practice is really not about changing experience but just getting interested in watching what's going on in the mind that's observing, without judgment, it gets fascinating. If I'm noticing what's in the mind and I recognize self-hatred, and I label it "hatred"—if somebody walked across my path and I note "hatred"—then right away the mind goes, "That's disgusting. You hate that person?" Well, I did. But if I note "*dosa* in the mind"—oh, *dosa* in the mind, okay, I can be with that.

This is just a sense of how language is actually very interesting to explore. How often the words we use can carry a huge charge or a lot of associations that we don't quite realize. We can end up in a struggle, and if we shift the words—oh, *dosa*, I can be with that—whereas "hatred," that's a whole story about me.

The third one, delusion, as I said, is kind of spacing out, not noticing. But the actual way that I notice delusion that is much easier to notice is the confusion, the misperception, that sense of me, me, me. It all refers back to me. This is basically the underlying corruption, confusion, defilement, *kilesa*—whatever word you want to use—that keeps the other two going.

Because who wants the pleasant? Who likes the pleasant? Who wants to be happy? Who's recoiling from the unpleasant? It's all about me. If there was no reference back to me, pleasant and unpleasant would

come and go—well, they do anyway. But pleasant and unpleasant would come and go without it being a problem.

The deep view, which isn't wise view but the view we so often hold of life, is that pleasant equals right, good, happy, and unpleasant equals wrong, mistaken, unhappy, suffering. Even though I talk about this until I'm blue in the face, my mind gets into that habit still a lot. I'll be suffering in terms of feeling like I'm in contention with something that's going on. I can just feel that sense of struggle. It can be subtle—I don't even know what. But as soon as I feel it, I just stop a minute. I don't have to be on retreat; it could be anywhere. Just stop a minute, not trying to figure it out, but just kind of checking what's going on in the mind.

And almost always, when you see something the mind is pushing away, it's almost always a little on the unpleasant side. There's almost always some sense of: it would be better, or it would be right, or I would be happy if this was gone and this was here. Or if this didn't go away and this never came. It can be really gross, like James is saying—we get into just piling up pleasant experiences, whoever gets the most pleasant things strung so closely together that there's no gaps, wins.

We laugh. We know that's ridiculous, right? On some level, we know. We all know things are impermanent. We see the fleetingness of *vedanā*. How long does that pleasant feeling last? Like that.

Ajahn Buddhadasa, who was a wonderful Thai forest meditation master—both Guy and I were at his monastery, Suan Mokkh, when he was there—he would talk about the fleetingness of pleasant feeling. So just notice: if you really start noticing pleasant and unpleasant, just the feeling tone, how long does it last in a moment? How long? Put that pleasant-tasting food on your tongue, and if you're really just with the pleasantness, for me it lasts about a tenth of a second. There's a burst, and then I'm just masticating kind of tasteless food, and the mind is reaching for the next pleasant, right? Why do we overeat? More, more, more, more.

Whatever it is that we do. The pleasant, the pleasant, the pleasant. How long does it last? Not much.

And he says—this is Buddhadasa again—"Just look at all the decisions you've made in your life. See how many of them, your major decisions, were based on going for pleasant feeling." You know, "If I do this, then I'll be happy." But you can't stop at happy. What does that mean? I'll feel good. Things will be nice somehow. We'll get all the furniture arranged on the Titanic just perfectly so that we're happy. We can spend our whole life doing that.

So these are really, really deep habits. It's really quick. And sometimes, yes, pleasant is pleasant. There is gratification in the pleasant. Sometimes people get confused because they say the Buddha says even pleasant feeling is dukkha, the first noble truth. So how can pleasant be dukkha? Pleasant is pleasant. I like it. I'm happy. I do feel good. I like it better when I don't hurt than when my knee is killing me. I like it better when the food tastes good than when there's something I'm really allergic to. So how can you tell

me that's dukkha?

But dukkha means unreliable—can't be counted on for any kind of lasting satisfaction or happiness. So there is gratification in the pleasant, and that's often how we get seduced.

The other aspect of the view—and again, I'm really simplifying—is to look in your own experience at what the views are of what brings happiness, what brings suffering in your own life. Not just the conscious ideas, but the ones you really act on, the ones you really take refuge in in times of stress when things aren't going the way you want.

So for instance, the idea: everything comes and goes, it's impermanent, knowing this is the way to peace. Okay, that's a nice thought. Is that where you really take refuge? Absolutely the knowing, when something difficult is happening? We can't kid ourselves. We might try, and that wisdom on the intellectual level can be helpful. If something's difficult and we think, "Oh yeah, it does change, things do change, everything's impermanent," that might give the wisdom to just relax into what's happening. So that's true. That is, in a little way, taking refuge in it.

Really taking refuge in it is absolutely knowing it's impermanent. We just open, it comes, it goes. But then notice, like I say, the times that it slips in underneath. I think I'm just being with what is, but ever so slightly—or not so slightly—I'm leaning towards "it just has to feel good." It just goes down. It's so embarrassing, really. You just want to feel good, for God's sake. It's just so simple. I don't want my back to hurt. I want to be able to feel good about myself, so I want to have some really deep, concentrated, unitive states. And it sounds like so that I can really know anatta, and I want to know anatta so I can feel good about myself, like I'm getting somewhere in my practice. And then I don't have to struggle so much, I can relax. It slips in, it slips in.

Where was I going with this? Oh yes, the third aspect I wanted to mention of the views we may hold is again that sense of me—that sense of me as a separate agent, either being acted on by experience and circumstances and environment and others, or being the agent that's doing the acting. As in meditating: I'm doing the meditation. I'm focusing on my breath.

In a conventional way, of course, this is true. I'm not saying we should lose the sense of who we are as compared to other people, or awareness of our effect on the environment. But deeply held, it's such a strong assumption, such an ingrained felt experience, that it's on the level of not even knowing that it's possible our perception might perceive things in another way.

Often it can happen in meditation—an experience where there just isn't that sense so much of me and other. And it doesn't have to be some huge blowout experience. Sometimes people are just focusing on the breath or just being with pain, and suddenly, boom, something opens up. Just in that moment—it could be vast, it could be focused—but there's simply no sense of me and other.

And very often in that moment, the next thing that comes is a really strong fear. Then people come and

say, "I got afraid and I ruined the moment." Again, immediately we own it. But the fear is just that sense of, "Whoa, this doesn't fit the paradigm. I don't know where to put this." In the moment itself, it's actually not suffering, it's not scary—it's just kind of the next moment. But that reaction is just a habit: "This isn't me and others, safe, safe, protected."

Our mind doesn't really like when these deep views are challenged. So when you're feeling in some way uncomfortable in practice or in life—not killer uncomfortable, not overwhelmed, not like you're going to go crazy—but a little uncomfortable, a little fear, that's not a bad thing. Let it spark curiosity: "Oh, this is interesting. I'm kind of interested. What's going on here?" Don't think about it too much, but get interested.

So how does this work? It's obvious, but I'll bring it into meditation terms. These habits are so deeply habituated that of course that's what we bring to meditation. We do something in order to achieve a result. That makes sense. We don't do something for no reason. If we said, "Come here for a month and work really hard for absolutely nothing. Nothing will change, you'll be just the same before as after—you won't really be the same because you're never the same, but really it's not to get a single thing"—even if our mind might say "cool," really deep down we wouldn't show up.

Why do we come to the hall? There are times when you come just to be in the presence of the moment. And that's sublime. That's wonderful—that sense of nothing to do, nothing to have, nothing to be. We love those moments. And then we turn it into something to try and have again the next time, the next time, the next time. Because that's what our mind trusts: "That was right. That was good. That felt pleasant. Now I've got it about how to meditate and know not-self. How can I keep it?"

You see how they come in again? It just comes in again—the wanting of pleasant, the fearing of unpleasant. It's all about me. And the "all about me" also tends to mean I then have to do it. I have to figure it out. I have to do the meditation correctly in order to purify my mind.

Even that language—purify my mind. How many of you, either consciously or not, have felt this: "Oh, my mind is impure"? How many of us start to kind of own it: "Corruption in my mind." Or, "Yeah, of course my mind is corrupt. It's infinitely corrupt. There's no way this mind could ever be purified." Instead of seeing that none of it's personal.

These habits—the greed, the dosa, the confusion, the me-ing and I-ing—it's just the nature of mind. When pleasant comes, the unaware mind just leans towards it. It's just nature manifesting. It's normal. It's natural.

It's not the only way, though. Actually, the mind in a moment that's just open, relaxed, accepting, willing to just be without knowing, without having to make a story, without needing to judge or recoil—that also is really natural. But mostly in our daily lives, in our busy lives, that's not the quality of pure mind that we notice so much. It's not the one we've been trained to see. As Sayadaw was saying, it's the opposite of everything we've been taught.

How many of you were taught to notice that in school? How many of you were taught that in a moment when you're just sitting, someone would say, "Oh, that's great! You're just sitting there really present and aware without trying to impress, without trying to get it right. Just being awake. Wonderful." How many of us was that ever even pointed out as a possibility?

Much more in our culture we need to do, we need to achieve, we need to have some kind of result in order to confirm ourselves or to have other people confirm us, to have a sense of doing okay, of existing.

So taking a simple meditation experience, we can see how the mind moves so quickly. Say you're just sitting and you have a pain. Okay, that's no big deal. Pain in your butt, pain in your knee—it doesn't really matter where. In the normal course of things, the pain comes up, it might be recognized, and there's just that little pulling back right away. Our tendency is, even in meditation, to keep on focusing on the pain and not to so much notice, not be quite tuned in to just that quality of the knowing. So you don't quite see when that simple "oh, this pain is like this" turns to recoil.

The pain gets more tight. And immediately, what we perceive, we think about: "Oh, this cushion is so hard. Why didn't I bring that soft foam cushion? I can't believe I forgot that ear pillow that I always use. How am I going to bear another three and a half weeks of this? And besides that, that person next to me is making so much noise moving. How can I possibly come to any kind of peace?" And then you start self-chastising and wanting and the whole thing, right? Just in that amount of time.

And at that point, which has taken no time at all, how can you even know what's actually happening? In that moment, that pain has obviously become a block to peace, a block to meditation, a block to ease. It's not really questioned—it's just obvious.

Maybe you've heard this from Sogyal Rinpoche. This is a process of reaction and thought. We get into so much confusion by letting ourselves get lost in whatever happens. You project a thought: "Oh, this pain is unbearable." Then the second thought believes the first: "How will I ever last two and a half months?" Then a third, fourth, and fifth thought are projected. The first thought is by this time already a reality. "This pain is unbearable." By the time the tenth one comes, it believes the fifth thought has always been an actuality.

And we just wonder why we don't actually recognize the true nature of peace, the true nature of the heart-mind of non-clinging. Why don't we even recognize how available, how accessible it is? Because we're all caught up in our stories, our projections of mind. It just happens so, so quickly.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya, again talking about how this works, said that when we look at pain, it's natural that this dislike comes up in the mind. That's just kind of a natural expression. But when there's aversion in the mind and we don't really see it, how can you understand what's happening? He uses this example all the time: If you're angry at someone and you keep on looking at that person, what happens to the anger? Does it stay the same? Does it get worse? Does it get better?

Does that person suddenly transform into incredible beauty? No, you know, when you're annoyed at someone and you keep looking at them, it just feeds the whole thing. The annoyance gets stronger. And that's what happens when we're with pain or with anything else and we don't notice the aversion in the mind. We can't recognize accurately when the mind is reacting—we need to see that, otherwise our perception is distorted. The aversion colors our whole experience.

So when we're talking about impure mind, so to speak—the mind colored by greed—greed is like thirst. It's this "I've got to have it" kind of energy. It's not the same as a wholesome wanting to do good. The word "wanting" in English covers a wide range of mental states that aren't actually the same. The Pali word *lobh a*, which we translate as greed, really refers to this thirst, this leaning forward, this "I have to have it," with the promise that this is going to make me happy. It's a truly deluded kind of state.

When we talk about it coloring the mind, let me try to explain. Andy Olenski, who is the director of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and a Pali and Sanskrit scholar, loves to examine the quality of mind. *Ci tta* is the word I'm using, translating as mind or heart. He says that in Buddhism, the mind is not a subject—it's not some thing that has objects as content. Rather, *citta* is the activity or process of cognizing, a flow of events.

You could think of *citta* as a moment, though even describing it as a discrete moment is just a way of talking. It's a moment of activity. My friend in Burma once described how she always thought of *citta* as this little round thing—a moment of consciousness with *mettā*, or delusion, or wanting, or concentration inside it, like little bubbles, like cartoon bubbles over someone's head. But really, mind is something else entirely. It's a moment of consciousness with various mental qualities arising together with it. There's no "in" or "out" of it. There's no consciousness here and then you over there that I'm cognizing. It's all arising together.

Consciousness—that moment of *citta*—includes the *viññāṇa*, the sense consciousness, the seeing or hearing. It includes whatever mental qualities are arising with it: attention, mindfulness, *mettā*, greed, hatred, confusion, whatever wholesome or unwholesome mix is present.

So in U Tejaniya's example, there's a moment of consciousness arising, and the object being cognized is painful sensation—unpleasant, strong, unpleasant sensation. Immediately with that, there's a kind of flinching back, the aversion. And when it's not recognized, the aversion just colors everything. It's like a dye. It flavors that whole moment of consciousness. From within it, the aversion colors how we think, the conclusions we draw, how we relate to that experience. "Of course I hate this pain. I have to do something about it. My knee's going to break. I need to go to the hospital. Of course that's normal."

When I was recently in retreat—a light retreat—I had the same experience with craving. I was just doing some walking meditation, and craving came up for something. I don't even know what it was for, but there was this sense of wanting an object. Then the next moment of consciousness really noticed the craving with interest, not with aversion, and I was seeing how from within the craving itself—this is why

it's so seductive—the quality it lends to that moment of mind is this promise that "this is really going to make you happy." It just feels like you could slide into this and everything's going to be okay. And it colors everything.

From within craving, even if the mind can say, "I know this—maybe it was a hot shower—isn't going to make me happy forever," that's just a little voice up here. But the craving in the moment is so powerful—it's its very nature to promise. As one yogi said to me during the three-month course, "It's this empty promise, but we keep believing it, the empty promise."

Sometimes, even when we start to see that getting this object or having this experience isn't going to do it, and we think we're renouncing, we just renounce one object for another. We don't see that it's really the belief in the promise of craving that needs to be seen through. It's not even that we have to stop craving, because that would be aversion.

Meeting craving with aversion isn't really any better. But to just really feel the seduction and simply be watching it. Just watch it. "Yeah, I get this." And feel the whole thing. Then watch it fade away. And keep on watching and notice—oh, this is a moment of clear, pure mind-heart. This is a moment of non-clinging. This is just a little bitty taste of the peace of the Buddha.

What the promise of clinging really is—when we get the thing, the clinging stops and we're at peace. As long as we're focused outward on experience, on objects, on getting, and we forget to turn around and notice what's going on in the mind, then we're just going to stay in this endless circle of samsara, of getting and wanting and trying and doing. But turning around—oh, craving is like this. Nothing to do about it. It's so much more simple in a way. Craving is like this. You don't have to hate yourself for craving. And certainly don't expect it to stop—that would mean you're an arahan if it stops. So cut yourself some slack. But be willing to simply recognize: craving is like this. Dosa—that's my favorite—is like this. This has been really, really important for me. It's like this.

Then it may not be any of those. It may just be hearing, seeing, smelling, pain, quietness in the breath, jaggedness in the breath. "What should I do? How should I meditate?" Worry. It's like this. That's Ajahn Sumedho's language.

The real work of meditation is not so much about getting any technique perfect, acquiring an experience and holding to it. All the techniques are just to help us turn around and notice what's going on in the mind. And in that noticing, the steadiness—the steadiness of noticing and its continuity—of course we space out, but the intention to be steady, I cannot say enough how key that is. Because in the long steadiness of mindful awareness, wisdom arises naturally.

Like that example I gave of seeing the craving—that's just a little piece of pañña, wisdom arising. Not "Oh, craving, I need this," but rather, "Oh, wow, look at the nature of craving. It's like this. It's an empty promise." It doesn't seduce when you see that. And there's a moment of purity, a moment of peace. That

didn't come because I decided I had to cultivate a moment of wisdom and get to peace. It came because there was simply: craving's like this, wanting's like this, peace is like this.

Thich Nhat Hanh has a great line. He says understanding—paññā, wisdom—does not arise as the result of thinking. It's the result of the long process of conscious awareness. The long, steady, ongoing process of conscious awareness. Sometimes understanding can be translated into thoughts, so we have an insight and think about it a little bit. But often thoughts are too rigid and limited to carry much understanding. The main point I wanted to make there is that understanding arises as a result of just the long, steady process of conscious awareness.

And conscious awareness doesn't care what the object of awareness is. That can be so incredibly freeing. Because it really means we don't have to be so worried or controlling about what is arising in our experience—how focused I am, whether I'm experiencing bliss or pain, whether I'm thinking, whether the quality of my fantasies is really disgusting, whether I'm still sleepy. Awareness doesn't care. A long process of conscious awareness. Sitting, walking, eating. Of course you space out.

I'm not saying that. But the willingness to not be so entranced by the objects, by what's happening, by our reactions to them, and to just get more interested in the mind that's observing—this is the key.

This is from Wang Po, who was a Chinese Chan master: "This pure mind shines forever with the radiance of its own perfection. But most people are not aware of this. They think the mind is just the faculty that sees, hears, feels, and knows. So blinded by their own sight, by their hearing, by their feeling and knowing, people don't perceive the radiance of the source."

As Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche says, most of our life our attention is turned out, out, out—to other people, to experiences. Or even when we're here in meditation, it's out in a way to how is the breath, how is the sensation, what's happening in the experience, how can it be better? Turn around and notice the mind that's noticing. And in that, the natural state is actually non-clinging, is actually peace. It's just important for us to be willing to recognize that. "Honor" is perhaps too fancy a word, but just to acknowledge those moments when there's wakefulness, sense of presence, and no big pushing, pulling, or "me-ing" going on. It could feel sublime. It could feel just kind of neutral. It could be peaceful. It could be alert. It could last for a while. It could just be for a second. It doesn't matter.

As Ajahn Buddhadasa says—he calls this voidness, voidness of sense of self—generate a contentment with voidness. Just notice it. Because when we bring to our techniques of meditation, whatever technique we do, when we do it with what Tejaniya calls right attitude, which is a mind that is just willing to be with what's happening with the intention to understand rather than to judge—or to use Ajahn Sumedho's language: "Oh, frustration is like this. Hating my practice is like this. Aversion to the sound of that person stomping up the stairs and hating their guts and writing a letter to the management is like this"—there's nothing that awareness can't notice.

And when you say, "I don't know, I can't figure out what's going on in that confusion"—it's like this. You just step back. To me, actually, I quit trying to name it so precisely when I realize I'm all caught up trying to figure it out. I just get big. Oh, dosa. Wanting. And that's plenty, because it's moved the entrancement from involvement with the object to "Oh, what's going on in the mind that's aware?"

And so our meditation is really—all our techniques are really—about helping us tune in more to both the mind that's confused and suffering and the moments of mind that's pure, that's peaceful, that's non-clinging. It's about access to freedom and recognizing and trusting that potential. It's not always having to be some incredibly deeply concentrated state. It doesn't have to come from some incredibly breaking-you-open anatta experience.

Again, as Buddhadasa says, we all experience many, many moments of this voidness every day. Every day. Just notice. And then notice the next moment: "Aha, 232 moments of voidness." Okay, that's a moment of being. "Okay, another moment of being—7,256,000 moments of being." But it's not, luckily, about numbers.

Luckily, one of my teachers years ago said, "A spark of truth burns up a mountain of lies." And it's true. That's why just a moment of insight is just a shift of perception, stepping out of that limited view, out of the assumptions we don't know we have, and just seeing in a different way. And that has far more power than the amount of time the mind spends in that perception. It just breaks something open.

Many people have talked about insights they've had—some sense of real anatta or some sense of really knowing impermanence. They say, "Well, it's not here right now, but there's a way I can access the memory that isn't just intellectual." It's really like we can kind of re-remember, viscerally, cellularly: "Oh yeah, you know." And that's a useful thing, because we spend plenty of time re-remembering the other way. So that's actually very helpful.

So our practice—we use the techniques. We need to focus sometimes, because how do you watch the mind? How do you even know you have a mind? You're talking about noticing pleasant and wanting. How do you even know that you're here in this room, never mind these subtleties we talk about seeing?

So sure, sometimes we need technique. We need to be with the breath or the body or hearing to bring in some focus, to bring in some stability. We might deliberately talk about opening and being with changing objects. We use technique—but not to perfect technique and not to achieve experience. Technique is just a way to ask, "Oh, what's going on in the mind?" It's like we get more interested. Almost like we fall in love with awareness, rather than being so in love with experience. In fact, love and devotion is sometimes a wonderful way into this opening. We'll talk more about that another time. But learning to trust it is really huge. Really huge.

And this is what we call cultivation of mind. So purify the mind—that doesn't mean get out the pickaxe and start digging away at the aversion and the clinging and start judging yourself. It's not personal. None of it's personal. We're just watching how nature manifests. When this happens and there's no

mindfulness, when the mind is wanting, this is where it goes—into clinging. But when all clinging is like this, that awareness is always available. It isn't dependent on deep shamatha or samadhi. It isn't dependent really on anything except remembering. And that's why the continuity is so helpful. First we just remember, "Oh yeah, oh yeah," and then it starts to take on a momentum of its own.

So just a couple of things, a couple of hints in practicing in this way, to make it seem not so esoteric, hopefully. The way Sayadaw U Tejaniya talks about being aware of awareness, often that can sound like something really esoteric. We're looking for awareness to be aware of, and it can really get very frustrating—and also become a kind of infinite regression.

So I just want to share the way he talks about it, which is incredibly simple. Someone says to him, "I don't know how to be aware of awareness, I don't know where to put my attention." He says, the mind cannot be found anywhere. Trying to find it is a futile exercise. It's like trying to find your glasses when you're actually wearing them. The mind isn't something you can take hold of and look at. You're getting confused because you're looking for something other than what is there—sort of like my friend looking for the mind, the citta, some kind of thing, some bubble you can get hold of.

So this is his example for awareness of awareness. He says to this person, just put your hands together like this. So try it, if you can bear it. Just put your hands together like that. Okay, can you feel the sensations where they touch? Yes? First, how much effort does that take? Not a lot, right? Just feeling the sensations.

Okay. Now, do you recognize that you're feeling the sensations? Don't double-think it—just, do you recognize you're feeling the sensations? Stay simple, for the love of God. Yes? Okay. That's awareness of awareness. How hard is that? You're aware of the sensation and you know it. That's awareness of awareness—not looking for a thing. Just awareness of awareness, very simple.

So he says, don't try hard to look for awareness. You relax and see that it's already there. We find being aware of the mind difficult only because we lack practice. So that's what he's talking about—being aware of the mind. It's not that hard, right? So when we're being with the breath, or being with the sound, with whatever—there's hearing.

When you know that you're hearing, that's awareness of the awareness of hearing. The next piece is that this just becomes more natural. That quality of effort that was there when I asked, "Do you feel the sensations and know it?"—it doesn't have to be a really precise, driven focus, just a relaxed recognition. That's the quality he talks about maintaining.

Now, the other important piece of this is twenty-four seven, not just once in a while. Once in a while, as we always say with continuity, when it gets difficult or we space out, you don't see change. The steadiness is what allows for reality, for nature to reveal itself, for wisdom to arise.

So in the in-between times—in the walking, in the sitting, in the eating, in the yogi jobs, whatever—sometimes the mind might be more focused and really precise, other times not. It doesn't

matter. The key is just this remembering, remembering yourself.

So you're trying to be mindful and feel and do the pots, and you're getting all lost in the mind's irritation. That's it. You don't have to go in there and take it apart and see the pleasant and the unpleasant. In a sitting, in a quiet time, yeah, that might reveal itself. Other times, it's much more general. But it's not the object that matters. It's that knowing. Just that awareness of knowing.

And as we go on with that, it gets a little momentum itself, and then when there's aversion in the knowing or wanting in the knowing, it actually becomes more and more obvious. So then it moves from knowing the sensations to knowing wanting. Fine, fine, fine.

And in this way, it's the same with the samādhi. It's always just like this. It's not about trying to make it different. It's not about meditation as a way to confirm myself, as a way to make myself feel better, as a way to get somewhere. It's just this sense of shifting the paradigm, stepping out of the habit of experience and liking and disliking and having experience make me happy and confirm me and getting somewhere and putting in effort to achieve a certain result and me doing the doing—to just recognizing nature's happening all the time, awareness is happening, noticing it.

It really gets to where—oh, aversion in the mind?—I feel happy to notice that. There's just this sense of ease of noticing whatever it is that's happening. Life stops in these moments. I'm not saying it's steady state, okay? But notice, just like Buddhadāsa says, generate a contentment. He says with voidness; I'm saying with awareness. Awareness that's with right attitude, awareness that's just this being with what is, not driven by wanting, by striving, by aversion—generating a contentment with that, almost a love of it.

And then whatever is happening, whatever is happening, is our practice, is our door to awakening, is a door to non-clinging, the heart of peace. Whatever is happening, there's no way your practice can't be good enough. Because it just doesn't matter. Awareness can meet all of it.

That quotation from Sayadaw—I wanted to end with it: when something arises in consciousness and it's seen with awareness, seen as "it's like this," that breaks the habit of self-referencing, of judging, of clinging. So any experience can introduce us once again to awareness. It's always available. That's the miracle of mindfulness, as Thích Nhất Hạnh says.

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