Shifting Paradigms

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 53:14

to talk about what I call stepping out of samsara, just momentarily. But that's good—momentarily is good.

One of my current teachers likes to say all the time that meditation is the work of the mind. It seems obvious, but sometimes we forget. We get so caught up in trying to make things happen. By "work of the mind," he means, as the Dalai Lama says, that all happiness and suffering begins in the mind, in the heart. The word we're using, *citta*, for mind means both mind and heart in the Pali language. It's not a differentiation that's made.

His example makes this obvious: happiness and suffering begin and end in the mind. If you're in a really depressed space or you're in grief, you could be on the most lovely vacation of your life. You could be in a wonderful situation, and you're not really happy. You don't enjoy it. The external circumstances don't necessarily bring happiness.

And the reverse—again, this is obvious, but we forget it—when you're feeling balanced, feeling good, or you just fell in love and things are great, something difficult could come along and it doesn't fluster us the way it might at other times. We might notice that in passing, but we might not really quite remember or see the radical nature of this.

The text for the talk this evening is a short one that I'm sure most of you are familiar with: those first two verses from the Dhammapada, from the Buddha, saying, "Mind is the forerunner of all states." Other translations say, "Mind is the forerunner of all things. With our thoughts we make the world. Speak or act with an impure mind, and trouble will follow you as the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart. Mind is the forerunner of all things, of all states. With our thoughts we make the world. Speak or act with a pure mind, and happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakable."

I actually think this is a really radical and profound statement, pointing to the real nature of what we are, what creates happiness, what creates suffering, what creates our whole idea of the world. I wanted to talk about that a little.

I deliberately chose a translation that used the words "impure" and "pure," which are not always words that, at least in this culture in the States, we really vibe to. We don't like to think of ourselves as impure. It brings along a certain negative, aversive quality. But in these terms, it's very specific.

Talking or acting with an impure mind simply means—not so simple, maybe—but what it means is a moment. Just a moment. Remember, don't stretch it out into past and future. Then it gets untenable, unbearable, overwhelming. We realize that it's always only just this moment. So we think or act with an

impure mind in this moment—this simply means a moment of consciousness, of conscious knowing, that is colored by the qualities of craving, clinging, of aversion or fear. Hatred is the kind of shortcut term for that. And the bottom line: confusion, delusion—it's all about me.

When consciousness is colored by one or more of those qualities, and not recognized, it's as if our awareness is looking through greed-colored glasses, me-colored glasses, hatred-colored glasses, not recognizing that. So focused outward, through the greed, through the hatred, through the confusion, we're speaking or acting. And all it creates, basically, is trouble and confusion.

We don't always tend to get that. It feels so normal and natural. I hope it doesn't—I hope you're not agreeing with me. But in my experience, the reactions of desire, that clinging that says "I've got to have," of aversion to what's unpleasant, of the discontent Rodney was speaking about—both of which are founded deeply in the sense of me. There is no desire or aversion without the sense of me in a moment. That can be so frequent, so familiar, that it feels like it's just normal.

When we don't stop and look at it, the impure mind feels like the normal thing. The pure mind, which is simply a moment of conscious awareness that isn't colored by greed, hatred, or delusion, can seem like some ideal, really far away, because we're so impure and disgusting. We start looking at how frequently wanting or aversion or discontent arises—which is what I would call noise when Rodney was talking about it. Not every thought, but these reactive qualities. They can seem so frequent, and we get so caught up in relating to them, that the ideal of a pure mind becomes something to strive towards. Our practice can turn into a striving, effortful activity based in either aversion or greed, trying to get me to be pure.

That's never going to happen from that motivation, from that intention.

So what I'd like to look at is this: how about if we open our minds to the possibility that these habits of relating to experience, to objects, to the world—from wanting and greed toward the pleasant things, from pushing away and aversion and discontent when things aren't the way we want them, to having it all be about me—

What if those are simply habits? They're not actually the norm. They're not actually the place that we can rely on. They're not actually needing to be our deepest refuge. They're natural in the sense that it's just nature—when we're perceiving inaccurately, we respond in this way. And if we don't learn how to look more clearly, if we don't learn that, then we keep acting in these same ways because we don't really recognize that they're not working.

So what if our practice is not about trying to get out the pickaxe and dig up all the impurities with aversion? "Let me get rid of that greed, get rid of that aversion. I'm here sitting two days and all I see is how much aversion is arising in my mind, and I've got to get rid of it. I've only got six more days." And we forget to notice what the attitude in the mind is right now. Ah, that's aversion.

What if that's all we have to do? What if it's not my job—since I'm not the center of the universe—to

control every mind moment and make sure nothing difficult arises? What if all we have to do is shift the perspective, shift what we notice, from being so engrossed in the object—the breath is calm, my mind is filled with aversion—to simply the knowing of what's happening? Aversion feels like this.

What if that's actually the norm? What if that's actually all that's necessary to begin to recognize, to land in, to trust what Rodney called the silence, what I would call from this text the pure mind or heart? What if that's actually more natural to us, but we're just in the habit of not recognizing it?

You know how the Buddha often spoke about his teachings, even back then, as going against the stream, like swimming upstream against society. That's obvious; I don't think I need to go into that so much, although it's different from twenty or thirty years ago. Thirty years ago, when I would go on these long silent retreats, if I was sitting next to someone on a plane and they asked, "What do you do?" and I said, "I teach meditation," that usually ended the conversation—unless they were a fundamentalist Christian, and then I was sorry I ever said anything.

But nowadays, if I say that, most of the time people are really interested. They have no real understanding, of course. They say, "Oh, that's what I need to do. I need to relax and just be happy." That's what they think you're doing. They have no clue. But the attitude is one of interest. Still, it's not really the norm in society.

More important than that, though, is what I want to talk about tonight: moving upstream against the habits and views in our own hearts and minds, the way we've been taught to view ourselves and the world that we don't even recognize.

This particular aspect of how the mind works really fascinates me—how the way we think, how our thoughts construct the world. And when we reiterate those same thoughts, those same views, or when everyone around us holds the same view, we don't even realize that it's a view or a description. It's just how it is. These views might be useful, so it's not that we dislike them, but just to know: this might be a view.

Let me give you a small example. I was in Burma in January with some friends, and we were going around to different nunneries and villages, giving dāna, doing various things. There were several of us, and you always take pictures, so there were lots of photographs. When we were back at the monastery where we were staying, one of my friends—a Swiss woman who's been a nun there for seventeen or eighteen years—had taken some photos with her camera, and we were looking at them on the computer. On some of them, like one of me on my skirt and on other people in other places, there were these perfectly round, bright light things appearing in different spots.

So this friend who'd been there for seventeen years, and who's really become very Burmese—it's a very faith-based society, you know, in the Buddha's teaching—immediately said, "Oh, these are devas." She totally believed they were devas. She called us in: "These are devas!" She went to the senior teachers: "These are devas!"

Then another friend there, also a nun, but her background is as a scientist—she has a PhD, she's a real scientist—immediately said, "Those aren't devas. That's just some moisture that collected on the lens."

Well, you know, who really knows?

So I thought it would be interesting when I got home, because I had pictures of a similar time and people from a different camera, to put them on my computer and see. And the pictures weren't exactly the same, but on some of them there were these round circles.

Now, is that devas? I don't know. But I'm bringing it up because what I love is that space where we just hold open. Who knows? Not just saying, "Oh, that was a world of devas. What? That's so crazy." But rather thinking, "Who would have thought? Oh, maybe that's a possibility." Just maybe there are many different explanations for things, for phenomena in the world.

So rather than focusing on the explanation, we can get familiar with that inner feeling of openness, of not knowing. The willingness to meet experience in any moment fresh. So not just noticing the experience—the sight, the sound, the smell, the taste, the touch, the thought—but also the quality in the mind that's being aware of the experience.

We can notice the aversion, but we can also notice that quality of open presence—without being colored by me-ing, by hating, by fearing, by wanting. Awake and present, without judgment, without assessment, without knowing. That allows for reality to reveal itself without our unknown views twisting our perceptions to meet what we think.

Do you get a little sense of what I mean? I'm just playing with that.

In terms of how the habits of the so-called impure mind work, how easily in a moment the impure—I'm just going to keep using that word, I even cringe a little from it—but the habit of wanting when something's nice and we think it will make us feel better. The habit of judging, of pushing away when something's unpleasant or makes us not feel good or makes us feel bad about ourselves. The habit of, as Bhikkhu Bodhi says, trying to keep the delusion, the illusion going that everything revolves around me.

You might not consciously think that if you were challenged, but just start to notice as you go through the days, without judgment, with interest. Notice just the kind of thoughts that come up. Not every thought's going to be about you, of course, because actually—this is a secret—we're not really, each of us is not really the center of everything else in the world. There actually isn't really a solid us that's not changing.

But it's a trip, isn't it? Each of us here in this room, say there's a loud noise that goes on. Each of us can have our own reaction, and it's about me. "Who made that noise? It's affecting my meditation. Why are they doing that?" Or, "Oh, no, I'm really cool. It's not bothering me at all. My concentration's firm." Or, "I can see, oh no, my concentration isn't good." "Why is that person—so glad it wasn't me!" "It was me, but I hope nobody noticed."

All of us, with our own little story, from pleasant, from unpleasant, from liking, from fearing, from "what does it mean about me?"

So what if that's just a habit? We can learn to put our reliance, our trust, on the pure aspect of heart and mind.

I read a book recently about the practice and philosophy of nonviolence. I want to share this part from the introduction because I found it interesting in terms of how we look at things, how we language things, how the thoughts we use can really affect our perception in quite deep ways. Anyway, it hit me that way.

He's talking about just the word "nonviolence." In that word, the main aspect that attention is drawn to is violence. The "non" is just a negation. So the main concept you get from that is violence. And he's talking about how, in terms of it as a philosophy, nonviolence is actually a very active, proactive, engaged approach to situations and to life. But when one hears "nonviolence," it just tends to feel kind of passive, like you just don't do anything. It doesn't really do justice to that quality.

He says it's not just in English. In Hindi, for example, *ahimsa*—it's the same thing. So he said, just play with the idea: What if the only word for war or conflict were "non-peace"?

Doesn't it just change a little bit, the whole idea? Non-peace then—in that, peace becomes the norm. The thing that we're used to. Non-peace becomes the aberration.

So in the same way, as Ajahn Amaro likes to say, what if the peace and ease of the mind and body is the *na tural* peace and ease of the mind and body? What if the pure mind that isn't contracted in response to situations with greed, with fear, with me—what if that natural peace and ease is actually the reality, the norm? What if the habits of the so-called impure heart and mind—of greeting, of needing, of aversion, of making it all about me—what if those are actually the aberration? What if we could begin to recognize, begin to trust, begin to give our interest more to the recognition of the natural peace and ease? Not as some distant thing that's going to happen in fifteen years and then never change, but as something momentary, momentary, momentary. What if we really gave a lot more interest and trust to recognizing those moments, that possibility?

I actually think that's a huge part of our practice, of our path. Meditation isn't really about creating some steady state, whether it's concentration or choiceless awareness. It's not about me creating some state out of forcing some wisdom and holding on to it. You can't hold on to anything. But it's really about allowing us the space, the quietness in the mind and heart, to recognize what's always available when we stop being so entranced by our reactions, by the reactions of mind.

So the natural peace and ease—notice it. I talk about this a lot through the days. It doesn't have to be a big deal. If you're waiting for the big blast of unified bliss that's going to really shake your world and you walk out of here a different person, I'm not talking about that. Maybe that'll happen. May it be so. Maybe it won't. But if we're waiting for that, then everything else isn't good enough, is it? Everything else is just

more samsara.

Instead, recognize simple moments when you can tune into the awareness, to the knowing of whatever's happening, and the mind isn't in reactivity, the heart isn't in reactivity. And you'll see it doesn't matter what the activity is or what the experience is.

Take sitting in meditation and being with the breath. Sometimes one is with the breath and you feel it quite easily. Sometimes one is with the breath and it gets very refined and subtle. Then all of a sudden that becomes very tight and tense. So what if, just in the moment that you're feeling the breath—it's not super concentrated, it's just easy, no big deal, you don't get into some story about how wonderful the breath is, there's just a sense of being present with it—what if then we could not give so much focus to the breath, but just notice how that peace and ease in the mind and heart feels? It's not really a physical feeling, but we just start to recognize it more.

In the walking meditation, sitting on the toilet, drinking a cup of tea, standing out and hearing the birds—generally we might tend to notice it more frequently, or in the beginning, with pleasant things. But it's not about pleasant things. It's got nothing to do with pleasant things. It can be when you're sitting there and your knee is just killing you, and you're fighting and struggling, and then there's just that moment where it's just sensation. The moment where it's just sensation, before you go into, "Wow, I'm doing so good, it's just sensation." The moment when it's just that—if you can notice how the natural peace and ease manifests.

We learn to recognize it, recognize it more and more. You see, it's not some really abstract, far distant thing that we have to create. We can't create it. The act of trying to create is actually what hides it. Not that it's an "it" that's sitting here, but that in every moment, every moment of what we call mind—Andy Olinsky, who's the director of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, a Pali scholar, and I like the way he says things, talks about describing what we call mind.

He says the mind is not a subject, not a thing that has objects as content. I know it can sound like that—the mind that has aversion sitting there as content, or peace sitting there as content. And we think of the mind as a steady state. It's not that. It's an activity, the process of cognizing, the process of knowing a flow of events.

So when I'm talking about a moment of mind, a moment of *citta*, it's as if—a simple kind of description—it's a momentary arising of the quality of consciousness, of knowing, of cognizing. Arising and passing, moment to moment. There's no steady state there. So it's birthing and death in every moment.

And in any moment, that process of cognizing—so for instance, right now, I'm seeing. I'm seeing all of you. It's a moment of seeing, that cognizing. Coming with it in that moment are whatever qualities, whatever factors of mind are present. So that could be a moment of calmness and liking. It could be a moment of

greed. It could have a sense of me—how do I feel? Or sadness or joy. Any of the qualities of mind come with it. You see what I mean? And that's fine. That's just how it works. And every moment is new.

What I love about that is when we begin to not get so focused on the object. Say, back to that knee. When you're sitting and there's pain, and if it's pain you're trying to be calm with, but it's pain, it's tight, it's tight, it's tight—and you're not noticing the momentary arising of the known, you don't notice that it's colored with aversion. You keep looking at the pain. The aversion is getting stronger and stronger, and meanwhile you don't notice that.

But because it's arising, the cognizing, the knowing is arising every moment, the stepping out of *saṃsāra*—what I'm calling this—is always available. As soon as we go, "Oh!" It's as if we turn around or widen our field of awareness and include the aversion. Oh! Aversion. Aversion. I know I make it sound so nice. I know it doesn't feel so nice. But even recognizing the aversion, that's a shift. That's a new moment of knowing. And it can really be that there's aversion, and the next moment of knowing it is really a moment of peace and ease. And we don't need to fix it. We don't need to get rid of it. We just need to recognize, "Oh, this is aversion. Aversion is like this."

Ajahn Sumedho—you probably must know who Ajahn Sumedho is—he uses that languaging a lot, and I love it. Really, what we're learning to do is not be so interested in whatever's arising and all our reactions to it, and how do we feel, and what does it mean, and how is the breath, and how calm is my mind, and am I getting concentrated, I'm still superficial, I'm not deep—all of that. Or in life, anything.

Instead, we get more interested in what's the quality in the mind that's aware. And it's like a Tai Chi move, sort of. "Oh, I'm like this and how can I get a better job?" Oh—discontent is like this. In that moment, "Oh, it's like this." That's moving our trust, our reliance, into the awareness, into the knowing. And that's always available.

When we're mucking around, liking and disliking, me and what does it mean about me and how can I make it better—we're overlooking the natural peace and ease.

So a big part of our path, really in some ways all of the different forms of meditation, are about setting a foundation to help us recognize the pure mind, natural peace and ease, and to support us to continue to shift the paradigm, to realize that that's more the norm rather than falling back into our reactions. And as Rodney was saying last night, it's very subtle. It doesn't matter how long we've been on a path.

It's very subtle and tricky, this sense that it should feel good. It should make me feel good about me. It should somehow fulfill me—some sense of achievement, some sense of getting somewhere. It can get more and more subtle. It's hard for us, and this is the shift, this is the moving upstream against society, against our own habits, to say that it really, really, really doesn't matter what's happening. The point of the meditation isn't to get some particular experience. There is no experience that lasts more than that moment. There can be varieties within it, and sure, some experiences are nicer than others. Some

experiences help to cultivate calm. Some experiences cultivate aversion. There's all the skillful means we talk about.

But none of the skillful means are useful if the attitude in the mind with which we try to carry them out is impure. All the skillful means in the world, practiced out of aversion, cultivate aversion.

So when I say it doesn't matter what's happening, can we learn to trust enough the natural awareness, the quality of the natural peace and ease? That no matter what's happening, we can just recognize, "Oh, it's like this. It's like this."

Sometimes that's not so hard to do. Sometimes it's so hard to trust it—even when you know, even when you really know deeply. For myself, when I'm really caught up in something, my mind can be pretty clear. I'm really looking very carefully at my experience. But a particular suffering personality pattern may be coming up, a sense of identification with something. Or I may be having a memory or a plan or some discussion I had, some relationship thing, whatever. And it comes up with a strong pain or a strong sense of me or a strong sense that I need to do something about it. It comes up with some oomph, right? You can notice the oomph. You're aware of the oomph. "Oh yeah, oomph." Maybe that's not the way you name it, but it's like this.

But it keeps on going.

To have that radical trust that the practice is—"Oh, totally caught up in hating this and needing to fix it"—is like this. And that you don't need to do something about it. That the wisdom actually arises by itself through the steadiness of this non-violent, non-interfering, but very present awareness. That's really hard to trust because we think we have to do. That's what we've been taught.

Just to sit and notice and say, "Well, it really doesn't matter what's happening"? Where does your mind go with that? "Well, that doesn't make sense. It doesn't matter what's happening? Why are we busting ourselves sitting and walking and being quiet and following the breath and noticing calm and all of this? They tell us all this stuff and then they say it doesn't matter. It doesn't make sense."

It doesn't really make sense. Not in the way we think of sense.

Because the bottom line is this: once the mind is pure, we speak or act with a pure mind, then all the skillful means make sense. But when we're speaking and acting really caught up in the wanting, in the aversion, in "this is about me," we can meditate till the cows come home with strong, vigorous effort. And I imagine many of you have done this. Just meditate your heart out. Rising, falling, lifting, placing, noting, noting, breathing, silence—until you just feel like you're going to snap in two. "What am I doing wrong?" You can be incredibly mindful, noting every single sensation in your breath, in your leg, every movement in your mind. And I've done this, believe me. I'm not speaking theoretically. And it's just getting tighter and tighter. I'm talking weeks now, months on retreat.

I'm not just talking a couple of days. I'm noting every single damn thing that's happening, no matter how quick. And it's getting tighter and tighter and tighter. Because what? I'm not noticing the attitude in the mind that's meditating.

In that particular instance, the attitude was "not good enough." I'm not good enough. I have to try harder. But another way striving manifests is through wanting—you know, "I want enlightenment. Enlightenment or bust. I will feel this breath." And you're really sincere. You're putting out tremendous effort. It's actually too much effort. But you're looking through the red glasses and not seeing them. That's what we've learned, and you can press like that and create experience. Absolutely. I know—I've done it. And experience can be useful. It's not like it's bad. But it's so hard to trust, to really trust, from that place.

I just have to notice the attitude in the mind. What's happening right now? Right now. Right now. Gentle. Relaxed. Around the clock—you know, continuously. Not every single moment, but it's like, okay, just remember yourself.

This quality of effort that my teacher describes—he often says, "If you don't mind doing this, if you can't bear to move, then don't do it. But if you don't mind, just put your hands together." Can you feel where they're touching? Yes? Not too tough, right? Pretty easy. That quality of effort. That quality of effort.

It's actually not daunting, not difficult. It actually becomes, as Rodney keeps saying, "Have fun"—it does become enjoyable. Because we're just noticing what's the quality in the mind and the heart right now, without judgment, without needing to say it should be different. Just noticing.

So part of our practice is really learning to recognize and trust—and more and more be able to trust—the pure mind and heart. And the other half is recognizing when there's so-called impure greed, aversion, or confusion in the mind. But as soon as we recognize them with interest, without judging, without taking it personally—it's just how nature is—"Oh yeah, that's wanting." Maybe it was five weeks before I noticed the wanting. Maybe it's a second. But it doesn't matter. As soon as you notice the wanting, that's all that needs to happen. Over and over and over. You don't have to get rid of it. You don't have to blow it up. You don't have to do something to yourself to never want again. Just notice.

And when that trying to make everything better, trying to make me better, trying to achieve some end, goes away—even just for a moment—"Oh, I'm completely knotted up in pain and aversion. It's like this." Stuff stops being such a problem.

You go through the day and it's not like you have to make yourself pay attention as some onerous duty, because it gets interesting. Because we stop judging everything that happens. "Oh no, I did that walking, it wasn't good enough, I was thinking, and then—okay, I've got to try it again." I wonder why I hate walking meditation, you know? Instead, we might say, "Oh yeah, there's a lot of thinking. Thinking's like this." Or, "I'm really not enjoying this at all." Not enjoying's like this. It really doesn't matter.

So you're just noticing, with that gentle but persevering quality of attention, what the attitude in the mind

is that's noticing. And don't make a big thing about it. Don't turn around and look and go, "What's the attitude?" It's not a big deal. Sometimes it's just calmness. Sometimes it's just peace. Sometimes you don't notice. Fine. Then notice the breath, the body, the thought—whatever is predominant.

As soon as it starts to be a problem—something's a problem here—that's kind of the sign. Oh, okay, check out what's going on in the mind. A very easy way to see is as you're sitting, as you're walking, as you're eating, as you're showering, just to notice: are you wanting something to happen? That's wanting. It's not any big subtle thing. Are you wanting something to stop happening? Aversion, fear. Or do you not actually have a clue what's happening? And sometimes we don't. "Oh yeah, I'm meditating, I'm here at Gaia House." But I would add to that: is it all about me? Whatever's happening, is it all about me?

None of this is with judging—it's just with interest. Just with interest. Let interest do the work, not wanting.

So in meditation we're learning to recognize and trust just those moments of is-ness, of purity, of natural peace and ease. It's natural for all of us. It doesn't only come with deep concentration. Just notice it. Trust it. Really learning to trust your own insight, your own connection to truth. No one else can give that to you, but no one else can take it away either.

And then really getting interested in and recognizing how we get seduced by these habits that obscure. I want to talk a little bit about playing with recognizing and noticing a couple of the strong habits, particularly craving and aversion, because they're so strong. Also, in terms of early days in retreat, you know how the so-called hindrances—I really don't like that word, hindrances to concentration—but difficult emotions come up. They come up anyway, but they come up really strongly in the first days of a retreat. Different ones of us have different ones that arise, and they can just take us away.

So the specific of craving is really sense desire, and the second one is aversion or ill will. Not just a moment of aversion, but you really start hating everyone, everything's wrong. Or with sense desire, you're just sitting there: "I could have this for lunch, I could have this for dinner, I wish I brought a different pillow, I wish I had a different room..." I have a friend who used to fantasize about his wardrobe. If he had a shirt he liked, he'd fantasize about getting it in five different colors. He'd spend hours in sittings doing this. On that level, we're in the hindrance of sense desire—just a little over the top.

Then there's sleepiness, tiredness, sloth and torpor, dullness. The fourth one is the flip side of that—the mind's just spinning, spinning, spinning. We're all thinking a lot, but I mean spinning with some kind of obsessive worry, where your body energy is really restless, where you feel like you want to jump out of your skin or run screaming out of the hall.

And what goes with most of those is doubt.

Doubt usually manifests as thought—doubt in yourself, doubt in the practice, doubt in the time. It can also just be a wavering, an indecision. Should I be with the third or the fourth way of being with the breath?

Which one is helpful for me? Is the breath helpful for me now, or is it better to be with the body? What works for me? Joseph said see what works—but what does it mean, "what works"? That's doubt.

And especially when it takes the form of thinking about the practice. Then we think we're practicing, but we're just thinking, thinking, thinking. That is so much suffering, I tell you. But to recognize any of the hindrances—oh, that's doubt—just don't go too far down that road. It's like they say about the donkey between two bales of hay: it can't decide which one to eat from and starves to death. So if you're like, "Is it the body? Is it the breath? Is it calming the breath, the helpful one? What's that third one? If only I could remember that third one, that's probably it"—drop it. Just feel the damn breath. Feel your body or your butt, it doesn't matter. Just connect with something that's happening now. That's actually the antidote. That's all I have to say about doubt.

But I was going to go into craving, desire. I just want to say a word about the word itself, because in English, the word "desire" or "wanting" covers a wide range of mental states that in the Pali language these teachings come from is more specific. And Joseph is going to talk a lot about that, I think, whenever he talks tomorrow, so I dare not go too far into it or my name is mud.

But I just want to say that when I'm talking about craving, *tanha*, it's a particular quality of mind and heart. "Thirst" is the closer translation. "I want this"—you can almost feel the contraction around it. And so there could be what we would say in English is desire. "I desire to take care of my children." You say, well, that's a good desire. Actually, I was going to say I hate that framing—that's not really helpful, is it? But that's how my mind works. I don't think it helps that we label this a good desire and that a bad desire. That just perpetuates this way we have of looking at the world in terms of good and bad.

But desire, *tanha*, as a form of *kilesa*—torment, impurity—it's not about what the object is. It doesn't matter. It's about that quality of thirst. So that thirst could be for pizza. That thirst could be for enlightenment. The thirst could be for anything. But say you say enlightenment or taking care of my family—that's a good thing. Yeah, it is. And one can have an intention, a kind of willingness to do that which we might call desire in English, but which isn't that thirst. Do you see what I mean? It's this thirst that blinds us, that keeps us locked onto the object, that keeps us in *samsara*.

Because the thing with craving is it has this promise—it's so seductive. The wanting, we tend to overlook it, but doesn't it have that seductive quality, just whispering, "If you can only get this, you'll be happy"? I mean, it's not so obvious, because we can hear that it doesn't really work. But still—just this next calm sitting, or if I had a sweater, or if this pain wasn't here, or if I had a new job, or whatever the heck it is.

The seduction of craving is precisely this: when I get this thing, I'm going to be happy. And we don't tend to look at the craving itself—we look at the thing, the object, whether it's a mood or a physical thing or whatever. When the thing actually happens and the craving goes away, there is natural peace and ease. But we don't tend to notice the natural peace and ease. We notice we have this thing and we're happy. We impute it to the thing. We impute it to the state. We don't recognize that the peace and ease is what's here

simply because we're not clouded by craving in this moment.

But then the seduction continues. We start to feel dis-ease again because craving comes up. Well, okay, now I have this, but what about the next one? So what we need to do is simply start to look at how craving itself feels in the mind, in the body.

I was recently having a discussion with some friends about the quality of craving, about this promise it carries, and how when we really look—really look—we can start to see the suffering of craving. But when we don't look, we don't notice it. This friend said, "Well, it's like this"—and this is a person who really likes cookies. The person was saying, "You know, there's the craving, but then I get the cookie, so this isn't really suffering, right?" We get the craving and then we get the cookie and it's all fine. And then the craving comes and we get the next cookie, it's all fine.

So I asked, "Okay, but then what about when you don't get a cookie?"

"Oh, but I always get the cookie."

That's samsara. That's why we keep on spinning it. We always get the cookie. And if it's not this cookie, then the mind is really good at thinking up something else to hide that we didn't get that cookie. That's how we stay spinning. Samsara actually means this round of birth and death, of wanting and dying and wanting and dying, moment to moment. And when we don't stop to look, we think it's making us happy. You stop and look and it's unbearable. So then we don't want to look anymore because it's unbearable. So we go back to, "Okay, never mind, I'll just keep getting the next cookie. I don't have to deal with it too much." It's what they call rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. But at some point, the Titanic's going to go down.

But we don't have to wait for that point. Because when we actually can just know—oh, wanting feels like this. Honestly. We really just recognize: wanting is like this. Next time you're doing walking meditation is a good one for this, because if there's a thing you want, in walking meditation there's the illusion that you could stop walking and go get it. So in sitting, at least there's social pressure. But if it's wanting a state, you can't make that state happen, so then it's clear that the wanting is suffering—but not really clear, because you tend to jump over it and just say, "Oh, I'm a useless meditator," and then you go to aversion.

Try it in walking. Wanting comes up. Maybe you just want to stop walking. You want to hear the birds. It doesn't matter what you want. And there's nothing wrong with the thing you want. But see if you can just do that Tai Chi move: oh, wanting is like this. Notice how it functions in the mind and the heart. That's all. Not with judging—with interest. How does it function? Notice if there's a feeling in the body that can help us just stay present with it.

Just keep on noticing. Keep on noticing. At some point—I promise, I'm not saying how long—but at some point, it will go away. Because everything goes away. Stay really present so you can notice it gone. Don't just jump to the next thing. Hang out there and notice the gone-ness. Notice the gone-ness.

And the same applies for aversion. Just notice the gone-ness. That's all. Maybe there's a natural peace and ease. Maybe it's just that much of a moment of gone-ness and the mind whips up another one. Playing with this really starts to shift our relationship to experience.

At this point, whatever's happening is interesting. Whatever's happening—even wanting, even aversion, even me-ing—is a doorway to recognizing peace and ease. You don't have to get rid of it. *Oh yeah, wanting is like this.* At that moment, we've stopped being so seduced by the object. Wanting becomes the next object. And the mind is simply aware of it. Awareness can be with anything.

The same applies to pain—physical, difficult sensation, but also emotional, or a sound that's bugging you, whatever. When the mind is really balanced, the attention can be with that unpleasant sensation, and it's fine. But as soon as you notice reactivity or tightness in the mind, don't give so much attention to the sensation. Notice the aversion, the fear, the pulling back. That's fine. There's no saying you have to bear it. We're not here to cultivate aversion. We're here to cultivate awareness.

So when you're aware—*ah, aversion is like this*—at some point you may need to pull back, because we don't want to just cultivate aversion. That's a skillful means. Then when the mind is balanced again, when you're in touch with awareness again, the difficult thing may arise. Can you really be present with it?

The whole thrust of the practice isn't to last through things, but to get more and more trusting in recognizing: what's the attitude in the mind right now? That's the effort we put in—to really trust the steady, non-judging process of awareness.

This non-judging process is really radical. Martin Luther King said, in terms of non-violence: "Non-violence means avoiding not only external physical violence, but also internal violence of the spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a person, you refuse to hate him." That same level of pure, kind awareness, non-judging awareness with whatever is arising in our experience. Non-violence. Active presence. But that gentleness—*it's like this, it's like this, it's like this*—steady. We learn to trust that the wisdom, the deeper seeing, the subtlety, it arises by itself when we are willing and able to trust the steadiness of this non-judging, gentle awareness. It's really manifesting active non-violence.

I want to end with something Gandhi said. He invented a word for non-violence that was more active: *saty agraha*, which translates as "truth force." I like to think of our awareness practice as truth force. It's really about honesty. In any moment, the knowing mind arising, and a willingness to be totally present and truthful with whatever is. It's almost like we learn to love the awareness without reacting so much to whatever is happening. And then whatever is happening becomes the doorway back into natural peace and ease.

One of my teachers said to me—actually a really tough teacher—he said, "You know, there's nothing you need to be afraid of, because awareness can be with anything. Awareness doesn't care."

In that way, you really can enjoy your practice, your life. Practice and life—same, same.

Let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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