Simplicity of Non-Reactive Mind

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 59:51

Tonight, what I mainly want to speak about I think of as simplicity—simplicity of being—or alternatively, the silence of the non-reactive mind, taking off from Guy's talk last night.

When I talk about simplicity or the silence of the non-reactive mind, I don't mean the simplicity or the silence of no thoughts, of no perceptions, of nothing happening. Not that we have to get rid of anything, but the simplicity of non-complication. As Guy spoke about last night, an example of that simplicity would be that moment of resting between vedana and tanha, craving. But it doesn't have to be just that little moment. There's the sense of non-complicating.

I think freedom of heart, freedom of mind really is a matter of simplicity. As we've been saying over and over, the essence of awareness is just the simplicity of being with things just as they are right now—nothing added, nothing taken away.

At least in the way most of our minds and culture seems to work, the trouble with simplicity is we're just not used to it. Our minds are obviously rather complex. The world is complex. We're used to complexity. Just look at how the body works. Pick any system of the body. Pick the whole structure of science. The more we know about science and the more science comes to be the trustworthy reference point in our culture—and the way I was trained in school, though I'm no scientist—the complexity of systems is endlessly fascinating. Of course, if you follow the complexity all the way down, it breaks up till everything is connected. And if you keep following the complexity of physics all the way down, which believe me I have no clue about except what I read, you follow it all the way down and you end up with nothing. There's no there there. But mostly, we're seduced. We're fascinated. We're just entranced by the complexity.

I loved what Guy said last night on how the Buddhist teaching is really about our condition as human beings, the quality of consciousness of our own minds. From that point of view, the complexity we get seduced by is the complexity of our thoughts and our personality. We're continually seduced, fascinated, entranced by this seemingly endless—nothing's endless—this endlessly renewable energy source of thoughts, over and over and over, and personality. We can get lost there. So the simplicity is not perhaps quite what we know how to recognize or trust.

There's a word in the Pali, *atammayatā*, which I've liked for a long time. Ajahn Buddhadasa, who was in the last century one of the most well-known Thai forest monks and scholars—and for the Thai Sangha, he was a little bit radical, the most radical who could stay within it in terms of scholasticism—he called *atam mayatā* the ultimate Buddhist concept. It's a concept, still a concept. What it basically translates to mean is

"not made of that," which is like non-fabricating, non-concocting, not making something out of anything. Non-identification is another way of saying it.

But it's the experience, that sense of the simplicity of heart and mind in the moment, just in a moment prior to the subject-object duality concept arising—or maybe that doesn't arise at all. Just the simplicity of just this, without a me, without an other, without a subject perceiving object. Just this. That utter simplicity, that silence. Not made of that.

I like the word concocting, but I know if English isn't your main language, you probably haven't heard that one. It means fabricating, making something up, constructing something out of nothing. You get the drift—concocting.

So a lot of what Guy spoke about last night, what he pointed us to, was the silence of the simplicity of heart and mind in a moment that is not fabricating, that's not concocting. But also, as you know, we spend a lot of our time in awareness exploring not only the simplicity, the silence, but also from the simplicity we can notice how the fabrication occurs. And then it simply becomes another thing that we don't have to fabricate on top of—if you know what I mean. You don't have to go into infinite regression about it.

This fabrication is the mind going out and creating a reality about any perception, any experience. And it does this endlessly. It's in *The Island*, but before that book came out, I saw a little pamphlet from another Thai forest Ajahn, Luang Por Dun. He was a disciple of Ajahn Mun, who was in the last century this very fierce, very revered Thai forest monk, the teacher of Ajahn Chah and that whole lineage.

So this Luang Por Dun—this is his reformulation of the Four Noble Truths, and it fits the way I'm thinking tonight. He says: the mind that goes out in order to satisfy its moods is the cause of suffering.

The mind that goes out in order to satisfy its moods is the cause of suffering. That's the second noble truth. The result that comes from the mind going out in order to satisfy its moods is suffering. That's the first noble truth. The mind seeing the mind clearly is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The result of the mind seeing the mind clearly is the cessation of suffering.

Don't try to remember all of that. You get the drift. The mind that goes out is basically making all the problems. And the mind seeing the mind is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. He didn't say the mind that hates the mind, the mind that gets rid of the mind, the mind that deadens the mind, the mind that stops functioning. I didn't hear anything like that. The mind that sees the mind clearly is the path to the cessation of suffering. And so that's our path here. That's what I want to talk about tonight.

The mind that goes out in order to satisfy its moods—well, this is not a surprise to us. We're very familiar with it. As Guy spoke about last night, he gave great examples in terms of the dependent origination, where the craving turns into grasping, turning into becoming. That's an example of the mind going out to satisfy its moods.

The way I want to talk about it tonight is mostly in the realm of thought. Not that thought has to be a problem. When the mind sees the mind and how it works, when thought is simply another arising experience like sound and sight and everything else, and there's just the simplicity of awareness noticing it—no problem. But when thought becomes the agent, so to speak, as if the thought is going out and constructing a reality around any particular perception, and then we try to do something about that reality, and then we suffer from it—well, that's what we call papañca.

Just to read the way the Buddha describes this: "Dependent on the eye and forms, eye consciousness arises." That's what Guy said last night. "The meeting of the three is sense contact. With sense contact as condition, there is feeling." We're up to speed on that, right? With sense contact as condition, there's feeling. And what one feels, that one perceives. So perception, which is also one of the five aggregates, arises with contact just as vedanā, just as feeling tone does.

Now, here's the salient point. See if you've noticed this. "What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one complicates"—mentally proliferates with concepts as the source. "The heart is beset. The heart is overcome by mental perceptions and notions that then overwhelm and assail a person."

He's just describing the solution to this cascade of troubles. That wasn't the Buddha, the solution to this cascade of troubles—but doesn't it feel like that? What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates with notions, associations, memories, comparisons. And then these notions can overwhelm and assail a person—assail, like attack. Don't you often just feel like you're the victim of these thoughts? The thoughts have somehow become so strong.

And so as much as we say, just notice—a thought is a thought, it comes and goes, the sky is blue, I'm hopeless, the thought is a thought—somehow we can't quite... We know it. We've experienced it. But that was yesterday, which is now only a thought.

And that thought is strong. Yesterday I could do it. Today I can't.

So seeing how this papañca gets triggered, and how we can work with it—not to hate thoughts, but the path to freedom is when the mind can see the mind just as it is. Seeing things just as they are. Another great Pali phrase is *yathā bhūta*, which is often translated as "things as they are." But I've heard it's more precisely, in terms of the right tense, "things as they have come to be"—which gives it the moving sense, because things as they have come to be right now won't be like that in the next moment. Things as they have come to be.

And that simplicity of awareness can meet thoughts, can meet this whole cascade of troubles, and stay in the simplicity, rest in the non-fabrication, in the silence, in the non-reactivity.

So the beginning, of course, is just understanding, seeing. I always hesitate with "understanding" because we use that as thinking. Seeing is a way of perceiving the nature of thought itself. Again, as I said, we know it's ephemeral, but then we don't know it. So really, first looking at the fact of how much we trust

thought to explain things.

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Understanding, wisdom, that kind of understanding, does not arise as the result of thinking." Let me read that again: Understanding does not arise as the result of thinking. If only we knew that. "It's the result of the long process of conscious awareness. Sometimes understanding can be translated into thoughts, but often thoughts are too rigid and limited to carry much understanding."

Yet we're so seduced, as I said. So used to just trusting, really having our faith in the power of thoughts, that we often don't even realize this whole train of fabrication has gotten going.

So let's go back to the point of perception. This is the Dalai Lama: "All of our difficulties stem from mistaken perception." That's why there's so much emphasis on direct experience or true knowledge. I mean, our whole practice, right, is emphasis on just what's happening now, that simplicity of awareness, that just being totally present with what is. That's the only way for accurate perception.

So we've spoken about perception—I actually can't remember if we've spoken about it here or not; it all blurs. But perception, that quality of recognition in the mind. Yes, Joseph talked about it, that's right. So perception, that recognition: this is a bird, this is a bell, this mood is sadness, this is a mood—all of that is perception. And how we perceive, we then think about and describe.

That doesn't have to be a problem. It can be extraordinarily useful, right? When you hear the bell and you think, "Oh, now it's five o'clock, time for tea." So there was the perception of bell, there was the thought about it, the perception of the time. And the thoughts about perceptions are how we construct our world. A great deal of the time, we're constructing enough of a similar world that we're all sort of functioning here together. So that just makes us think that our perceptions are completely accurate. But as I know has been pointed out, our perceptions often are not accurate.

The perception is colored, is affected by the mood, by the mental state in the mind, particularly when we're not aware of what the mental state is. So for instance, I was practicing in Burma—usually sunny, but then there's one really cloudy day. And I noticed at two different points in the day, one time I went out and my thoughts and my mood were kind of a little heavy. There was a little fear, a little unsettledness. And when I went out, the clouds looked threatening and ominous and heavy. Then later in the day, I was in a bright, calm mood. I walked out, and the clouds were cozy, and it was nice to have the sun blocked. Both of those perceptions—that was what I really perceived at that moment. To think that my perception is an accurate description of reality? Not so trustworthy.

Or when there's delusion in the mind, we don't even know accurately. So say, for example—if this has ever happened to anyone here—after lunch you go to take a nap, or at two in the afternoon, or some odd time.

And you think you're just going to lie down for 15 minutes, but you totally conk out. One of those really heavy sleeps where, when you wake up for a minute, you don't know who you are or where you are. The

bell rings, and you're thinking, "What is that? Is it breakfast? Is it tea?" That moment when you just don't know—that's delusion. But at least you know you don't know, so that's wisdom. If you don't know you don't know, and you think you know but you don't know—that's delusion. And a lot of the time, it's like that.

For me, a good example is when I don't have my glasses on. I don't like to wear my glasses all the time, but I really don't see so well without them. So when I'm in my cottage without my glasses, everything looks really clean, and I'm happy when things are clean. It's really nice. Maybe I don't need to vacuum this week. Then I'll be working, and I'll go into the bathroom with my glasses on, and I'm sitting there going, "Oh, God." My whole mood shifts.

That's the papañca. The perception is just, "Okay, well, it's not so clean as I thought." The papañca is when I think about it. "Look at that. I thought it was clean." Then the mood follows, and more thoughts about it. "I'm so lazy. Why don't I clean? What am I going to do? This is depressing." And then it just starts rolling. In no time at all. Those are the thoughts that overwhelm and assail a person, in no time, because we're jumping on the train and going with it. But see how it comes from perception. That's the first place it starts.

I find it fascinating to explore perception, especially when we don't even notice it. We just assume it's accurate and go from there, then wonder why things are a little out of sync.

A woman some years ago, in another country, told me this story. She had gone to work, her regular work in an office. That day, without realizing it, she was in a state of feeling bad about herself—low self-esteem, worthlessness, self-hatred. So she was working, and she saw one of her colleagues, someone she didn't have that much to do with, across the office, frowning at her. "What did I do to him? We didn't even speak today. Why is he frowning at me?" Going back to her work, and all day, that thought keeps coming. "What did I do?" Feeling worse, getting angry, then feeling bad about herself. The whole day, building, building, building.

And of course, you come to find out: first, he wasn't frowning. Second, it had nothing to do with her. He hadn't even noticed her. He was just having some thought about something that had happened at home. No correlation at all.

Have you noticed anything like that ever happening here?

Just to see—it's not about bad or good. Just notice. The mind can get so complicated when I talk about it, but the moment of awareness, just noticing, is quite simple. I'm not trying to fix it. Just watch how it works. "Oh, look at that. This whole cascade of perceptions and thoughts and story and mood."

"Oh, it's like this." Honestly, just that simple awareness of it is enough. We don't have to take it all apart and unpack it and fix it and put it back, get back to the original perception and see what's right. That's making another big story. Just, "Oh, it's like this." This whole story—"I'm no good and they all hate me and

everybody here is getting together secretly at some time when I'm sleeping and making a plan to kick me out"—it could be paranoia. Maybe so. But anyway, it's like this. You don't have to figure it out. Just, it's like this.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who was a great Tibetan teacher, said: "When our sense organs"—so it's not just seeing, but hearing, smelling, tasting, thinking (remember, a lot of our perceptions are mental ones of moods and thoughts)—"when the sense organs encounter an object, the only part the object itself plays is to begin the process of perception in your consciousness. From then on, as your mind reacts to the object, influenced by all of your accumulated habits and past experiences, the whole process is entirely subjective. When your mind is full of anger, the whole world seems to be a hell realm. When your mind is peaceful, free from any clinging or fixation, you experience everything as primordially pure."

And that's just what Guy was saying last night. We tend to look out, look out, but it's all... And this is even a concept, out and in—I mean, that's just some idea too. But looking back at the mind itself.

Ajahn Chah said—he's so pithy with his examples—he held up a vase and said, "Look at this vase. You think it's nice, or you think it's ugly, or you think the flower arrangement should be different, or whatever. But it's just itself. It's just a vase. It's neutral. It's you who are driving yourselves insane."

So it's just to see that our emphasis, our interest can see the process, but it really comes out of all the investment into the perception, the vedana. Because vedana, the feeling tone, is not inherent in an object. For example, that vase—I could hold it up, and the sight could be pleasant to you and unpleasant to you and neutral to you. And tomorrow, it could all change around again. It's not an inherent thing at all, but rather a quality of feeling tone in the mind that's influenced by, as he says, our accumulated habits, past experiences, and things as they have come to be in this moment.

So the emphasis, the interest comes back to the simplicity of awareness—of just simply noticing without needing to give so much energy to all this concocting, to all this fabrication. Not trying to stop it, but we can withdraw the fascination, the belief, the sense that this is what's holding our world together. You may not want to withdraw the sense that this is what's holding your world together. And that's another story. That's also something we could look at.

So atammayatā—this simplicity. Not of hating or fearing or fighting with thoughts, or of loving our thoughts, or of making a world of our thoughts, or of needing to change anything. The simplicity of simple awareness.

I'll read you from Ajahn Sumedho. I just love the way he talks about the simplicity of awareness. He says, "The only way to go beyond being caught in thinking and emotional habit is through awareness of them, through awareness of thought, through awareness of emotion. The island that you cannot go beyond"—which Guy read last night—"is the metaphor for this state of being awake and aware, as opposed to the concept of becoming awake and aware."

I love that. Any moment, be awake and aware. You're never going to become awake and aware. That's always a concept somewhere else. But just right now, it's like this. You are awake and aware.

"Awareness is not about making value judgments about our thoughts or our emotions or our actions or our speech or anything. Awareness is simply about knowing these things fully, that they are what they are at this moment. It's very simple, very direct, and you cannot conceive it—awareness. You can't conceive it."

You have to trust it. You have to trust the simple ability that we all have to be fully present and fully awake. Trust the simple ability we all have to be fully present and fully awake, just for a moment. Don't let your mind project "fully awake" into the future, never spacing out again. Just for a moment—this ability to be fully present and fully awake.

And begin to recognize the grasping and the ideas we have taken on about ourselves, about the world around us, about our thoughts and perceptions and feelings. Just recognize with awareness. That's all. You don't have to fix it. You don't have to change it.

And then, as I was saying before, as you begin to realize and recognize this non-grasping, sometimes emotionally one can feel frightened by it. It can seem—it doesn't have to, but it can at times seem—like a kind of annihilation is taking place. All that I think I am in the world, all that I regard as stable and real, can feel like it starts to fall apart. And that can be frightening. As I said, when we know the ideas that are constructing our world, it can feel frightening.

But if we have the faith to continue bearing with—in other words, faith and awareness to continue being with these emotional reactions—and allow things that arise to cease, to appear and disappear according to their nature, then we find stability not in achievement or attaining, but in being. Stability in being awake. Stability in being aware. Just the stability in the simplicity of awareness—of the non-concocting, non-involved, non-reactive mind. I think I used that word last night: stable.

And so in doing that, part of what we do is continue to explore the nature of thoughts so we're not so afraid of them and we get less and less caught in them. It's not a bad thing that you're seeing so many thoughts here, really. We do seem to need to be hit over the head a little bit. We can't just see something a couple of times and get it. We wish, but no.

But the amount of thoughts you've had—how many thoughts would you say you've had since you've been here? Impossible to tell, right? And how many have we believed? A lot. But how many have we not believed? A lot. And so we really start to see the nature of them. Underneath that, we start to get it.

This is, again, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche: "The mind is always being carried away by one delusion after another. Thoughts of hatred or attachment suddenly arise without warning"—have you noticed that?—"triggered off by circumstances. And if not seen clearly, they quickly take root and proliferate," just as we've been saying. "Yet, however strong these thoughts may seem, they are just thoughts and will

eventually dissolve back into emptiness." No matter what you do, they'll eventually dissolve. Try to hold on to a thought and don't let it go from now until the end of the evening. It's going to dissolve. "Once you recognize this intrinsic nature of the mind, these thoughts that seem to appear and disappear all the time can no longer fool you. As clouds form, last a while, and then dissolve back in the empty sky, so these deluded thoughts arise, remain a while, and then vanish in the emptiness of the mind. In reality, nothing at all has happened."

That's what I love. This whole story and world, and it's gone. In reality, nothing at all has happened. Awareness isn't touched or stained, and all that world we went through—gone. Nothing has happened. There's no logical reason to be so driven by thoughts.

In terms of how we get so seduced, of course there are many ways of talking about it. But one classical way, found really more in the commentaries, is often called the three papañcas—three particular habits of mind, none of which will be a surprise to you.

But it's not just greed, hatred, and delusion. It's a slightly different list, although those are a subset—the tendencies that feed papañca, that just take off. I mention them because I find it interesting to explore, and it gives me a little bit more to notice. It helps cue me: "Oh, yes, right, that's what's happening." And you can just see the process.

What tends to really fuel this papañca, this tendency for thoughts to take off and construct a world, is craving, attachment to views, and māna—conceit. I'll say a little about each of these, although we've obviously talked a lot about them already.

The craving I think I need to say the least about. You know what it is. But it's interesting to watch how craving—this wanting, this thirst for whatever, it doesn't matter what it's for—operates in the mind. When there's not awareness of it, when it goes out towards some idea, some object, a sense object, a mind object, whatever is perceived as pleasant, and when that isn't seen, the energy that goes into concocting, into fabricating a whole world is really amazing, isn't it? I'm sure you've all seen this.

It's interesting to observe, at times, without judgment. The only way to watch any of this is from the motivation of interest, or just the simplicity of awareness. Judgment—that's just the backside of craving. It's just aversion. And you can't see clearly with judgment. When you're judging yourself, it's just the nature of the mind. This is how the mind is working for everybody, not just you.

So just watch the machinations that go on when there's desire in the mind. And here, with little stuff—if you have a seat that you like in the dining room, have you gone through all kinds of contortions to make sure you get that seat again? And also that nobody should notice you're doing it? Or when to have your shower time? How to sit, how to walk, all that stuff. It gets so complicated here.

You start saving food and then discover how much work that is, how complicating it is to save food and then put it somewhere. Then you want it later, but you're all the way in your room. Do I want to go back?

But I can't do it at four—everybody will see me. When can I do it? I get up at three in the morning so I can eat this food that I saved. Meanwhile, it rots there in the yogi refrigerator, which, by the way, they would like you to clean out if you have little pieces of moldy food in there. The cooks have asked us to ask you to please, for God's sake, clean it out. And as you're doing it, you might notice: what's in my mind when I put this little piece of whatever—I don't even know what it is anymore—in here?

The craving runs us. And it's so believable when this is the perception. Craving colors perception, so that the object, whatever it is that we want, the thought—it looks like a beautiful thought. A person looks like the most beautiful person you've ever seen.

I used to have this thought come up, God knows why, of some street corner in Bangkok that I was at years ago. Now, that street corner was a really busy intersection of little stalls selling plumbing parts. There was nothing attractive about this street corner. But for some reason, in certain moods, it would come up, and my mind would go, "Bangkok. So lovely." And then it would add all this beautiful stuff about Bangkok. And then I'd spin into a whole story. You can spend hours like this.

You wake up and nothing at all has ever happened, which is lucky. Because the other option is you go online, book a ticket, fly to Bangkok, get out of the taxi at three in the morning and think, "Why did I come here again? What was it about Bangkok that I liked so much? I forget."

Choki Nyima Rinpoche, who is a brother of Tsoknyi and Mingyur Rinpoche, once talked about this. He said, "Watch the fickleness." Fickleness is like unreliability.

We say "fickle" in English—someone who falls in love with one person, then another, then another. Unreliable. Untrustworthy. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche says to watch how easily the mind is influenced by just a pleasant or unpleasant sight or sound into an immediate mood. And then out of that mood, we construct a whole world. And we believe it.

At least here on retreat, the papañca mostly ends with thoughts. But as I said, in the world, it can go on into actions. You might make a career choice based on papañca. You might—hopefully not—get married based on papañca. "Oh, I'm a little bored. Let's have kids." Then what are you going to do?

It's really about watching this. And what we have the chance to observe here is how craving, as the Tibetans say, puts feathers on the object. It makes things much more beautiful than they are. If we don't see that the perception is unreliable, we're gone. We see that over and over, and then we wake up—oh yes, in actuality, nothing has happened. The more we see that, we start to develop a simple recognition: these thoughts, they're not really anything.

There's this seduction of pleasant thoughts, this promise of craving, the promise that more pleasant thoughts will finally make me happy. And we'll sit here with our knee hurting while we're off in some daydream, and if we stop and examine it—okay, I really know I'm probably not going to have that dinner party when I leave, but maybe, yeah. I spent a three-month retreat planning all these dinner parties, the

menus, the recipes. You wake up—oh yes, right, here I am. And I never did any of it. I don't even like dinner parties. But that was the promise, that it was going to be so pleasant. Or the reverse—the fear of the unpleasant.

So we start to see: we wake up and it's nothing. The thoughts are going nowhere. It's just a thought.

What helps us trust awareness again is what Chokyi Nyima calls a weariness with saṃsāra. Not a weariness of aversion, because that's just flipping from craving to aversion, but the weariness of this word *nibbidā*. It's sometimes translated as "disgust," but that's not a good translation. Disgust for us has this negativity and revulsion. But nibbidā—the best way of describing it is that you kind of lose one's taste for something. The example given is of a dog chewing on a bone, but the bone is completely bleached out by the sun and there's just no juice there. There's nothing there. So you lose your taste for it, not out of disgust or revulsion, but because it just doesn't offer anything. It's really a movement of wisdom, a freedom of heart and mind in the moment, a turning away from something that isn't offering us anything anyway.

Nibbidā, this sense of turning away—it's not only from seeing that something doesn't give us what we hoped. "Oh yes, these thoughts, they're really not so great. Come back." The turning away is also just a releasing of the idea that this is going to bring me happiness, simply by seeing with awareness the actuality of it. A thought is just a thought, and it will never be more than that.

But nibbidā can also be developed by attention to the positive, the wholesome aspects of peace in heart and mind. So it's not just a negative thing. In your practice here, in your daily life, as you're walking around—those moments when you're just touching things as they are, *yathā bhūta*, things as they have come to be. Just that. The simplicity, where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess. And the mind is not concocting any story about anything. It's just this—that sense of peace.

I think Guy talked about last night how we don't tend to notice it enough. But when we do, it's so much more—I don't know what the word is—refreshing, attractive, fulfilling, nourishing, than getting lost in thoughts about dinner parties. They don't really compare.

And so the wholesomeness, the peace, the satisfaction of the heart and mind that's pure, that's simple, that's non-reactive, that's not involved in the moment—this becomes so much more vivid and real that the attention turns away from getting lost in daydreams. Not out of aversion, but out of just seeing: oh, there's really another possibility.

This is one of the attractions of samādhi, of the mind that's collected and balanced—whether it's one-pointed or in a steadiness with changing objects. That sense of the collected mind, the secluded mind. *Citta viveka* is the secluded mind, secluded from the hindrances for a time. The first time you experience it strongly, or sometimes after, we don't even realize until then what it feels like not to have all this stuff in our minds all the time. Like, wow. What's going on? Everything's just so pure and clean. The world is so

amazing. No—just for a moment.

There's no great hatred and delusion coming up in the mind. It's like, wow, that's nice. Oh, maybe that's a possibility. Maybe that's more attractive than thinking about the vacation I'm going to take next month. So it's not a should, but it's seeing the drawbacks of samsara and the peace, the nourishment of the heart and mind that's at ease.

So that's craving papañca. The second papañca is the papañca of views—views and opinions, and attachment to them. Obviously it's attachment to them, but a view is really a description of the world, any description we have that we take to be actually true, holding to it: this is true and everything else is false. Although, of course, we don't usually think of it in those terms. And in fact, we don't even know we have a view.

But it can be a view of who you are, what your personality is like. It can be, obviously in the world, political views—we all see where that goes. It can be views about how someone else should behave. It can be views about how we're all supposed to behave here. It can be views about what the appropriate kind of food is. It could be views about what's right practice.

A really sorrowful source of views is Dhamma views. What's the true Dhamma? What's the inaccurate Dhamma? Who has the true Dhamma? Which way of practice? Which teacher? Is it the Thai forest tradition? Is it the Burmese Sayadaws? Is it the Tibetans? Is it the Zen? I mean, does anybody even know what anybody else really holds as a view anyway?

Views are an enormous source of suffering. But really, at this level, we're talking about a concoction of thought. Have you noticed that? Huge. I think views are much more gripping and seductive even than craving for sense objects. This is what's happening, we take it as the reality. And we stop looking. We stop noticing. Our perception kind of snaps shut. It's like this.

That's why the mindfulness is this non—not picking and choosing. Just mindfulness, awareness, meeting whatever's arising. Not just the things we like, not just the things we think we should pay attention to.

Have you noticed how much we try in the instructions or in interviews, and we say, "Well, what are you noticing?" And how often the response is, "Well, this. That's happening, but that's not what's supposed to be happening. This is what's supposed to be happening." Or, "Yeah, I'm noticing lots of changing objects, but that's because I'm not concentrated enough. I should just be with the breath." Or, "I'm only with the breath, and that's because I'm not able to do choiceless awareness, which I know is really where it's at."

You can have people come in one after the other, with completely opposite experiences, and suffering because it's not happening the way they think it should be happening. But they don't think they're just thinking that. They know that's how it is.

And how much thought gets engendered when you're holding to a view of what practice should be, or

what right practice should be. Or you're feeling fine in your practice, but then you see someone else—they look a little better, they're doing something different. And one of us up here says something that completely doesn't match your experience. And you don't know whether to hate us or hate yourself, but one of us has to be wrong, and you better figure it out or you're going to go crazy. And the mind just starts spinning, right?

How do the question periods affect you in the morning? Does your mind just go, "Okay, fine, that's not my experience, never mind," and you keep going? Great. May it be so. Because otherwise you have to figure it all out. How can it all fit in? Views, views. So much thinking comes from that. So much getting caught.

Sogyal Rinpoche has a great line about this. He says we get into so much pain and confusion by getting lost in what happens. And this, to me, is a good description of how views form. You project a thought, and then the second thought believes the first thought. Then the third, fourth, and fifth thoughts are projected. The first thought is, by this time, already a reality. By the time the tenth one comes, it believes the fifth has always been an actuality. That's it—views, views. And we just don't even see it.

Nisargadatta said, "The world appears to you so overwhelmingly real because you think about it all the time. Cease thinking about it and it will dissolve into thin mist." I would say, you know, I feel so real because I'm thinking about me all the time too. We think, "But I don't want to dissolve into thin mist. I'd much rather sit here and stew about the fact that my practice isn't going right and I'll never be able to do it the way those other people are than to dissolve into thin mist and simplicity."

So views are an endless source of papañca—not only the thought, but this concocting a whole world, believing it, suffering, and acting on it. Remember the example I gave a couple of talks ago about a friend of mine who felt that she was so aversive? That was the view she had of herself: "I'm an aversive person." And the view everyone else had—they all agreed she was aversive. That's a perception, all agreeing, and we think, "Okay, that could define the world."

And then when she sat down with open, balanced mindfulness, deliberately seeing that as a view and not buying into it, she noticed that aversive thoughts were maybe ten percent. There were all kinds of other thoughts. And then in the long run, she wasn't any of the thoughts anyway. That's the difference between the simplicity of awareness without a preconceived notion of what we're looking for or what's already here. The preconceived notion can completely blind us to open perception.

It's an example I give a lot, but I'll give it again because it was so vivid. At a retreat I was teaching quite some years ago in California with a friend, James, there were about fifty people, a retreat like this, but maybe a week long. Many of the people had never sat an intensive retreat before. And then as now, I had to sit in a chair. I sit in a chair. We taught just the way we teach this, and we described how to sit just like we do here.

This woman, about the fifth day, had an interview with me. It was one of those times when she had just

broken through something. She said, "I've been in such agony, physical agony, for the last four days. Just sitting there cross-legged was absolutely impossible for me—so much pain. I've never sat cross-legged before." She was a middle-aged woman; it was killing her. But clearly that's how you have to sit. There's no way you can meditate if you don't sit cross-legged. She'd just been fighting with pain, no mindfulness. "I don't even know what's the point of this."

And finally last night, the fourth night, she said, "I looked up and I thought, 'Oh, Carol's sitting in a chair. Maybe it's okay to sit in a chair.'" She sat in a chair, and she could actually meditate—actually notice what was happening. That's how strong views can be, and how the papañca not only of the thinking about it can lead to actions.

So that's the second source of papañca. And the third is that of māna, translated as "conceit of self." It's a subtle sense of self, but the way we mostly notice it feeding endless trains of thought and belief is in this comparing. I think Sally talked about that, where somebody walks by and they're better than me, they're worse than me, or we're equal. But just this subtle—it's a sense of I am-ness.

It's brought about by the perception of seeing, for example. We don't notice seeing. We don't notice the perception that "that person looks so mindful." They're mindful, I'm not. I'm not doing well. And then the endless thoughts about everything you haven't done well in your whole life cascade forward.

You're walking, and then you slow down, and finally you're really slow, and someone comes rushing past, and you think, "Ah, I'm really doing well. I'm so mindful." Again—seeing, perception, fast—not seeing at all. Just going, going, going. There's this comparing that's extremely subtle, and don't be judging yourself about it. Just get fascinated by it. Wow, look at all this that gets going—completely extra!

If you could imagine thought balloons from all of us in the dining room at lunchtime—oh my God, it would feel like a nightmare. "They're good. They're bad. They're eating like a slob. They're eating so great. They're eating too much." It's like, oh please. So comparing to each other.

Comparing with our own past experience: "Well, this is the third week and the fourth day, and in the last retreat on the third week and the fourth day, I was doing a whole lot better than this. Is it my fault? Is it the teacher's fault? Is it the other yogis' fault? Is it the weather? Is it because I'm old? Is it because I'm young? Is it because of my health? Is it because of the food?"

It's like—cool it. Yathabhuta. Things as they have come to be right now. It's like this.

How simple is that? How free is that—from that whole world of comparison—to "it's like this"? Oh my God, what a difference. But the mind goes, "Hey, that's almost like being a simpleton." In the big world, if you say about someone, "She's a really simple person," it's not usually a compliment, except in certain spiritual circles. It's not really a compliment to be that simple.

Am I doing better or not? Should I be going slower or not? Are they faster than me? Are they slower than

me? Well, maybe there's a reason... "It's like this." It's almost like that fear of annihilation Sumedho was talking about. The whole thing just falls apart. But we don't need that whole thing. We're just dragging that around and suffering.

Ah, the simplicity. Atamayata—not concocting.

So comparing to others, comparing to ourselves in the past, and again, comparing with a view, with an ideal. This is what practice should be like. This is how much I should eat. This is how much I should sleep. This is how I should dress—whatever it is. And then comparing to that. Source of endless, endless thoughts.

Just notice that. To me, this is a great dining room practice. Because when I'm on retreat, I tend to stay more by myself. But it could also be practiced in the meditation hall. Just walking into the dining room and being in your body, being aware of seeing. Seeing, seeing. And if it comes up—ah, judging—notice it. The judging, the comparing. No need to do anything about it. You don't have to concoct anything around the comparing. Just notice it. Seeing, comparing. It's like this. Seeing, comparing. It's like this.

We don't need to fear it. We don't need to try and push it away. It's also just another thought. Every thought is just another thought. No matter how puffy it is or how much emotion it comes together with, in that moment there's always the potential for the simplicity of awareness. It's like this—awareness of thought and emotion. And it will remind us that just because a thought comes together with really strong emotion, that doesn't make it more true. In fact, more likely less true.

So just noticing that. These are the three—they say—seeds of papañca. Not the only ones, but the main ones: craving, attachment to views, this māna, this conceit, this comparing. And not to stop it, but just to notice the process. In noticing the process, we've kind of stepped back into the simplicity of awareness, which is always available—the stillness of not self-referencing, of non-concocting, of yathābhūta, just things as they have come to be right now. Nothing extra. Not referencing back to anything else or forward to anything else. Just the willingness to be so simple.

I just want to end with a quotation from the Buddha describing himself, his mind. So this is the Buddha describing his mind to the bhikkhus. He said: "Thus, bhikkhus, the Tathāgata does not conceive of a visible thing as apart from sight." In a sense, there's seeing. The Tathāgata does not then conceive of a visible thing—there's just seeing. "He does not conceive of something that is unseen. He does not conceive of a thing to be seen. He does not conceive about a seer."

To balance it, in the famous sutta where he's talking to Bāhiya, giving him this little pithy instruction—he only had three minutes to give him an instruction to enlighten him—he said: "When in the seen, there is only the seen. In the heard, there is only the heard. In the sensed, there is only the sensed. In the cognized, there is only the cognized. This, Bāhiya, is how you should train yourself."

That's what he's saying. In the seen, the Tathāgata does not conceive, does not think about something

visible as apart from the seeing. There's only seeing. He doesn't conceive of a seer apart from something seen. There's only seeing.

"When, Bāhiya, there is for you in the seen only the seen, in the heard only the heard, in the sensed only the sensed, in the cognized only the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When, Bāhiya, there is no you there, then, Bāhiya, you are neither here nor there nor in between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering."

Let's just sit quietly for a moment.

Thank you for listening.

There's only seeing. There's only seeing.

"When, Bahiya, there is for you in the seen only the seen, in the heard only the heard, in the sensed only the sensed, in the cognized only the cognized—then, Bahiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When, Bahiya, there is no you there, then, Bahiya, you are neither here nor there nor in between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering."

Let's just sit quietly for a moment.

Thank you for listening.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.